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A Theory of Primal Writing: Refocusing the Narrative Lens upon the Non-human

by

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND CREATIVE WRITING

<u>English Critical and Creative Writing</u>

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

A THEORY OF PRIMAL WRITING: REFOCUSING THE NARRATIVE LENS UPON THE NON-HUMAN

Peter Jeffrey Whittick

The contention of this thesis is that the environmental crisis is a result of cultural attitudes to nature as much as it is of material human impact. This study therefore seeks to address a fundamental issue for literary studies, namely the representation of nature in literature. This critical / creative project forms a natural progression from past considerations of ecocriticism, which explore how nature has been represented historically, while the creative element takes the form of an experimental young adult novel[1] that correlates with the critical part of my thesis. Following an outline of cultural notions of nature and wilderness in Western culture and how these inescapable historical concepts shape perception of the non-human, my research then consists of two main elements, both of which investigate how an understanding of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology in conjunction with a Kristevan theory of language can reveal how nature is portrayed in YA fiction. The critical element will attempt to develop and implement a new eco-critical perspective and apply it to the literature of David Almond, while my creative research exploring the effects of environment on human identity will be formed by a YA novel, entitled *Pinhead*. Central to both, will be the examination of how the 'gestural' origins of 'semiotic' 'wild language', are fundamental in shaping narratives which reconnect readers with their own innate sense of primal 'carnality'. The thesis will explore how a narrative drawing on the 'gestural' elements of the poetic voice can represent humanity and nature within a unified biosphere, rather than as separate entities. In short, *A Theory of Primal Writing* aims to utilise aspects of Kristevan semanalysis to provide a connection with, and a framework for, aspects of

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[1] Henceforth, the term 'young adult' will be referred to as 'YA'.

Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, particularly the concept of an 'affective material dimension of language, that contributes to meaning'[2], which is common to both theorists. This hybrid position allows the development of a new ecocritical perspective which encourages new readings of how nature is portrayed in fiction. It also, through the identification of relevant narrative techniques, develops a creative tool with which to foreground nature.

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[2] Keltner, S.K. *Kristeva: Thresholds (Key Contemporary Thinkers),* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011, Wiley. Kindle Edition, 2013-05-03), Kindle Loc. 630-631.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, ...

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

A Theory of Primal Writing: Refocusing the Narrative Lens Upon the Non-human.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed: ....

Date:...

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Definitions and Abbreviations

YA = Young Adult

Introduction.

If the environmental crisis is equally shaped by cultural attitudes to nature as much as it is by material human impact, then the issue of how nature is represented is vitally important, because it defines how nature is perceived and ultimately shapes how the crisis is addressed. This study, therefore, seeks to address a fundamental issue for literary studies, namely the representation of nature in literature, and it will explore whether those representations can be made with a greater equality alongside human themes and characterisations, within a narrative hierarchy of discourse.

My aim is to develop ways to readjust the narrative lens away from its current anthropocentric focus. However, creating a more equal representation of nature in prose fiction is highly problematic. In his essay 'The (im)possibility of ecocriticism'[3], Dominic Head highlights this problem in a reference to Lawrence Buell's book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* [4]. Head challenges Buell's position 'which installs a particular inception of [non-fictive] nature writing as the proper object of ecocritical attention'[5] and which 'denigrates explicitly fictive modes'[6] because of their 'failure to privilege the environment'[7]. Indeed, he suggests that it *is* possible to shift the focus of fictional narratives towards the non-human, citing J.M Coetzee's novel *Life and Times of Michael K* [8], as one that 'reinvent[s] the model of [human] social interaction as a myth of ecological ethics'[9]. Head suggests that Coetzee repositions the seemingly anthropocentric political theme of apartheid and civil war to create a symbolically 'geopolitical novel which explicitly disappoints conceptions of the political from which ecology is excluded'[10]. Similarly, it is my contention that literature in general, and especially the experimental narratives common to children's and YA fiction, offer a viable ecopolitical platform from which to demonstrate what Head refers to as an 'interdependence of the human and non-human'[11]. This undertaking, however, must acknowledge Buell's statement that it is necessary for literature to 'abandon… its most basic foci of: character, persona [and]

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[3] Head, D. 'The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism' in Kerridge, R. & Sammells, N. *Writing The Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, (New York: Zed, 1998).

[4] Buell, L. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture,* (Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press, Harvard University Press, 1995).

[5] Ibid., p.32.

[6] Ibid., p.32.

[7] Ibid., p.32.

[8] Coetzee, J.M. *Life and Times of Michael K*, (Johannesburg: Raven, 1983).

[9] Head, op. cit., p.33.

[10] Ibid., p.35.

[11] Ibid., p.33.

narrative focus'[12] in order to represent nature as more than a 'backdrop'[13] for human characterisations. But, in so doing, it is also crucial to recognise Head's distinction between a strong anthropocentrism which privileges human value over that of the non-human, and a 'weak anthropocentrism' which is an inevitable part of the human condition. He refers to Andrew Dobson's book *Green Political Thought* [14]:

> Here I draw once more on Andrew Dobson's construction of ecologism, as a human-authored political program which, necessarily, qualifies the purity/mysticism of an[sic] entirely planet centred philosophy.[15]

Furthermore, it is vital to recognise that in attempting to represent nature a writer cannot escape a bodily form, sensory apparatus and mode of mental processing that shapes their human perspective. My own project, therefore, must acknowledge how Kant's distinction between the thing-in-itself and the thing-as-perceived lies at the heart of any phenomenological perspective it might employ. Indeed, as Kate Rigby outlines in her book, *Topographies of the Sacred* [16]:

> In declaring things in themselves *(Dinge an sich)* out of bounds to human knowledge, Kant had dealt a valuable blow to a certain epistemological hubris: the assumption, that is, that philosophical reflection or scientific investigation would be able to reveal nature in the raw, unmediated by human perceptions and projections.[17]

This clearly indicates that our difference from other species will always restrict and define our representations of nature to one which is essentially anthropocentric. Nevertheless, whether that anthropocentricity be strong or weak is an important ecopolitical issue, as a stronger anthropocentricity will have a tendency to perpetuate negative and potentially damaging attitudes towards nature. I suggest that the shift away from stronger anthropocentric representations of nature is already being explored in poetry and that these may be successfully employed in YA fiction.

In his article, 'Unnatural Relations? Language and Nature in the poetry of Mark Doty and Les Murray' [18] and the later 'Translating Wilderness: Negative Ecopoetics and the Poetry of Don

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[12] Head, op. cit., p.33.

[13] Ibid., p.32.

[14] Dobson, A. *Green Political Thought*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

[15] Head, op. cit., p.29.

[16] Rigby, K. *Topographies of the Sacred,* (Charlottesville / London: University of Virginia Press, 2004).

[17] Ibid., p38.

[18] Dunkerley, H. 'Unnatural Relations? Language and Nature in the poetry of Mark Doty and Les Murray', (ASLE, Volume 8: 2001), http://isle.oxfordjournals.org/content/8/1/73.full.pdf+html?sid=a9d25f60-f0e6-4e59-882f-3a2028c6d82d PDF Accessed 15.08.2015.

McKay'[19], Hugh Dunkerley discusses how the complex relationships between nature and language, and reality and language, can sabotage empowering representations of the non-human that aim to avoid anthropocentricity. 'Translating Wilderness' describes the problematic situation that exists for poets who have attempted to 'speak for or about nature'[20], and to describe 'that which is beyond the human'[21] in a manner that doesn't simply recreate nature as 'representations of human states of mind'[22] or resort to using 'language [in a way that] is already freighted with human ideas'[23]. In a key example, Dunkerley cites Wordsworth's Romantic anthropomorphism of the daffodils in 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' [24], which are described as 'Tossing their heads in a sprightly dance'[25] and as outdoing 'the sparkling waves in glee'[26]. They are seen to be imbued, firstly, with human physical characteristics, then secondly, with human emotion. Similarly, in reference to Ted Hughes' 'Hawk Roosting'[27], Dunkerley reveals the poet's failure to write 'as if nature were speaking'[28]. Indeed, instead of representing the hawk in a 'post-Darwinian'[29] context as 'amoral and inhuman'[30], Hughes has actually created 'a voice that he felt sounded like 'Hitler's familiar''[31]. In both examples, it is made clear that the attempted representation of the 'otherness'[32] of plant and bird is constrained by the limits of language, and that 'their beyond-human qualities are lost'[33], in spite of both Wordsworth's and Hughes' efforts to the contrary. These two examples demonstrate the major difficulties faced in any attempts to represent nature and are just as applicable to the writing of prose fiction as they are to poetry. It is the recognition and development of new possibilities for representing 'the beyond-human qualities' of nature in YA prose fiction that will be the subject of this thesis.

In some respects, the development of these new representations is rooted within poetry's attempts to portray nature. Indeed, Dunkerley's article goes on to make some useful points

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[19] Dunkerley, H. 'Translating Wilderness: Negative Ecopoetics and the Poetry of Don McKay' in Norgate, S. *Poetry and Voice: A Book of Essays,* (Google Books: 2012), https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6MMwBwAAQBAJ&pg=PR7&lpg=PR7&dq=Translating+Wilderness,+Hugh+Dunkerley&source=bl&ots=WCYLo_Obla&sig=i0WWc7xrPLvqe8p9-ZiqlUPQY7o&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAmoVChMIp8zrsoirxwIVitsaCh1xpAB3#v=onepage&q=Translating%20Wilderness%2C%20Hugh%20Dunkerley&f=false Accessed 15.08.2015.

[20] Dunkerley, H 'Unnatural Relations?' p.1.

[21] Dunkerley, H. 'Translating Wilderness', p.210.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Wordsworth, W. 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' in Abrams, M. H. & Greenblatt, S. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, (7th Edition / Volume 2, WW Norton: London, 2000), p.284.

[25] Dunkerley, op. cit., 'Translating Wilderness', p.210.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Hughes, T. 'Hawk Roosting', http://allpoetry.com/Hawk-Roosting Accessed 15.08.2015.

[28] Dunkerley, op. cit., 'Translating Wilderness', p.210.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

regarding Don McKay's attempts to represent the non-human through an external human perspective that openly accepts its inability to authenticate what it perceives, and this will be discussed in relation to the idea of wilderness, in Chapter One. In 'Unnatural Relations?' he discusses Australian poet, Les Murray's *Translations from the Natural World* [34] in which Murray attempts to translate the 'presence'[35] of the non-human 'other' by 'invent[ing] new articulations in order to convey a life very different from our own'[36]. This approach of a 'translation' that seeks to 'reinvest our lives with a sense of lived physical experience'[37] via a closer connection to the 'presence' of the thing itself, is an exploration that arguably moves writing closer to a more empowering representation of nature. It is Murray's idea of poetic 'translation' via the imagining of nature's perspective, which forms the starting point of my endeavours to explore a similar method within prose fiction. Through recognising the limitations of the human perspective and language, yet focussing on the connection to the 'presence' of the non-human thing itself, it may be possible to dispense with the problematic anthropomorphism that constantly anchors the reader to their human position. This in itself would be a step towards creating more empowering and direct representations of the non-human in prose fiction. However, taking this exploration forward necessitates a shift away from certain constraining aspects of postmodern concepts of language. In 'Unnatural Relations?' Dunkerley argues that:

> post-Saussurian [and] post-structuralist [perspectives], while acknowledging our relative status in the world, have removed us further from a relationship with nature through various theories of knowledge and language.[38]

While referencing Jaques Derrida and Leonard Scigaj, he sheds light on the distance these perspectives have maintained between reality and language:

> Such an apparent abandoning of any notion of referentiality, that language can actually tell us anything about the world, has important implications for literature, especially a literature which attempts to engage with the otherness of nature. If language cannot relate usefully to a reality 'out there', if it is, in fact, a hermetically sealed system as some theorists suggest, then any attempt to write about a reality 'out there' becomes futile.[39]

But it is through outlining Colin Falck's critique of the reductive nature of post-structuralist theory

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[34] Murray, L. *Translations from the Natural World,* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1993).

[35] Dunkerley, op. cit., 'Unnatural Relations?' p.10.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., p.13.

[38] Ibid., p.2.

[39] Ibid., p.3.

in *Myth, Truth and Literature* [40], that Dunkerley offers an alternative perspective on representing the non-human that is central to this thesis. In seeking to re-establish language's ability to successfully represent the non-human through a nexus of reality and language, he cites the connection Falck makes between the two:

> [L]anguage may actually rely on and, in fact, grow out of a 'pre-linguistic mode of life which we share with other inhabitants of our world and which is not yet a realm in which subject and object - or awareness and corporeality - have clearly differentiated themselves'. [41]

Dunkerley's citing of Falck highlights the origins of language within a 'pre-linguistic embodied experience' and links it to the phenomenological approach to language defined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'who suggested that language is in fact an advanced form of expressive bodily gesture' [42]. The idea of a 'pre-linguistic embodied experience' connected closely with aspects of my own approach to creative writing that had been influenced by the theories of language developed by Julia Kristeva. Previous exploration of developing a vivid and experimental style of prose had led me to research her concepts of poetic and semiotic language in the pre-linguistic 'echolalias of infants… as rhythms and intonations' [43] that are connected to the 'semiotic chora' [44] and 'affective, corporeal existence' [45]. These, like Merleau-Ponty's theories, contain various inter-related descriptions of the origins of language and conceive it as something that physically gestures outward towards external nature, and yet simultaneously grasps inwardly towards human nature.

At this point, it must briefly be acknowledged that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories of language (detailed in Chapter Two) are rooted in the work of Martin Heidegger, whose insight is also highly relevant to the present environmental crisis, of which he provided early warnings, as Trevor Norris explains:

> Heidegger's later works suggest that we are living through a crisis in our relation to the environment, in which we treat the natural world, ourselves included, as a reserve of energy that can be turned perpetually and ceaselessly toward technological ends. [46]

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[40] Falck, C. *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Post-modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[41] Dunkerley, op. cit., 'Unnatural Relations?' p.4.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Kristeva, J. *Desire in Language* in Oliver, K. *The Portable Kristeva*, (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2002), p.101.

[44] Ibid., p.24.

[45] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 692.

[46] Norris, T. 'Martin Heidegger, D. H. Lawrence, and Poetic Attention to Being' in Goodbody, A. Rigby K. Ed's, *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches (Under the Sign of Nature)*, University of Virginia Press. Kindle Edition. (2011-09-13). Kindle Loc. 2413-2415.

Introduction

However, in specific relation to this study, it is apparent that Heidegger's concept of 'Dasein, or being-there, or more explicitly in English, being-in-the-world'[47], is used as a defining step by Merleau-Ponty in his concept of a corporeal 'gestural'[48] reciprocity between the human subject and the non-human object. Indeed, Heidegger's concept that:

> [l]anguage is a part of nature, and [that] it is therefore in the nature of language
> to make manifest the nature of being[49],

is clearly visible in Merleau-Ponty's concept of a 'pseudo-presence' that can be called forth into 'being in the world' via a verbal image, that he sets out in *The Phenomenology of Perception*:

> To say that I imagine Peter is to say that I bring about the pseudo-presence of
> Peter by putting into operation the 'Peter-behaviour-pattern'. Just as Peter in
> imagination is only one of the modalities of my being in the world, so the verbal
> image is only one of the modalities of my phonetic gesticulation.[50]

Merleau-Ponty's concept develops Heidegger's idea that language is an 'essential' 'representation' of being, as Norris describes:

> [For Heidegger], language is not to be understood in the degraded sense of
> representation, obscurely related to the world, but in the sense of a mode of
> being through which the essential nature of being is revealed.[51]

Thus, Heidegger's concept of an 'essential nature of being', is seen to be fundamental to Merleau-Ponty's concept of a 'pseudo-presence' within the imagination. I seek to discover, that if by tapping into the 'pseudo-presence' of nature via the 'phonetic gesticulation' language, a more direct and empowering representation of nature may be achieved in prose fiction, through techniques that lessen the sense of separation between the human and the non-human.

Although it is not an element that can be explored in great depth in this study, which focusses primarily on the connection between Merleau-Ponty and Julia Kristeva, it is interesting to acknowledge that Merleau-Ponty also made important contributions to the research of language as a more-than-human phenomenon. His ideas in this area were greatly influenced by the Umwelt theory of Jakob von Uexküll, as his lectures on nature between

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[47] Norris, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 2418-2419.

[48] In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1967), Merleau-Ponty defines the origins of human language as a 'gestural' response to the external worldly environment. Indeed, for him language originates directly because of the reciprocal, interactive 'gestural' response between a subjective humanity and the living-world. This is in opposition to the Descartian assumption that thought and speech are objective products of the human psyche.

[49] Norris, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 2647-2648.

[50] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p210.

[51] Norris, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 2650-2652.

1956-1960 (available in English translation as *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*)[52] clearly demonstrate. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty is keen to diminish the perceived separation between the human and the non-human, as Louise Westling points out in her monograph *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language*[53]:

> Merleau-Ponty insisted early in his career that "the only Logos that pre-exists is the world itself"; he developed this notion further in his late Nature lectures to claim that "animality is the logos of the sensible world: an incorporated meaning." Thus human language and aesthetic behaviors [sic] emerge from our animality. In his final working note, written only a few months before his death, he said that he wanted to show that "we can no longer think according to this cleavage: God, man, creatures," but instead must describe nature as "the man-animality intertwining." Logos is what is realized in us—our self-conscious understanding of the incorporated meaning of animality, "but nowise is it [our] property."[54]

For Merleau-Ponty, the aspect of 'animality' shared between human and non-human, is vital to the human creation of meaning. This notion of shared 'animality', in itself, is a challenge to the notion of anthropomorphism, as Westling further explains:

> The increasing body of archaeology and scientific studies of animal behavior and cognition shows that humans cannot be considered separate from other living creatures with whom we coevolved and share ancestry, genetic makeup, and morphology. Thus, as Balkan German ethologist Jakob von Uexküll explained with his Umwelt theory, we overlap with the others in many ways and can understand them to some degree, as they can us, because of a long shared past and similar physical qualities, abilities, and habits. This is not a question of anthropomorphism. Indeed, as many commentators have pointed out, the charge of anthropomorphism is completely human centered, for it assumes that no other creature could possibly have any of our qualities. We and other creatures observe each other, compete and conflict with each other, and also cooperate or at least live in various sorts of arrangements with each other as we have done for millions of years.[55]

Thus, the element of 'overlapping' and the past shared existence between the human and the non-human means that the evolution of human consciousness and language must inevitably contain the aspect of the non-human other, and indeed, that non-human consciousness and communication must similarly contain elements of human understanding and language. As a result, this aspect of a shared 'animality' within human understanding and language means that it

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[52] Merleau-Ponty, M. *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, Evanston, Il.: Northwestern UP, 2003)

[53] Westling, L. *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language* (New York: Fordham UP, 2014).

[54] Ibid., p.3.

[55] Westling, op.cit., pp.4-5.

can never be purely anthropomorphic because of the non-human element within it. Consequently, for the sake of this study, my references to anthropomorphic representations within literature must be made with the acknowledgement of this point, while yet also maintaining the recognition of the anthropomorphic as something that generally operates to foreground the human species over the non-human. In so doing, anthropomorphism is still an anthropocentric literary trait in spite of the aspect of a shared 'animality' within human language.

Any reference to the connection between Merleau-Ponty, von Uexküll and the shared 'animality' within human language, must also include a brief mention of the contemporary field of biosemiotics that has developed as a result of their theories. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to language suggests that human language originates from a reciprocal, bodily gestural response to the world, and that embodied creation of language is shared with other animals. Biosemiotics is an area of study that has developed from both Merleau-Ponty's and von Uexküll's work. It is a field that encompasses both human and animal language, and 'makes connections among biological sciences, linguistics, and cultural studies to explore communication and signification in living systems'.[56] Westling refers to the work of Wendy Wheeler, who sees this new area of study as something which can shed light on how human language has evolved as a direct result of humanity's interaction with the world, not as something separate to it. In a reference to how biosemiotics' acknowledgement of the influence of the non-human upon human language can be applied to the study of literature, Wheeler states that:

> This way of thinking can be extended to an understanding of literature's place in the living community, where it functions as one of our species's [sic] ways of singing the world to ourselves, in concert with the songs and artistic creations of many other creatures, from birds and primates to dogs and dolphins.[57]

So indeed, through including human language among the multiple voices of nature that sing to the world, biosemiotics is a clearly a field which would benefit any future development of *a theory of primal writing* that seeks to reach beyond the connection between Merleau-Ponty and Kristeva, that is the focus of this study.

A more general conceptual background to my study, concerning the theoretical frameworks of Merleau-Ponty and Julia Kristeva, is addressed in Chapter Two. It identifies how an understanding of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, in conjunction with a connecting area of Kristevan theory, allows a new hybrid position. This perspective, which I have called *A Theory of Primal Writing,* aims to utilise aspects of Kristevan semanalysis to provide a connection with, and

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[56] Westling, op.cit., pp.102-103.
[57] Ibid., pp.103.

a framework for, aspects of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, particularly the concept of an 'affective material dimension of language, that contributes to meaning'[58], which is common to both theorists. This hybrid position allows the development of a new ecocritical perspective for literature which encourages new readings of how nature is portrayed in fiction. It also, through the identification of relevant narrative techniques, develops a creative tool with which to foreground nature. The development of this perspective, is demonstrated through the examples provided in Chapter Two of my thesis, which attempts to reveal how nature is portrayed in children's and YA fiction, in the literature of David Almond.

Also central to an exploration of how nature can be more equally represented in fiction are the cultural notions of nature and wilderness in Western culture, and these are addressed in Chapter One. How these inescapable historical concepts shape the perception of the non-human, and any interaction with it, must first be acknowledged if we are to make a shift away from a view of nature as a less-than-human commodity that subsequently consigns it to the literary narrative background against which human activity unfolds. Particularly helpful in explaining how historical aspects have shaped humanity's current relationship to nature is Kate Soper's book, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-human* [59]. Equally revealing in exploring concepts of 'wilderness' are the essays 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature', by William Cronon[60], and those contained in Don McKay's *Vis a Vis: Field Notes on Poetry and Wilderness*[61]. Between them, these studies assist a greater understanding of the culture / nature divide and outline possible routes forward in developing a relationship with nature that allows for a greater equality between the human and the non-human.

In regards to a creative phenomenological response to the non-human, Chapter Three provides a commentary upon the writing processes involved in the writing of *Pinhead*. It consists of relevant critical observations on examples of my practice-based creative research, which aims to explore specific experimental literary techniques that conform to a theory of *primal writing*, and that relate to the effects of environment on human identity. This creative research is made up of excerpts from my YA novel, an exploration within a playful form which holds much potential for an experimental narrative exploring eco-political issues.

Continuing the creative element of my thesis, my YA novel *Pinhead,* seeks to exploit the metaphor of 'dyslexia to nature' and demonstrates a series of experimental techniques that conform to aspects of *primal writing*. Central to both the critical and creative elements, is the

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[58] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 630-631.

[59] Soper, K. *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-human,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

[60] Cronon, W. 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature', http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon_Trouble_with_Wilderness_1995.pdf, p1. Accessed 15/07/2015.

[61] McKay, D. *Vis à vis: field notes on poetry & wilderness,* (Wolfville, N.S.: Gaspereau Press, 2001).

examination of how the 'gestural'[62] origins of 'semiotic'[63] 'wild language'[64] that relate to 'the affective dimension of meaning'[65], are fundamental in shaping narratives which reconnect readers with their own innate sense of primal 'carnality'[66] by portraying what Merleau-Ponty has termed the 'pseudo-presence', of nature[67].

Although it must be recognised that writers have previously used elements of *primal writing* to convey qualities of wildness when writing about nature in fiction, no-one has specifically identified or catalogued *how* these techniques operate, *why* they are successful, and *what* might be the most effective way of employing them in literature to achieve an eco-political challenge to anthropocentric narratives. By providing an analysis of the techniques employed by a writer of children's and YA fiction (David Almond) and assessing their contribution from an eco-political perspective, it is my intention to push the boundaries of the genre and attempt to foreground natural representations to the extent where they are no longer seen as subordinate to the human plots and characterisations. It is interesting to note that the inter-relational relationship between my critical and creative research meant that it was often the case that I recognised *primal writing* techniques in my critical case studies (of David Almond), after having developed them independently within my creative work. I also maintain that to date, creative attempts at representing nature, or of attempting to translate what Les Murray calls its 'presence', have primarily been focused within poetry rather than prose.

Similarly, I must gratefully acknowledge the influence of Les Murray's poetry upon aspects of my own prose style. I will be attempting to demonstrate here, that it is possible to transfer many poetic and *primal writing* techniques to literary narratives. For this is highly desirable if literature is to create direct, empowering and biocentric representations of nature, rather than disempowering and anthropocentric portrayals that can only reinforce current negative attitudes to nature as a subordinate entity.

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[62] In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1967), Merleau-Ponty defines the origins of human language as a 'gestural' response to the external worldly environment. Indeed, for him language originates directly because of the reciprocal, interactive 'gestural' response between a subjective humanity and the living-world. This is in opposition to the Descartian assumption that thought and speech are objective products of the human psyche.

[63] In *Revolution in poetic language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), Julia Kristeva defines the 'semiotic' 'disposition' as being; that which deviates from the grammatical rules of language, and in so doing subverts its meaning.

[64] 'Wild language' is language made up of the 'gestural' and the 'semiotic' aspects, which bring a 'more than human meaning' to human language.

[65] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 630-631.

[66] In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage, 1996), David Abram describes 'carnal' language as: 'Language… rooted in our sensorial experience of each other and the world'.

[67] Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., *The Phenomenology of Perception*, (2002), p.210.

Chapter 1: Definitions of Nature and Wilderness.

1.1 Kate Soper: *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-human.*

Kate Soper's discussion of various ways of perceiving and defining nature requires that we question the term's complexity. To fail to do so undermines an accurate understanding of how our perspective of it is culturally shaped, and so her book *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-human* [68], provides a crucial theoretical and historical background which underpins this whole study. Soper explains that the notion of 'nature is, indeed: 'at once both very familiar and extremely exclusive'[69], and the word itself is problematic because it simultaneously holds so many different meanings. The use of capital 'N', for instance, signifies a return to the deification of nature, or as in a constructed nature as seen in 'the ''Nature'' Park'[70]. Similarly, there is a difference when the word ''nature'' is being used as a noun in regards to the '''nature'' of rocks'[71], or as the object when referencing 'rocks as part of ''nature''', or of "the great nature that exists in the works of mighty poets or to the humbler stuff of 'natural fibre'[72]. Indeed, in this literary study, it is perhaps the historical and cultural definitions of Romantic 'great nature' that are most relevant in their influence on my own writing. However, as Soper states when referring to John Stuart Mill, there is an essential opposition that shapes the idea of nature:

> In its commonest and most fundamental sense, the term 'nature' refers to everything that is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity. Thus nature is opposed to culture, to history, to convention, to everything which is defining of the order of humanity.[73]

This opposition, or human / nature divide is, as I shall later detail, something that *primal writing* seeks to subvert by blurring the boundaries between the two, while acknowledging the limitations of mimetic representations of nature that are inevitably shaped by 'culture… history [and] convention'.

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[68] Soper, K. *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-human,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).
[69] Ibid., p.1.
[70] Ibid., p.18.
[71] Ibid., p.1.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., p.15.

Soper's exploration outlines two positions, those of 'nature-endorsing'[74] and 'nature-sceptical'[75] perspectives. She reveals that while 'nature-endorsing' perspectives tend towards a reductionist view of humanity that discounts notable distinctions between human and non-human nature, they also assume that 'nature' is an incontrovertible concept and inevitably overlook the degree to which the individual components of nature may differ and are culturally rendered. In contrast, 'Nature-sceptical' theories accentuate the cultural construction of humans and nature and tend towards an 'anti-realist'[76] view of social determinism from a perspective that assumes that the concept of nature is essentially a product of culture. Soper explains how these two positions are often set against each other, even while still forming the basis for political movements that hold similar viewpoints. While the position of 'nature-endorsement' can be seen to align with many environmental or green movements, it has also provided a basis for anti-feminist, anti-gay and fascist politics. However, 'nature-scepticism' is aligned to a progressive sexual politics which questions retrogressive discourses that condemn feminist, gay and lesbian behaviour as unnatural, while cultural feminism and various strands of eco-feminism that comprehend components of the concept of 'woman as a colonised people'[77], and of the 'fourth world'[78], fall clearly into the former category. These latter perspectives partly rely on the rejection of science as a male, and, therefore, supposedly impartial, institution, which is part of an imperial patriarchal social order.

The dialogue surrounding feminism is one of multiple discourses of nature, which are often contradictory, while remaining inescapably and discordantly interwoven, making any single clear definition of the term 'nature' problematic. In one sense the term 'nature' is conceived as a state of ''otherness' to humanity'[79], that represents 'everything which is not human'[80]. In this way, 'nature' is viewed in opposition to human culture and history, and as something that stands apart from what humanity produces and creates artificially. Soper uses the example of a ''Nature' park'[81] to successfully demonstrate the inherent contradiction within this definition. The 'park' has been built by humans, but the 'unbuilt environment'[82] of 'nature' has been artificially

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[74] Soper, op. cit., *What is Nature?* p.4.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Brewer, P. 'International Journal of Socialist Renewal', http://links.org.au/node/109 Accessed 6.8.2015, 'The notion of women as colony or as a colonised people emerged in the Fourth World Manifesto at a Toronto conference in 1971. It argued that the struggle for women's liberation was inherently anti-imperialist because women constituted a colonised group what they called the Fourth World. Previously some radical feminists had argued that women's liberation would subvert imperialism, especially US imperialism, given the anti-Vietnam War ferment out of which women's liberation emerged.'

[78] Ezekiel, J. *Feminism in the Heartland,* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1st edition, 2002), p26. '[T]he 1971 North American Women's Conference in Toronto… brought together North American and Vietnamese women… delegates penned "The Fourth World Manifesto," an "embryonic but highly influential expression of cultural feminism," according to Echols.'

[79] Soper, op. cit., *What is Nature?* p.15.

[80] Ibid., p15.

[81] Ibid., p.18.

[82] Ibid.

contained within the human cultural creation of the 'park'. This description defies any clear delineation between nature and humanity while simultaneously suggesting a supposed difference.

At the heart of the contradiction lies the idea that western society has a sense of being excluded from nature, while also being a part of it:

> We have thought, that is, of humanity as being a component of nature even as we have conceptualised nature as absolute otherness to humanity. 'Nature' is in this sense both that which we are not *and* that which we are within.[83]

In this respect, therefore, humanity is both natural and unnatural, and inevitably experiences a sense of otherness that must ultimately be extended to our very selves. This conundrum of exclusion requires that western society must constantly question its position in relation to, and within, 'nature'. This is a process of questioning that is central to my creative project, which takes up the task of repositioning representations of nature with more equality alongside human representations within a hierarchy of discourse (as outlined in my introduction). By challenging perceptions of humanity as separate, and nature as something other to humanity, I am also exploring a perspective that question humanity's superiority to nature.

Soper describes how modern attitudes to nature have developed, largely in relation to a cosmological view of humanity's status in relation to God. She refers to the issue of humanity's position within a natural hierarchical order in an historical context. From the Medieval period through to the period of the Enlightenment shaped by 'Prometheanism'[84] and the rationalist systems of Rene Descartes, the Neoplatonist concept of 'The Great Chain of Being'[85] placed humanity as a moderately innocent force within a linked structure of being. Theoretical developments during the Enlightenment, however, while still adhering to the notion of the hierarchical Chain, begin a shift of focus towards human superiority that 'supported those currents of Enlightenment thought which emphasised our difference from, and right to exploit, 'nature''[86]. Soper highlights this shift as being a deeply significant rejection of the previous reasoning about the intrinsic value of nature that would have demanded that it was held in greater respect before Rationalist attitudes prevailed:

> Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz had all agreed to the principle that *non omnia hominum causa fieri* ['not everything is created for human ends'], and Locke, Kant, Addison, Bolingbroke, and many others, were to invoke the idea of the

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[83] Soper, op. cit., *What is Nature?* p.21.

[84] Ibid., p.15.

[85] Ibid., p.24.

[86] Ibid., p.23.

> Chain as a reminder of the numerous creatures superior to man, and as a caution
> against arrogant assumptions of human dominance within 'Nature'.[87]

In some respects, therefore, 'The Great Chain of Being' as described by Neoplatonism, is comparable to Ecology's current description of humanity's position within the 'interdependency of the eco-system'[88]. While acknowledging that there are differences between the two, Soper describes Ecology as:

> a secular critique of instrumental rationality and of a 'technical fix' approach to
> nature, and a Neoplatonist theology which grounds its demands for human
> humility in the distance which separates man from the lowliest of divine beings.[89]

It is clear that both descriptions place humanity *within* an inextricably linked structure of being, rather than it existing as a superior, separate and external observer of nature. But while Neoplatonist theology places humanity within a hierarchical system, Ecology posits humanity within an 'eco-system' without hierarchy, composed of a 'plurality of beings each possessed of its particular function and purpose maintaining the whole'[90]. Both of these perspectives, therefore, support the relevance of any creative project that attempts to question notions of human superiority over nature. However, Soper's critique can be seen to provide a starting point for recognising certain central similarities between theological and eco-critical motivations within their descriptions of nature. This latter issue, of how the effects of theological thinking permeate historical and current perceptions of nature, is one that must be recognised in order to examine how nature might be more effectively represented in literature from an eco-political angle, and this will be more directly addressed later in this chapter.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, Romanticism can be seen to move away from what the 'Green Movement'[91] now defines as the ''Anthropocentric' privileging of our own species'[92] over nature, that is central to the humanist perspective within Enlightenment thinking. To illustrate the complexity of anthropocentricity within Romanticism, it is again useful to refer to Kate Rigby's book, *Topographies of the Sacred*, in which she describes:

> aspects of romanticism that resist easy assimilation into a contemporary
> understanding, or that conversely, represent a problematic legacy of
> romanticism in the present. In this context… [there are] two worrying tendencies,

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[87] Soper, op. cit., *What is Nature?* pp.23-24.
[88] Ibid., p.25.
[89] Ibid., pp.24-25.
[90] Ibid., p.25.
[91] Ibid., p.5.
[92] Ibid.

both of which can be seen to lead to a betrayal of the earth, albeit in opposite directions.[93]

She refers to an anthropocentric 'romantic holism'[94] that privileges 'humanity or, more specifically, the human mind [above] the rest of the natural world,'[95] and highlights an ideological rift between Wordsworth's progressive but '"Passive reverence" for the earth'[96], in opposition to others, such as Novalis, who actively reinforce a more anthropocentric position by 'asserting that "Nature is to become moral. We are her teachers."'[97] Both these romantic ideologies inescapably infuse modern attitudes and representations of nature. Perhaps Rigby's most pertinent reference in regards to this study, however, is in relation to how poet John Clare 'went furthest in restoring a voice, and a more-than-human interest, to the genius loci of a particular place'[98]. She refers to Clare's poem '"The Lamentations of Round-Oak Wood"'[99], in which 'the "genius" of Clare's brook speaks, and […] does so on its own account'[100]. This indicates that despite the problematic oppositions within Romanticism, Clare's influence in giving a 'more-than-human' voice to nature, albeit one that 'anthropomorphizes the brook'[101], provides an empowering representation. As Rigby states:

> It [the representation] is, rather, an invitation to the reader to consider the plight of place itself, along with the suffering of those, human and otherwise, for whom it had hitherto provided pleasure, shelter, and sustenance.[102]

This is clear evidence of a shift against the privileging of humanity, where place and nature is being represented with a greater consideration and equality, through being given its own voice (a point I shall later return to in relation to the poet Les Murray).

In reacting to the 'economic and social consequences'[103] of the Enlightenment period, Romanticism can be seen to undertake a counter-revolutionary, but nevertheless, largely 'aesthetisizing approach to nature'[104].

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[93] Rigby, op. cit., *Topographies of the Sacred,* p.49.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., pp.49-50.
[96] Ibid., p.50.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid., p.57.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., p.58.
[101] Ibid., p.59.
[102] Ibid., p.58.
[103] Soper, op. cit., *What is Nature?* p.29.
[104] Ibid., p.150.

Chapter 1

As Soper states:

> We may therefore argue in a general way that the cultivation of the sublime is the
> expression of anxiety, but also the aesthetic 'luxury', of a culture that has begun
> to experience its power over nature as a form of severance from it, while
> Romanticism only finds expression against the background of a certain mastery of
> its forces and a consequent concern for the alienation it entails.[105]

This is a crucial point of consideration if attempting to reduce this perceived distance within literary representations, when those most attractive descriptions of nature's transcendent qualities that might serve to align the reader to a more intimate and protective empathy with it, can actually simultaneously alienate them by maintaining the sense of 'power' that humanity holds over it.

Romantic conceptions of 'Nature' are also seen to be problematic to the discourse surrounding 'Human Nature'[106]. The term is used in relation to humanity while also being closely linked to its use in describing the 'nature' 'which is independent of us, and external to us'[107]. '[H]uman nature'[108], does not necessarily suggest that humans are 'natural' in the same sense that animals, or the world are 'natural'. Soper highlights how these two distinct notions of 'natural' are exclusive of each other, and how what is natural for animals is not necessarily natural for humans:

> Certainly, it is true that the idea of 'human nature' is very often used to
> emphasise our difference from 'natural' species, as when it is said, for example,
> that human beings are 'by nature' rational and moral beings in a way that no
> other species are, that it is 'against their 'nature' to behave 'like animals', or that
> in taking 'nature' as a model they are precisely reneging on what is true to their
> own.[109]

Indeed, Baudelaire attacks Romantic conceptions that 'nature' might provide an archetype for human behaviour, stating that 'Nature cannot but counsel that which is criminal'[110], which is suggestive of a nefarious and perverting influence that 'nature' holds over humanity. But if human beings are capable of defying the animal elements *within* their own nature, any underlying emphasis by society on 'the ethics of human conduct'[111] seems to hold an acknowledgement that

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[105] Soper, op. cit., *What is Nature?* p.227.
[106] Ibid., p.25.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., p.26.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

these animal aspects are an integral part of human nature, while simultaneously seeking to separate humans from other species, that lack these 'ethical' and 'moral' qualities.

In terms of what behaviour is perceived as 'natural' for humans, those that transgress the recognised 'moral' human conventions and 'the ethics of human conduct', must be viewed by a society that adheres to these behavioural conventions, as 'unnatural', and therefore (falsely), as a perversion of 'nature'. This perspective has far-reaching consequences for members of human society who transgress conventions of sexual orientation, which are often particularly taboo due to the fact that procreation is such an obviously shared requirement of survival, both within 'nature' and humanity. Humanity (particularly in regards to religious practice) is constantly sensitive to this shared connection with 'animal' behaviour, and surrounds it with elaborate systems of cultural etiquette and ritual, in order to disguise the shared 'animal act' itself. Therefore, any adjustment to the 'act' itself risks going beyond the pale that differentiates the human from the animal. Indeed, it is significant that even now, society ties itself in knots regarding homosexual acts, for instance, which are perhaps so powerfully designated as unnatural because of the non-procreational aspect of the sexual act that can (again falsely) be seen to break the code of 'nature'. This contradictory position draws attention to the junction of similarities and differences between humanity and 'nature' as homosexuality is considered to pervert both the conventions of human ethics and the 'laws of nature' that are perceived as separating humanity from nature. This signifies a double transgression, in effect, attempting to define the homosexual as perverse and excluded from both, which thankfully, is of course, an impossibility, both physically and conceptually.

Inevitably linked to these notions of transgression are acts of repression. The elements of human nature which threaten the 'normal' conventions of human culture, by revealing the animal aspects of humanity, have alternately been suppressed and celebrated throughout different periods of conceptual thinking. But the discourses surrounding nature do not only restrain those elements defined as perverse. Soper describes how:

> The Enlightenment acclamation of human freedom and autonomy, moreover, carries within it a potentially repressive legacy of the modes of thought from which it breaks in the form of a continued elevation of mind over body, the rational over the affective. Though pitted against the more puritanical suppressions of bodily appetite and 'animal' instinct' sustained in Christian dogma, the rationalist element of Enlightenment thinking may also be charged with fostering modes of 'corrective' education and regulation that have denied self-expression and served as the prop of class, race and gender divisions.[112]

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[112] Soper, op. cit., *What is Nature?* p.31.

Broadly speaking, this statement suggests that a 'Christian dogma' also separates the spiritual from the physical, within its human / animal division, and this has a significant impact on how nature is determined as a soulless and lower status commodity, to be used simply for human gain (ironically, a physical and material gain). If Christianity views the earth as a corporeal, physical, 'bodily' arena in which humanity simply undergoes moral trials on the way to a higher spiritual plane, only achievable by leaving the body and the natural world behind, nature tends not to be viewed as anything other than expendable. In this light, Christianity can be seen to celebrate death over a more 'natural' life. Furthermore, the separation of the soul from the body until the moment of resurrection implies a hierarchy between the physical and the spiritual within an individual, personal microcosm that mirrors the same separation in the greater earthly sense. The ultimate consequences are that through Christianity's demand that humanity denies the value of earthly nature, within and without, humanity becomes separated from nature, the world, and itself. However, there are a diverse range of attitudes towards nature within Christianity which challenge the view of it as something merely to be exploited by humanity. In his book *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective*[113], David Kinsley gives examples of Christian tradition that do 'not consistently and unanimously adopt a negative attitude towards nature'[114]. These examples question the certainty of the 'mastery hypothesis'[115] which proposes that Christianity has demystified nature, promoted an anthropocentrism that places it under strict human dominion, and privileged human Christian spirituality over the physical world to an extent that has 'led to a lack of reverence for nature'[116]. Kinsley states that the early Christian thinker 'Irenaeus'[117] felt that nature was directly connected to God through the act of divine creation. So, although he 'tended to interpret the nature of the creation in terms of how it serves mankind, he was positive in his overall assessment of the physical creation and the human body'[118]. Going further, Kinsley makes a reference to 'Francis of Assisi'[119] whose 'love of and solidarity with nature are well-known and celebrated within Christianity'[120], and which suggests a less hierarchical relationship between the human and the non-human. This is borne out by Bonaventure's account

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[113] Kinsley, D. *Ecology and Religion Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective,* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1995).

[114] Ibid., p.118.

[115] Ibid., p.115.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid., p.118.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid., p.120.

[120] Ibid., p.118.

of 'The Life of St Francis'[121], which can be found in the book *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings*[122]. Bonaventure says of St Francis that:

> When he considered the primordial source of all things, he was filled with even more piety, calling creatures, no matter how small, by the name of brother or sister, because he knew they had the same source as himself.[123]

The use of the familial 'brother or sister' to describe non-human creatures certainly places them on a more equal footing with humanity. Likewise, Kinsley's reference to the more recent Christian attitudes of the missionary Dr Albert Schweitzer continue this theme of a greater equality between the human and the non-human. He refers to Schweitzer 'picking up worms from paths and placing them out of harm's way and rescuing insects from drowning in puddles.'[124] Indeed, Schweitzer believed that 'A man is truly only ethical when he obeys the compulsion to help all life which he is able to assist, and shrinks from injuring anything that lives.'[125] Karl Barth sees this statement as 'simply a protest against our astonishing indifference and thoughtlessness in this matter', but Schweitzer's sensitivity to nature is powerful evidence that echoes the connection and respect shown by Francis of Assisi. Indeed, these examples all provide evidence of Christian traditions that can be said to counter the certainty of the 'mastery hypothesis', to some degree. Furthermore, these examples provided by Kinsley relate to a more mystical creation-centred theology that has historically been embraced in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Indeed, Melissa Jones, adjunct professor of religious studies at Brandman University, writes that: 'Orthodox Christian theology embraces nature as a divinely written icon, an intricately crafted window to God.'[126] This creation-centred theology is drawn upon by the current Pope Francis, who has spoken out strongly against the denial of the value of earthly nature. His recent encyclical letter refers directly to the issue of climate change being a direct result of humanity's abusive relationship with 'our Sister, Mother Earth'[127] and the 'harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her'[128]. This reference to

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[121] Linzey, A. & Regan, T. (eds), *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings,* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), p.28.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Linzey, op. cit., p.28.

[124] Kinsley, op. cit., p.123.

[125] Ibid., p.120.

[126] Jones, M. *A divinely written icon: Orthodox theology can lead to new Christian thinking on creation,* <https://www.ncronline.org/books/2013/09/divinely-written-icon-orthodox-theology-can-lead-new-christian-thinking-creation>. Accessed 29.3.2017.

[127] Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome Encyclical Letter, 24.5.2015, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html>. Accessed 30.10.2015, Point 1.

[128] Ibid., Point 2.

'our Sister, Mother Earth' signifies a sense of equality and familial connection between the human and the non-human world.

Similarly, what Soper refers to as the 'Enlightenment… modes of 'corrective' education and regulation that have denied self-expression and served as the prop of class, race and gender divisions', can be seen to be countered by the 'discourses of sexual and social emancipation'[129], present within the Romantic exposition on 'nature'. However, the discourse that encompasses women and nature, particularly in regards to 'ecofeminist harmonisation'[130], is trapped by a contradiction that creates an 'ideological tension'[131] within the 'coding of femininity with naturality'[132]. For while a discourse that aligns woman to feminine descriptions of nature and criticises 'the violation of mother earth'[133], can clearly be seen to challenge a patriarchal instrumental threat to nature, it also becomes simultaneously trapped by a conceptual hierarchy that aligns women to a 'lower order'[134] of being, as part of 'the conception of nature as bestial 'other' to human culture, and the conception of woman as inferior 'other' to man'[135]. So, as Soper explains, any ideology that perpetuates the 'woman-nature equivalence'[136] simultaneously runs the risk of relegating women to 'maternal and nurturing functions'[137].

Soper also describes how an ideology that takes up a stance of 'anti-naturalism'[138] denies the possibility of natural influences within human nature, and therefore, sets itself against 'ecological realism'[139] and rejects any sense of shared commonality with nature. In fact, this denial of the 'naturality of sex and the body'[140] in favour of a position that sees the body purely as a cultural construction could be seen to negate any form of engagement with ecological thinking. However, Soper overcomes this problem by suggesting that an anti-naturalist discourse should be appreciated in a more rhetorical, less literal sense:

> [W]hat is being denied is not the existence of the body in the realist sense, but the assumption that the phenomenally experienced body - the body of 'lived experience' is natural.[141]

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[129] Soper, op. cit., *What is Nature?* p.31.
[130] Ibid., p.122.
[131] Ibid., p.123.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., p.122.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., p.123.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., p.130.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., p.133.
[141] Ibid., p.134.

Furthermore, in regards to our corporeal interaction with nature, she makes the important point that: 'The body is […] not a 'product' of culture but a creation of nature whose existence is the condition of any 'work' upon it.[142]'. This is of great interest because, while it acknowledges the influence of culture upon any interpretation of nature, it also recognises the original corporeal state of the human being as a 'creation of nature'. She states that:

> [T]he body is natural in the further sense that it is not an artificial construct but a subject-object, a being that is the source and site of its own experience of itself as an entity.[143]

In relation to this study, the implication of a body which is not only an 'artificial construct' is that even while acknowledging the cultural intervention that shapes our relationship with nature, by utilising the bodily experience it may also be possible to connect to a 'lived experience' through the body's phenomenological interaction with the world. Experimental art forms, such as literature that connects more directly to a bodily relationship with nature can, therefore, address the culture vs. nature question by sidestepping a more culturally shaped representation of the non-human. As I will show later, this is made possible through using aspects of *primal writing* that explore ways of representing the natural 'other' through a more direct phenomenological connection between the human subject and the non-human object. The primal 'lived experience' can be better represented by engaging with the phenomenological gestural origins of language that connect the body's relationship of reciprocity with its non-human environment. So, even while the writer may be unable to escape their own cultural and historical idea of nature, using a phenomenological approach may make it possible to represent nature more directly and with more equality, within that culturally shaped perspective.

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[142] Soper, op.cit., p.135.
[143] Ibid.

Chapter 1

1.2   William Cronon: The Trouble with Wilderness: Or Getting back to the Wrong Nature.

In his essay, 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature' [144], William Cronon builds on Kate Soper's questioning of discourses surrounding nature, demanding that we re-evaluate the cultural influences that underpin axiomatic human attitudes to nature and fundamental principles of environmentalism. It should be recognised that his critique of wilderness is mainly specific to the fetishisation of the sublime in New World Romanticism and not that of European Romanticism which focuses more on the relationship between the human and the non-human. European Romanticism itself could also be said to encompass a variety of perspectives, directions and movements. As Kate Rigby points out in her essay 'Romanticism and Ecocriticism'[145], a clear identification of 'Romantic literature'[146] is not easy to pin down:

> To speak of a "recognizably Romantic literature" also begs a question to which there is no clear answer. The identification of a distinctly and relatively coherent Romantic "school" or "movement" occurred after the event.[147]

However, differentiations of Romanticism aside, Cronon's perspective on wilderness provides relevant background necessary to the development of *a theory of primal writing* that primarily seeks to recognise or escape more anthropocentric representations of nature. Cronon explores the discourses surrounding the North American Wilderness from the perspective of it being an almost fictionalised cultural construct, conceptualised as a sacred space against which humanity reflects the failings of its own being:

> Wilderness stands as the last remaining place where civilization, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth… [it] presents itself as the best antidote to our human selves, a refuge we must somehow recover if we hope to save the planet … wilderness is not quite what it seems. Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation.[148]

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[144] Cronon, W.*The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,*
<http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon_Trouble_with_Wilderness_1995.pdf>, p1. Accessed 15/07/2015.
[145] Rigby, K. 'Romanticism and Ecocriticism', in Garrard, G. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism,* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).
[146] Ibid., p.60.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Cronon, op.cit., p.1.

But by conceptualising 'Wilderness' as an ideal, Cronon suggests that we risk obscuring inherent realities that are damaging to both how we comprehend the environment and how we interact with it, and that this holds dire consequences for its future environmental protection. This current misconception of 'Wilderness' as a place of purity and wonder, is in stark contrast to historical representations of it as ''deserted,' 'savage,' 'desolate,' 'barren' — in short, a 'waste,''[149] . These descriptions are traceable to biblical references to 'wilderness', 'as a place 'where Christ had struggled with the devil and endured his temptations'[150], and in opposition to the purity signified in Biblical descriptions of the Garden of Eden. It is Cronon's argument that in recent times 'Wilderness' has been re-conceptualised as a new 'Eden', and that two historical concepts are primarily responsible for this adjustment: the sublime, and the frontier. As I have previously referenced, Kate Soper describes the anthropocentric attitudes present in Romanticism that promote a 'celebration of the sublime in nature'[151], and Cronon similarly highlights the significance of the 'sublime', as a 'pervasive cultural construct, being one of the most important expressions of that broad transatlantic movement we today label as romanticism'[152]. However, he sees 'the frontier'[153] as concept which defines a 'more peculiarly American… post-frontier ideology'[154], that in conjunction with the sublime, is significant in shaping the 'modern environmental movement'[155], and therefore holds huge influence over modern perceptions and representations of nature.

Cronon describes the 'sublime' as the Romantic interpretation of 'wilderness' as a dreadful and magnificent terrain that awakens a visceral emotional response. These 'vast, powerful landscapes where one could not help feeling insignificant and being reminded of one's own mortality'[156], triggered quasi-religious experiences for Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, who when 'surrounded by crags and waterfalls'[157], felt themselves 'literally to be in the presence of the divine… [and] experienced an emotion remarkably close to terror'[158]. Cronon cites Wordsworth's vivid description of crossing the Simpleton pass:

> The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
> The stationary blasts of waterfalls,

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[149] Cronon, op.cit., p.2.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Soper, op. cit., *What is Nature?,* p.226.
[152] Cronon, op.cit., p.3
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., p.4.
[157] Ibid., p.5.
[158] Ibid.

> And in the narrow rent at every turn
> Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
> The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
> The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
> Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
> As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
> And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
> The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,
> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
> Were all like workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
> Characters of the great Apocalypse,
> The types and symbols of Eternity,
> Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.[159]

He argues that Wordsworth's reaction to the terrain is clearly identifiable as an experience that goes beyond a mere description of the aesthetic qualities of a dramatic vista, and instead actually defines 'Wilderness' in a manner that goes further than the theories of Burke and Kant, as being of those 'rare places on earth where one had more chance than elsewhere to glimpse the face of God'[160]. So in this sense, Wordsworth's Romantic concept of the 'sublime' interprets 'Wilderness' as a place containing both God and the devil, powerful good and also the pre-Romantic Wilderness as a place containing powerful evil. This sublime Wilderness is where humanity, following in Jesus' footsteps, might go to confront the duality of good and evil within existence, their own nature, and in 'nature' itself. From this point, Cronon describes how, perhaps through a process of acclimatisation to the more fearful aspects of the 'sublime', the Romantic definition of 'Wilderness' makes a gradual transition towards a more 'comfortable, almost sentimental'[161] aesthetic appreciation of landscape, towards a position where 'the sublime in effect became domesticated'[162]. He cites John Muir's description of the Yosemite Mountains as a place with 'No pain here… no fear… filled with God's beauty [in which] champagne water is pure pleasure'[163] as an example of this departure from Romantic awe.

The second element of humanity's concept of wilderness, Cronon maintains, lies in its relationship to the historical and conceptual development of the American frontier. He argues that the 'crucible of American identity'[164] in relation to the 'frontier myth'[165], was always a

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[159] Cronon, op. cit., p.5.
[160] Ibid., p.4.
[161] Ibid., p.6.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid., p.7.
[165] Ibid.

temporary state in which its champions constantly reflected back on the essentialist notion of a 'rugged individualist'[166], supportive communal neighbourliness, and the sense of a wild, Utopian, unexplored virgin-territory that vanished at the moment it was discovered. The frontier was perceived as a worthy place where masculinity prevailed in opposition to the lesser, civilised places where an easier feminine way of life prevailed, and drained the liberty and red blood of the frontiersman. With the cessation of the frontier came a national nostalgia for the ruggedness associated with the past lifestyle which gradually became absorbed into the collective American psyche, and which was mythologised as a sacred ideology central to American national culture. The maintenance of frontier values became symbolic of and affiliated to a virtuous and democratic way of life, and also of a:

> […] peculiarly bourgeois form of antimodernism [in which] [t]he very men who most benefited from urban-industrial capitalism were among those who believed they must escape its debilitating effects'[167].

Attempts were made to perpetuate this mythological 'frontier experience'[168] through the setting up of National parks, where outdoor activities, such as 'sleeping under the stars, participating in blood sports, and living off the land'[169] might also maintain the national virtues in those who wished to celebrate 'Wilderness' by entering into the national frontier fantasy.

Cronon asserts, however, that this form of re-enactment did not extend to the '[c]ountry people [who] generally [knew] far too much about working the land to regard unworked land as their ideal'[170]. This implies that the mythological and cultural construction of 'wilderness' is far removed from the actuality of the thing itself. Similarly, and perhaps more significantly, Cronon states that this process of re-enactment involved an act of exclusion of those indigenous peoples to whom the concept of a wild 'frontier' held no meaning:

> The myth of the wilderness as "virgin" uninhabited land had always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home. Now they were forced to move elsewhere, with the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God's own creation. Among the things that most marked the new national parks as reflecting a post-frontier consciousness was the relative absence of human violence within their boundaries. The actual frontier had often been a place of conflict, in which invaders and invaded fought for control of land and resources. Once set aside

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[166] Cronon, op. cit., p.8.
[167] Ibid., p.9.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

within the fixed and carefully policed boundaries of the modern bureaucratic state, the wilderness lost its savage image and became safe: a place more of reverie than of revulsion or fear. [171]

In an example which holds strong comparisons to the highland clearances which provide an historical context of oppression in my YA novel[172], Cronon references the deportation and exile of indigenous peoples who experienced 'wilderness' from a completely different perspective. He shows how America created an '"uninhabited wilderness"— uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place'[173], and in this way, demonstrates the artificial quality of the culturally constructed concept of 'wilderness'. He further states:

> It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny. Indeed, one of the most striking proofs of the cultural invention of wilderness is its thoroughgoing erasure of the history from which it sprang. In virtually all of its manifestations, wilderness represents a flight from history.[174]

More than this, wilderness has taken on a new form of religious context among environmentalists 'who reject traditional notions of the Godhead and who regard themselves as agnostics or even atheists'[175], and who attribute a form of sacred significance to nature, which draws entirely on previous historical valuations while failing to recognise the transposed symbolic aspects of their awe, which still, nevertheless, remain swathed in an historical Romantic articulation. So while the cultural 'wilderness' is disguised in ways that encourage a myth of a wild-Utopian Eden, it maintains an illusion that it is somehow possible to begin again 'and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave our marks on the world'[176]. But this paradox at the heart of 'wilderness' manifests a bifurcated perception which excludes humanity from a nature which must be 'wild' by definition, but that is made 'unwild', domesticated by our occupation. In this sense, the celebration of 'wilderness' becomes a yardstick by which human civilization and worth is measured, but also replicates 'the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles'[177]. Furthermore, Cronon suggests that it is through this hidden agenda of escapism that humanity excludes itself from the actuality of its urban homes in a false dream of belonging to

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[171] Cronon, op. cit., p.9.

[172] In a similar situation to that described by Cronon, of the forced relocation of First Nations people to create a 'pristine', uninhabited wilderness, the inhabitants of Scottish Highlands and Islands were forcibly cleared from their homelands during the 18th and 19th centuries. This also gave the impression of a 'pristine', uninhabited wilderness that was then represented in art such as 'Landscape with Tourists at Loch Katrine, John Knox, 1815', or poetry such as 'The Lady of the Lake', by Sir Walter Scott.

[173] Cronon, op. cit., p.10.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid., p.11.

[177] Ibid.

nature, denying the value of the 'homes we actually inhabit'[178]. This is a lie that not only removes responsibility from the destructive lives and behaviours that are conducted within modern domestic society, but also one that obscures how the ideologies surrounding 'wilderness' threaten other cultures:

> [I]n its reproduction of the dangerous dualism that sets human beings outside of nature—in all of these ways, wilderness poses a serious threat to responsible environmentalism at the end of the twentieth century… The classic example is the tropical rainforest, which since the 1970s has become the most powerful modern icon of unfallen, sacred land—a veritable Garden of Eden—for many Americans and Europeans. And yet protecting the rain forest in the eyes of First World environmentalists all too often means protecting it from the people who live there.[179]

In this way, American environmentalist perspective, and its distorted, dualistic cultural mythology of 'wilderness', contains major implications for the environments it attempts to save. It becomes a 'self-defeating form of cultural imperialism'[180] that damages the environments it seeks to protect by perpetuating the dualistic 'cultural myth that encourages us to "preserve" peopleless landscapes'[181] that are in fact, unnatural.

Building on this point, Cronon refers to Bill McKibben's book, *The End of Nature*[182] which argues that the human damage to the Earth's atmosphere, and subsequent global climate crisis, has created the situation where 'nature as we once knew it no longer exists'[183], and that we now live on 'a planet in which the human and the natural can no longer be distinguished, because the one has overwhelmed the other'[184]. Cronon disputes such a view because it is built on 'the premise that nature, to be natural, must also be pristine—remote from humanity and untouched by our common past'[185], and that this flies in the face of historical evidence that humanity has been interacting with, and 'manipulating'[186] the environment, often with positive effects, for millennia. But rather than suggesting that we ignore our effects upon the environment, Cronon disputes the radical deep ecology, 'Earth First!'[187] position in which 'all of civilized history becomes a tale of ecological declension'[188]. Instead, he asks that we step back from the dualistic

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[178] Cronon, op. cit., p.11.

[179] Ibid., p.12.

[180] Ibid., p.13.

[181] Ibid.

[182] McKibben, B. *The End of Nature,* (New York: Random House, 1989).

[183] Cronon, op.cit., p.13.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Ibid.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Ibid., p.14.

[188] Ibid.

'wilderness' paradox, which requires our absence from nature and the world in order for it to survive, and that 'the only way to save nature is to kill ourselves'[189]. He calls for us to recognise that the environmental problems that affect the poorer people of the world are often exacerbated by aspects of 'recreation' and 'class privilege'[190] that maintain 'a wilderness ideology that devalues productive labor and the very concrete knowledge that comes from working the land with one's own hands?'[191]. In this sense 'wilderness ideology' can be seen to create an antagonistic situation which sets human against human as well as human against nonhuman, rather than a more inclusive global relationship.

Similarly, by becoming trapped in this exclusive wilderness ideology that separates humanity from nature and 'tends to privilege some parts of nature at the expense of others'[192] humanity becomes distanced from nature and unable to recognise that which surrounds it within its own homelands and home. In this process of fetishising the sublime, humanity becomes blind to the local hill but favours the mountain ranges, or becomes biased towards the conservation of raptors over that of common passerines. Cronon asks the question 'How can we take the positive values we associate with wilderness and bring them closer to home?'[193] and delivers a pertinent answer.

> I think the answer to this question will come by broadening our sense of the otherness that wilderness seeks to define and protect. In reminding us of the world we did not make, wilderness can teach profound feelings of humility and respect as we confront our fellow beings and the earth itself. Feelings like these argue for the importance of self-awareness and self-criticism as we exercise our own ability to transform the world around us, helping us set responsible limits to human mastery—which without such limits too easily becomes human hubris.[194]

So it is by 'broadening our sense of the otherness' in regards to nature and through recognising its presence and significance outside 'the wilderness', that humanity may increase its understanding of it, and by so doing, possibly cease to be separated from it, if indeed, we ever were. As Cronon further states:

> The special power of the tree in the wilderness is to remind us of this fact. It can teach us to recognize the wildness we did not see in the tree we planted in our own backyard. By seeing the otherness in that which is most unfamiliar, we can learn to see it too in that which at first seemed merely ordinary. If wilderness can

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[189] Cronon, op. cit., p.14.
[190] Ibid., p.15.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid., p.16.
[193] Ibid., p.17.
[194] Ibid.

> do this—if it can help us perceive and respect a nature we had forgotten to recognize as natural—then it will become part of the solution to our environmental dilemmas rather than part of the problem. This will only happen, however, if we abandon the dualism that sees the tree in the garden as artificial—completely fallen and unnatural—and the tree in the wilderness as natural—completely pristine and wild. Both trees in some ultimate sense are wild; both in a practical sense now depend on our management and care. We are responsible for both, even though we can claim credit for neither.[195]

In short, he is suggesting a form of humility and respect towards nature that rejects an escapist conception and a dualistic view of nature, and that moves firmly beyond the enclosed ideology of the sublime wilderness frontier. In attempting to reach this position, humanity could perhaps escape its subconscious identification with wilderness that blinds it to consumerist addictions, robotic lives, and the hopeless industrial commodification of itself, nature and the world in which all exist. In this sense, Cronon is taking the concept of home, and all that it entails in the human sense of respect and nurture, and proposing that we extend it outwards to encompass the wildness that we encounter, towards nature in all its forms. In my YA novel, *Pinhead*, my creative research will explore if it is possible to represent wilderness in a way that reaches out in a more reciprocal relationship. It will explore if phenomenological *primal writing* techniques enable new portrayals that bypass the problematic, historical Romantic representations of wilderness that Cronon describes as perpetuating the dualistic view of nature that foster its commodification.

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[195] Cronon, op. cit., p.19.

1.3   Don McKay: *Vis à Vis.*

In a collection of essays and poems entitled Vis à Vis, Canadian poet Don McKay cultivates a theory of wilderness that is in some respects like that developed by William Cronon, but McKay's development contains his own intimate endeavours to 'come to grips with the practice of nature poetry in a time of environmental crisis'[196]. Similarly to Cronon, McKay's notion of 'wilderness' looks further than that of wild expanses of endangered natural environments, but also moves beyond historical and cultural explanations towards a more metaphysical conception of 'wilderness' as that which lies tantalisingly, just beyond powers of human recognition, or in McKay's words:

> By "Wilderness" I want to mean, not just a set of endangered spaces, but the capacity of all things to elude the mind's appropriations.[197]

But far from being a grandiose explanation, this is a definition that, like Cronon's, ultimately questions the influence of the sublime in order to look at nature and wilderness on a smaller scale, finding the glory of nature equally visible in the 'dry rot in the basement, a splintered handle, or shit on the carpet'[198], as in the mountainscape, or the forest.

Central to McKay's definition of wilderness is its connection to the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' notion of the 'face of the other', or 'face-to-face relation' (*rapport de face à face*, in French) as a metaphysical interaction. This is a concept contained within the philosopher's thought on human sociality and holds the origin of McKay's title *Vis à Vis.* Levinas' definition of a metaphysical interaction, however, should not be confused by a direct association with a theological concept of a higher causality or truth:

> Levinas will call the face-to-face relationship "metaphysical." He does this repeatedly in *Totality and Infinity*. Cf. *Totality and Infinity*, *Loc. cit.*, p. 84. There, he writes, "we have called this relation metaphysical. It is premature and…insufficient to qualify it, by opposition to negativity, as positive. It would be false to qualify it as theological." By metaphysics, Levinas means an event that repeats in the everyday, but is not reducible to the existence conceived phenomenologically as the object of intentional aiming or representation. This resistance to representation is due to the curious time structure of the encounter called the face-to-face. It comes to pass in an instant that 'interrupts' intentional consciousness, in its alone or solipsistic quality. Thus, "meta-physical" is

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[196] McKay, D. *Vis à vis: field notes on poetry & wilderness,* (Wolfville, N.S.: Gaspereau Press, 2001), p.9.
[197] Ibid., p.21.
[198] Ibid.

> approached in light of the phenomenology of consciousness and its 'temporality',
> but not in terms of a first or highest being or cause.[199]

Indeed, drawing on Levinas' philosophy, McKay's semi-metaphysical approach within both the essays and poetry of *Vis à Vis* expresses and explores the metaphysical in a manner which appears to describe a presence of being in a way that encompasses all manner of existence without hierarchy. Neither Levinas' nor McKay's portrayal of being is one that exclusively depicts a 'highest being or cause', for its presence is still shown to be equally valid within 'the dead raven'[200], 'the shit on the carpet'[201], and the 'abattoir, atrocity'[202], as it is in the angelic 'ravens... soaring at high speed'[203]. In this respect, McKay is exploring a wonderfully dirty and multi-faceted nature of being and wilderness, and in so doing attempts to redefine how we view the value of everything in nature and in human nature. He depicts different aspects of nature as being inseparable parts of a whole, in a trinity of domestic wilderness (the 'shit on the carpet'), wild carnivorous humanity (the 'abattoir, atrocity'), and the fragile beauty demonstrated in the decaying physicality of being ('the dead raven'). It is McKay's links to Levinas' philosophy which allow him to employ 'the vantage point of the phenomenology of the other'[204] in order to draw upon the immediacy of how the 'face to face' encounter with nature ''interrupts'' the 'solipsistic quality' of 'intentional consciousness'. McKay describes a situation in which artistic representations of 'home' exist as a most 'fundamental and unquestioned category, underlying all other motives'[205]. He states:

> Home, we may say, is the action of the inner life finding outer form; it is the settling of self into the world. As such it makes the first appropriation, the fundamental move that possesses the other; the hand grasps the thing and removes it from its element, relieving it of its autonomy and its anonymity: the thing is both owned and named.[206]

From this perspective, McKay's idea of 'home', and indeed its relation to the poetic, is also rooted

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[199] Bergo, B. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/notes.html, Accessed 16/07/2015.
[200] McKay, op. cit., p.28.
[201] Ibid., p.21.
[202] Ibid., p.101.
[203] Ibid., p.17.
[204] Ibid., p.22.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.

in Heidegger's linked concepts of 'dwelling'[207] and 'Being-in-the-world'[208], in which to dwell, is both to be, and also to belong. This inseparable connection between dwelling and poetry, is defined in Heidegger's book *Poetry, Language, Thought* [209], in which he argues that:

> Poetry does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it. Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus bring him into dwelling.[210]

He continues:

> Poetry and dwelling not only do not exclude each other; on the contrary, poetry and dwelling belong together, each calling for the other.[211]

This describes an inescapable nexus between place (dwelling) and representation (poetry) that is ripe for a phenomenological exploration, and in some respects McKay exploits this relationship. For as well as being rooted in Heidegger's concept of the relationship between dwelling and poetry, McKay's connections between the world and poetry can also be seen to draw on Levinas' concept of how '[t]he self is ''made of'' the other, and is not a pre-existing container in which the other is registered'[212]. In this sense, 'home' exists as a place of both intellectual and physical transfer; a form of two-way conduit in which the external otherness of the world is 'grasped'[213], appropriated and drawn inside, in an act of possession that renders 'the other as one's interior'[214], while also acting as the place from which humanity comprehends, participates and communicates its understanding of the world. As McKay states: 'It [home] turns wilderness into an interior and presents interiority to the wilderness'[215]. This establishes a concept of 'home' as vital in relation to how humanity interacts with nature and also highlights the importance of recognising the appropriation of 'the other as one's interior' in any process of how nature should be represented. McKay demonstrates this act of human appropriation in the essay, *Baler Twine*, in

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[207] Heidegger, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought,* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001, Trans. Ed. Hofstadter A). p.216.

[208] From *Being and Time*, Heidegger, M. translated by Macquarrie, J. and Robinson, E. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962) (first published in 1927). Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy definition: 'Famously, Heidegger writes of Dasein [existence] *as* Being-in-the-world. In effect, then, the notion of Being-in-the-world provides us with a reinterpretation of the *activity of existing* (Dreyfus 1990, 40), where existence is given the narrow reading (ek-sistence) identified earlier. Understood as a unitary phenomenon (as opposed to a contingent, additive, tripartite combination of Being, in-ness, and the world), Being-in-the-world is an essential characteristic of Dasein.' http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/#BeiWor Accessed 7.11.15.

[209] Heidegger, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought,* Trans. Ed. Hofstadter, A. (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001).

[210] Ibid., p.216.

[211] Ibid., p.225.

[212] McKay, op. cit., p.22.

[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid., p.23.

[215] Ibid.

his descriptive example of a raven:

> Then, on my way back home, I got my best look at a raven. It was hung up by the
> roadside at the entrance to a lane, a piece of baler twine wrapped around one
> leg, wings spread. There was a huge shotgun hole in its back just above the tail,
> which was missing altogether.[216]

He goes on to demonstrate how the raven has not only been killed, but that by being hung up

instead of allowed to rot naturally and return to the earth, its body has been reassigned to

function as a symbolic gesture that 'we can do this'[217]. By becoming a sign in this way, McKay

suggests that 'The raven's being, in Martin Heidegger's terms, was not just used, but used up'[218]

and in this sense, the dead bird has simply become a 'tool' of humanity. Interestingly, his later

reference to Heidegger's claim that 'tools', or any forms of technology, have become invisible

because 'their being is fully explained by what they're used for'[219], also implies that if nature has

been reassigned as a tool for human use, it has then, also become invisible as itself. Most

significantly, in using an aspect of nature to signify something other than its original state of

being, humanity is committing an act of essentialist possession that not only disguises nature's

original state, but consigns it to becoming both an other and lesser form, or what McKay terms;

'Matériel'[220]. He describes the full definition of 'Matériel', thus:

> In its limited sense 'matériel' is military equipment; in a slightly larger sense it is
> any equipment owned by an institution. But I am taking the term to apply even
> more widely to any instance of second-order appropriation, where the first
> appropriation is the making of tool[s], or the address to things in the mode of
> utility the mindset which Heidegger calls ''standing reserve.'' To make things into
> tools in the first place, we remove them from autonomous existence and
> conscript them as servants, determining their immediate futures. To make tools
> into 'matériel', we engage in a further appropriation. This second appropriation of
> matter may be the colonization of its death.[221]

In regards to the raven, this anthropocentric act can be said to conscript the raw presence of the

bird in an execution that seizes possession of what McKay terms, its *duende.* However, in place of

this wilful domination and how nature is used and conceived, he suggests a new way in which

humanity might relate to it through a process of 'poetic attention'[222], which requires a human

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[216] McKay, op. cit., p.18.

[217] Ibid., p.19.

[218] Ibid.

[219] Ibid., p.57.

[220] Ibid., p.20.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid., p.26.

participation in observing nature instead of merely appropriating it into a solipsistic human system of meaning; one that inevitably encourages its subjugation and inevitable exploitation. By introducing the concept of 'poetic attention' into how nature is portrayed, McKay also reveals the use of language as the 'tool' of the poet and how even a system using 'poetic attention' is still inevitably constrained by the technical aspects of description. He uses the phrase 'aeolian harpism'[223] to describe the aspect of Romantic poetry that becomes more concerned with the celebration of the poet's imagination than the thing itself, which in so doing glorifies nature at the expense of 'a recognition and a valuing of the other's wilderness'[224]. In order to achieve a truer and more authentic 'recognition' of nature and how it is represented, McKay, like Les Murray, suggests that portrayals of nature should not be 'a *vestige* of the other, but a *translation* of it'[225]. He describes the process, thus:

> The persistence of poetic attention during the act of composition is akin to the translator's attention to the original, all the while she performs upon it a delicate and dangerous transformation.[226]

But, whereas Murray tends to directly translate from nature, almost from an internal perspective that characterises and speaks as nature might, McKay's attempts actively employ apostrophe: 'Do you know my darling they were charlatans…'[227], in 'Stool', or anthropomorphic metaphor in 'Baler Twine': 'Last Winter two ravens, who I mistook for a blown-away umbrella…'[228]. In so doing, he is accepting the inability of language to effectively represent nature by using what he terms '[a]nthropomorphic play'[229] to cause a 'slight deformation of human categories'[230] and through an 'an extra metaphorical stretch and silliness of language as it moves towards the other, dreaming its body'[231]. In this way anthropomorphic play in combination with metaphor serves to reveal the inescapable irony of the poet's perspective, with no pretence of inhabiting the other, translating through an external human perspective that honestly accepts its inability to fully authenticate what it perceives. In this respect McKay's position that: '[t]hanks to metaphor, we know more; but we also know that *we don't own what we know'* [232], is a powerful one in its pronouncement upon the human / nature divide. Indeed, there can be an element of gestural reciprocity in the

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[223] McKay, op. cit., p.27.
[224] Ibid., p.28.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid., p.30.
[227] Ibid., p.100.
[228] Ibid., p.15.
[229] Ibid., p.31.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid., p.69.

anthropomorphic play contained within metaphors used to describe the non-human. This creates a more direct connection between the human and the non-human as language attempts to reach out towards the other. McKay uses several beautiful metaphors to both reference and describe this process:

> [Y]ou see ravens at play on the Athabaska River and think "boys on a raft." Anthropomorphic play, along this trail, is a gift to the other from the dwelling you will never build there. How? A slight deformation of human categories, an extra metaphorical stretch and silliness of language as it moves towards the other, dreaming its body.[233]

McKay's metaphor of the 'ravens' as '"boys on a raft"' provides a dynamic energy which results from linking two objects, one human and one non-human, to create a new third position, which startles the reader to observe the world anew. Indeed, Eva Feder Kittay states in her book *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*[234] that: 'The metaphor thereby provides us with a way of learning something new about the world, or about how the world may be conceived and understood.'[235] McKay is using what he calls 'metaphorical stretch' to invite the reader to view the world anew. This particular collision between ravens and boys uses the 'silliness' associated with the act of 'play' to empower the image with a sense of agency that could be said to foreground nature via the complexity of the paradoxical elements it contains. He primarily creates an anthropomorphic third position of 'ravens as playful boys', but in so doing, this metaphor must unavoidably contain and encourage a certain reversal of imagery within the comparison, and indeed, a reverse-anthropomorphic perception of 'boys as playful ravens'. This is, in a sense, a new fourth position which is possibly more empowering from a perspective of a *primal writing* that seeks to escape anthropomorphic ties. The metaphor of 'a gift to the other from the dwelling you will never build there', is a poignant reminder of the inability of the human narrator to truly inhabit a non-human perspective, but yet, an acknowledgement that the power of metaphorical language can still provide a human gesture back towards the non-human object it seeks to describe, within a reciprocal gestural exchange of being.

So, it can be seen that McKay's representations of nature contain the 'negative

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[233] McKay, op.cit., p.31.

[234] Kittay, E.F, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure,* (OUP: Oxford, 1987).

[235] Ibid., p.2.

ecopoetics' referred to by Dunkerley, in that:

> The poet writing about nature can no longer hope to be some sort of channel for natural energies; rather any poem should be a gesturing towards the ultimate unsayability of nature, the otherness of the non-human.[236]

McKay, in acknowledging the unsayability of nature, is drawing on both Heidegger's poetics and Levinas' ethics. To clarify Heidegger's position, it is helpful to refer to Kate Rigby's reference in her essay that addresses negative ecopoetics, 'On the (Im)possibility of Ecopoiesis':

> Heidegger insists here that in the materiality of the work of art, including the dense sonority of spoken verse, earth appears as *that which withdraws and remains hidden*. And if, as Heidegger maintains, the earth is disclosed in language as that which remains "concealed" (*das Verschlossene*), then in the poetic work, earth is preserved in its unsayability.[237]

This position is distinct from my own more Merleau-Pontian position which enables a more directly connected, if perhaps, not necessarily more authentic representation, of the natural object, as I will explain in Chapter two. Similarly, by drawing on Levinas, McKay's mode of poetic representation, again acknowledges the alterity of the non-human other, whereas I feel a Merleau-Pontian perspective allows for a greater possibility of an element of merger and participation in the ecopoetic representation because of his openness to a more direct non-human influence on the creation of human language in the gestural and reciprocal relationship between the two. Furthermore, I feel a Merleau-Pontian approach lessens the human / non-human divide, and his acknowledgement of Uexküllian Umwelt theory allows for the possibility of a greater gestural reciprocity between these not so separate, semiotic worlds.

In conclusion, McKay's definition of nature / wilderness and how it affects representations of nature are mostly relevant in the respect that they move away from a Romantic perspective of nature that through its focus on sublime grandeur limits humanity's awareness of it, and interaction with it, on a smaller scale. He proposes that through recognising 'the vantage point of the phenomenology of the other', by recognising the element of 'otherness' within ourselves, and that '[t]he self is ''made of'' the other', we may progress towards what lies beyond powers of human recognition in order to connect more closely with the presence of nature. 'Home' is the interactive conduit for this process, through which humanity may depart

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[236] Dunkerley, op. cit., 'Translating Wilderness', p.213.
[237] Rigby, K. *Earth, World, Text:* 'On the (Im)possibility of Ecopoiesis', Source: New Literary History, Vol. 35, No. 3, Critical Inquiries, Explorations, and Explanations, (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Summer, 2004), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057847> Accessed: 02-03-2017 18:25 UTC, p.236.

from a state of grasping appropriation that reassigns nature as 'Matériel', and as a tool for human use. Therefore, by recognising nature on its smallest, least grand scale, it can move towards a new position of 'poetic attention' that requires more participation in observing nature instead of merely appropriating it into a solipsistic human system of meaning. Ultimately, what is most relevant in McKay's theory, in regards to my own project, is his revelation of nature as a 'tool', for by connecting it to Heidegger's observations on the invisibility of technology, this reveals how humanity has made nature / wilderness invisible, except in its anthropocentric service to humanity. Also relevant are his efforts to highlight the smaller details of wilderness that exist outside the sublime, and his attempt to translate nature by employing the 'silliness of language as it moves towards the other, dreaming its body', in order to accomplish this. However, in my own narrative, rather than relying primarily on metaphor and anthropomorphic play, as McKay does, as a way to translate and alert the 'poetic attention', I have chosen to follow Murray's attempt to translate and give a voice to nature. I feel that the more direct phenomenological connection to the 'presence' of nature in Murray's approach, can to a greater degree, avoid the anthropocentrism of McKay's anthropomorphic play, while also maintaining the aspect of 'poetic attention' that contains a semiotic 'jolt'. The more direct phenomenological translation of any voice of nature can avoid the overt references to human culture which constantly drag the reader away from the natural object being described. McKay's idea of 'poetic attention' is a useful concept when used in relation to my own theory of *primal writing*. However, I prefer to explore the playful, poetic aspects of language and move towards 'the other', by focussing on those aspects that trigger our own carnal connection to the non-human through a closer attention to phenomenological links to the gestural aspects of language. This concept of *primal writing* that acknowledges and utilises the aspect of affective meaning, as an ecocritical tool and a creative palette, will be now be explored in detail during the next chapters.

Chapter 2: A Theory of Primal Writing.

Merleau-Ponty and Kristeva:

The Body, the Choratic Nexus, and the Language of the World.

Introduction.

For both Julia Kristeva and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the human body plays a fundamental role in the creation of language, and it is this aspect of how the two theorists explain the exchange between the self and the external 'other' which makes their perspectives so potentially useful to ecocritcism in exploring the relationship between the human and the non-human. In this chapter, I will be primarily be looking to the work of Stacey K. Keltner, in order to highlight some of Kristeva's links to phenomenology in her book *Kristeva: Thresholds,* [238] and to writers Donald A. Landes, Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, and David Abram, in order to explore how Merleau-Ponty's theories describe the 'gestural' influence of the non-human on the human production of language. I will provide some relevant comparative backgrounds for the two theorists and discuss the connections between their approaches, focusing primarily upon how the human body contains the liminal, primordial space in which the creation of language occurs, and how it responds within, and to, the non-human world. I will prepare the ground for my next chapter, in which I will discuss how aspects of Kristeva's semanalysis can be used to give a clarifying structure to Merleau-Ponty's concept of the phenomenological reaction that takes place between the body and the world, and how this is expressed through language. It is not my purpose to discuss the merits of these theories, or to develop a comparison of Kristevan and Merleau-Pontian positions, either generally, or specifically on aspects relating to intentionality or contingency. Rather, it is to accept their theories and establish the existence of a connecting theoretical bridge between Kristevan semanalysis and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, one that allows aspects of the former to detail and translate linguistic aspects rooted deep in the 'gestural'[239] influence of the corporeal world, as described by the latter.

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[238] Keltner, S.K. *Kristeva: Thresholds (Key Contemporary Thinkers),* (Cambridge: Polity Press, Wiley, 2011, Kindle Edition, 2013-05-03).

[239] Landes, D.A. *The Merleau-Ponty Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury Philosophy Dictionaries / Bloomsbury Academic, Kindle Edition, 2013.6.6), Kindle Loc. 1848.

2.1   Julia Kristeva and semiotic energy.

Kristeva's theory of language, as presented in *Revolution in Poetic Language* [240], published in 1974, is also a theory of subjectivity. Her radical distinction between 'the symbolic' and 'the semiotic' describes the former as a social, historical and cultural system of signification, and the latter as an 'affective material dimension of language, that contributes to meaning'[241]. Stacy Keltner describes this distinction/relationship:

> Meaning is constituted in the dialectical tension between the semiotic and the symbolic, which Kristeva describes, on the one hand, as a semiotic discharge of energy in the symbolic or, on the other, as the giving of symbolic form and meaning to the semiotic. The semiotic/ symbolic relation measures the trials, failures, and accomplishments of meaning and subjectivity – their advent as well as their loss. For Kristeva, artistic and literary encounters illustrate the processes inherent to all meaning and subjectivity[242].

It is this 'semiotic discharge of energy in the symbolic' that is central to my theory of *Primal Writing*, for the 'semiotic contribution to meaning' Keltner describes, often relates to corporeal aspects of the phenomenological production of language, as described by Merleau-Ponty, to which I will turn later in this chapter. However, Kristeva's connection to phenomenology begins as part of a complex critical relationship with the theories of Edmund Husserl, for while, as Keltner observes, Kristeva 'credits phenomenology for accurately describing the function of meaning proper, ie., 'the symbolic''[243], much of Husserl's theory of subjectivity is rejected before eventually being reformed and repositioned as a vital component of her own theory of subjectivity and language. Indeed, in her essay *The System and the Speaking Subject* (1973) and later, in the book based on her doctoral thesis *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), Kristeva challenges the notion of the concept of the Cartesian Cogito; a self or subject that is unitary and stable, pre-existing and separate from the linguistic structures it uses. In stating that 'the Cartesian conception of language' is 'an *act* carried out by a *subject*', and that 'this 'speaking subject' turns out in fact to be that *transcendental ego* which, in Husserl's view, underlies any and every predicative synthesis'[244], she is rejecting the concept of a *transcendental ego,* which is fundamental to Husserl's phenomenological approach to language. As Kelly Oliver states:

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[240] Kristeva, J. *Revolution in poetic language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
[241] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 630-631.
[242] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 634-636.
[243] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 649-650.
[244] Kristeva, J. *The System and the Speaking Subject*, in Moi, T. *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p27.

> Kristeva criticizes Husserlian phenomenology for taking one stage of the process
> of subjectivity and fetishizing it. The stasis and stability of the transcendental ego
> is but one element of subjectivity.[245]

Kristeva makes a distinction between one concept of the self/subject as an 'ego' or an 'I', and a second ongoing process of 'subjectivity' as a more encompassing transient state of being 'on-trial'. She describes this state as 'le sujet-en-procès' (the subject in process); 'a being incessantly engaged in the activity of expressing or signifying' and 'conditioned by larger bodily and relational processes'[246]. From this perspective, the process of expressing meaning through language can be seen to be a physical condition of, and a reaction to subjectivity, rather than an act of signification by a pre-existing *transcendental ego*, as observed in the phenomenology of Husserl. However, rather than make a total rejection of Husserl's position, Kristeva uses it as a contrasting component alongside aspects of Lacanian and Freudian concepts, in developing her own theory of language, as stated by Stacey Keltner:

> The confrontation between the phenomenological and psychoanalytic theories of
> meaning thus provides the critical space in which Kristeva formulates her own
> theories of meaning and subjectivity.[247]

Keltner further describes how Kristeva identifies 'two theories of meaning (phenomenological and psychoanalytic) both [of which singularly] fail to account for what she takes to be the signifying process as a whole.'[248] By incorporating both theories into a greater concept of meaning, Kristeva's method of semanalysis becomes possible. For her, the Husserlian phenomenological and the psychoanalytic 'designate two modalities' of 'the same signifying process' [249]. This designation leads Kristeva towards the development whereby aspects of the phenomenological modality are aligned with what she terms the 'symbolic' and the 'Phenotext', which are evident in the grammatical order of language. In opposition, the psychoanalytic modality is aligned with 'the semiotic' and the 'Genotext', which are evident within poetic language that subverts the grammatical order. Both of these aspects 'are inseparable within the signifying process'[250]; the semiotic needing symbolic structure and the symbolic needing the 'semiotic discharge of energy'

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[245] Oliver, K. *The Portable Kristeva*, (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2nd edition, 2002), p.xviii.

[246] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 697-708.

[247] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 726-727.

[248] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 719-720.

[249] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p22.

[250] Ibid.

in order for meaning to be created. In relation to this study of language, Keltner's description of the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic is very relevant to this study:

> The semiotic appears within but simultaneously withdraws from fixed meaning. It is the heterogeneous, affective, material dimension of language that contributes to meaning, but does not intend or signify in the way that symbols do. One may think of the rhythms and tones of poetry or music – the affective dimension of meaning that is part of but remains heterogeneous to the symbol. The semiotic may thus be understood as "outside of" or "prior to" meaning proper insofar as it represents the excessive demand of affective, corporeal existence to accomplish expression. However, this demand must be qualified by social and historical conditions of symbolic meaning. The symbolic organizes subjects, objects, and others into a coherent unity. Hence, the symbolic may be further specified as the social-symbolic. Significantly, the semiotic and the symbolic are interwoven in all discourse, and their relation makes signification possible – even when one is emphasized at the expense of the other, as in "purely" formalistic enterprises of thinking like math and logic or in "purely" expressive music.[251]

It is this description of the 'affective dimension of meaning' found in the 'rhythms and tones of poetry or music', that relates directly to my theory of *Primal writing*, which not only incorporates these aspects of language in order to express a more direct representation of experience, but also attempts to harness the 'jolt' that the 'semiotic discharge of energy' delivers to the imagination, allowing the reader to experience a challenge to the 'symbolic meaning' of the text. Similarly, these 'semiotic' aspects of language relate to *Primal writing* because its poetic accent 'represents the excessive demand of affective, corporeal existence' and it is through this connection to the influence of 'corporeal existence', that Kristeva's theory of language can be seen to link with Merleau-Ponty's more phenomenological explanation of the creation of language and meaning.

So, if the influence of the corporeal is viewed as a vital component of Kristeva's explanation for the semiotic elements of language, general possibilities for links to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach can be acknowledged (as I will show). But there is also a more specific nexus to be identified in connecting Merleau-Ponty and Kristeva's theories, one that lies in the liminal space in which meaning is created. Both theorists designate aspects of 'thetic' processing as being vital within the constitution of meaning, so having reached a crucial part of my theory, I will now switch my focus to provide a background to how Merleau-Ponty's theory of

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[251] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 688-696.

consciousness relates to his theory of language. I will then return to compare and connect both theorists' concepts through what (drawing influence from Kristeva and Merleau-Ponty) I term a *choratic nexus of reciprocity*; where 'affective meaning' is shown to be present within the non-human 'gestural' elements of the 'pre-thetic'[252] stage of signification.

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[252] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 975.

2.2   Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Primordial Corporeality and the Gestural.

In conjunction with Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, what Donald A. Landes calls the 'unified patchwork' [253] of philosophies and concepts contained within Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of language has been vital in helping to describe the theory of *Primal writing.* This was initially a theory of experimental creative writing I had been developing independently, prior to discovering connections with Merleau-Ponty. It is Merleau-Ponty's ability to make creative connections between various schools of thought that shapes his theories, and his attitude in this respect has in turn inspired an ongoing process of connectivity between his past work and my research. But with this creativity in mind, Merleau-Ponty himself reminds us that care must still be taken in finding a balance between a 'subjective reading' [254] of history and philosophy that simply projects one's own conceptual intentions across the theories of others, and an 'objective reading' [255] that aims to create a 'system of neatly defined concepts, of arguments responding to perennial problems, and of conclusions which permanently solve the problems'[256]. So, I will attempt to continue in what Landes describes as a spirit of 'responsible and creative reading' [257] in the development of my own connections and concepts.

Like Kristeva, Merleau-Ponty uses Descartes as a foil against which to question the nature of being. For him, Descartes' concept of *Cogito ergo sum;* 'I think therefore I am', is reversed from a position of thought being prior to being, to one where being takes precedence. He follows Kant's departure from a strict Cartesian rationalist precept that 'ideas are innate within the mind'[258]. Komarine Romdenh-Romluc describes how Kant makes a distinction:

> …between a priori concepts, such as identity, that are integral to the possibility
> of experience and thought, and empirical concepts that are acquired on the basis
> of experience… [and how these concepts are also]… answerable to the ways of
> thinking about the world which are best confirmed by experience. [259]

But, Merleau-Ponty rejects both the notion of the Cartesian soul and Kant's concept of a Transcendental Ego as being instances of a theory of a consciousness that remains separate and

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[253] Landes, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 103.

[254] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 107.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Merleau-Ponty, M. *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* Trans. Bergo, B. (USA: Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existence, 2002, Paperback ed.), p5.

[257] Landes, op .cit., Kindle Loc. 114.

[258] Romdenh-Romluc, K. *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* Trans. Davis, O. (Routledge Philosophy GuideBooks, Taylor and Francis, Kindle Edition), p8.

[259] Ibid., p9.

different from the world. He similarly rejects scientific concepts of a consciousness explained by causal laws and varieties of behaviourism, whereby subjectivity is merely a mental process within the physical body. Instead, he proposes that:

> …what we ordinarily think of as mental states and activities are constituted by *bodily* engagement with the world. The subject of these states and activities is thus essentially embodied. But, to understand this form of bodily subjectivity, we need to reject the traditional idea of the body as a mere object, a piece of biological mechanism, which somehow contains consciousness within it. Instead, we need to recognise that the body is a form of consciousness. [260]

As Romdenh-Romluc describes, Merleau-Ponty's theory of being is based entirely on the position that consciousness is 'constituted by *bodily* engagement with the world', and therefore impossible to separate from its environment, a point crucial to an eco-critical exploration of language. Merleau-Ponty describes his important development on Kant's appraisal of metaphysics and hypothetical 'a priori reasoning'[261], thus:

> Kant saw clearly that the problem is not how determinate shapes and sizes make their appearance in my experience, since without them there would be no experience, and since any internal experience is possible only against the background of external experience. But Kant's conclusion from this was that I am a consciousness which embraces and constitutes the world, and this reflection caused him to overlook the phenomenon of the body and that of the thing.[262]

For Merleau-Ponty, it is the 'phenomenon of the body', that lies at the centre of *a priori* reasoning and experiential *a posteriori* contingency. He defines this process further during *The Phenomenology of Perception*:

> Human existence will lead us to revisit our usual notions of necessity [a priori] and of contingency [a posteriori], because human existence is the change of contingency into necessity through the act of taking up.[263]

This description of a corporeal process of 'taking up' from the world defines the body as a physical conduit which acts with a connected interdependence and understanding; an inseparable consciousness joined with that of the intellect; being simultaneously both of the world and in the world. In this respect at least and, although arriving from a phenomenological route, Merleau-

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[260] Romdenh-Romluc, op. cit., p2.

[261] Landes, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 304.

[262] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (2002), p353.

[263] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* Trans. Landes, D.A. (Taylor and Francis, 2013-04-15. Kindle Edition), Kindle Loc. 4942-4943.

Ponty is acknowledging the existence of an inseparable mind / body / world consciousness, and can be seen to be prior to Kristeva in rejecting Husserl's concept of the *transcendental ego*, which is aligned to the notion of the Cartesian *cogito.*

Merleau-Ponty draws influence from a wide range of theorists and philosophers including Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and the Gestalt psychologists. Of philosophical influences, while Martin Heidegger's concept of 'Being-in-the-world' is highly relevant to this study (and is something to which I will refer, shortly), it is Husserl's rejection of modern scientific absolutism that perhaps inspires the strongest underlying currents within Merleau-Ponty's own branch of phenomenology. While 'Husserl intends phenomenology to be a science… [of…] systematic inquiry that yields objective truths'[264] based on ordinary human experience, Merleau-Ponty interrogates this position to develop Husserl's notion of a 'Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction'[265] beyond one that simply interprets consciousness as being separate from the world and possessing its own innate power of intentionality and objective thought. As Romdenh-Romluc points out, by drawing on Martin Heidegger's philosophy of inspiration from great 'works' in *The Philosopher and His Shadow (1964),* Merleau-Ponty can be seen to progress Husserl's phenomenology by developing 'the unthought-of element'[266] of it, within his own theories. Merleau-Ponty, while accepting the framework of analysis that the 'Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction' provides, rejects the unquestionable validity of the conclusions of objective thought because of the inescapable influence of the worldly field upon the consciousness. Merleau-Ponty recognises that consciousness cannot remain objective because it cannot escape the influence of the historical and experiential world upon which it depends to gain its evidence. This development on Husserl's position is evident in Merleau-Ponty's concept of the role of objective consciousness in the corporeal relationship with the world. He, in part, takes inspiration from Husserl's own acknowledgment in his later work of the inadequacy of his concept of the body in relation to the '*Lebenswelt'* [267] (Lifeworld) and consciousness. This area, concerning the connection between body and world, is most vital to my study, because it underpins Merleau-Ponty's explanation of the 'gestural' origins of language, which I will detail later in this chapter.

In forming a theory of consciousness that moves beyond Husserl's position, Merleau-Ponty follows Heidegger, copying the phrase 'being in the world'[268], or '*être au monde'*, to describe the act of bodily perception that in turn allows and influences the process of imagination. As Romdenh-Romluc notes, he uses Sartre's example of 'Peter' to argue that acts of

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[264] Romdenh-Romluc, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 235-236.

[265] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 260.

[266] Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Philosopher and His Shadow* (1964) in Romdenh-Romluc, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 384.

[267] Romdenh-Romluc, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 368-374.

[268] Merleau-Ponty *The Phenomenology of Perception* op. cit., (2012), Kindle Loc. 163.

imagination are not simply internal 'items'[269] of thought, but that they take place in the world. Merleau-Ponty states:

> When I imagine Peter absent, I am not aware of contemplating an image of Peter numerically distinct from Peter himself. However far away he is, I visualize him in the world, and my power of imagining is nothing but the persistence of my world around me. To say that I imagine Peter is to say that I bring about the pseudo-presence of Peter by putting into operation the 'Peter-behaviour-pattern'. Just as Peter in imagination is only one of the modalities of my being in the world, so the verbal image is only one of the modalities of my phonetic gesticulation.[270]

I suggest that this concept of a 'pseudo-presence' is a vital component in making *Primal writing* a potentially successful means of communicating the presence of nature within literary portrayals that seek to embody a more direct representation of the non-human in fiction. In combination with Merleau-Ponty's Heideggerian description of *être au monde,* its implications are that the boundaries between the consciousness of a presence actually experienced within the world and an imagined 'pseudo-presence' visualized in the world, are not as clearly separate or delineated as previously thought. While Merleau-Ponty maintains that objectivity is sought through the process of 'Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction', it also seems that any act of imagining, and therefore any act of reading, induces a state whereby the 'pseudo-presence' of the imagined exists with equality alongside the actual within the consciousness, and therefore within the world. According to Merleau-Ponty:

> [This act of] creating pseudo-presents[sic], is the means of our communication with both time and space. The function of the body in memory is that very function of projection that we have already encountered in kinetic initiation: the body converts a certain motor essence into a vocalization, deploys the articulatory style of a word in sonorous phenomena, deploys the previous attitude that it takes up in the panorama of the past, and projects an intention to move into actual movement, all because the body is a natural power of expression.[271]

So, from this excerpt it can be seen that Merleau-Ponty's concept of the imagination is of a bodily process that blurs the boundaries of 'time and space' (via memory) within the consciousness, and that it is also the body that discharges the 'vocalization' of 'sonorous phenomena' within the 'natural power of expression', part of that expression being language. He continues:

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[269] Romdenh-Romluc, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 3429.

[270] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* op. cit., (2002), p210.

[271] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception,* op. cit., (2012), Kindle Loc. 5168-5172.

(e. Thought is expression.)
These remarks allow us to give the act of speaking its true physiognomy. First, speech is not the "sign" of thought, if by this we understand a phenomenon that announces another as smoke announces fire. Speech and thought would only admit of this external relation if they were both thematically given; in fact, they are enveloped in each other; sense is caught in speech, and speech is the external existence of sense. We can no more admit, as is ordinarily done, that speech is a simple means of solidifying thought, or again, that it is the envelope or the clothing of thought.[272]

In conjunction with Merleau-Ponty's version of 'being-in-the-world', this description of the speech process where 'sense is caught in speech, and speech is the external existence of sense', moves beyond the idea of a speech that merely signifies external objects, to one of speech that more successfully expresses their 'bodily presence'. This process draws on the subject's immediate bodily state and a remembered bodily experience, and allows the imagination to draw on the bodily memory to place an imagined object amidst the 'persistence of my world around me'. This concept lies at the heart of my theory of *Primal writing*, which attempts to evoke the 'bodily presence' of nature through using the previously referenced 'semiotic discharge of energy', as described by Julia Kristeva, to jolt the reader's imagination and bring their past bodily memories into their immediate bodily consciousness. (I will shortly explore this aspect fully).

Similarly connected to attempts at *Primal writing*, through their link to the 'semiotic discharge' as described by Kristeva, are Merleau-Ponty's concepts of 'The Flesh of the World', his observations on the transactional 'reciprocity' between the human and non-human, and his discussion of the 'gestural' aspects of language that connect 'the bodily presence' of the object / other (nature) to the bodily consciousness of the subject. These must be addressed fully before the connection between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological linguistic response to the world can be described in terms relating to the 'semiotic discharge' of Kristevan semanalysis. In order to do this I will call upon the writings of David Abram, which develop Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of the relationship between the world and the expression of language. Abram sheds light on how Merleau-Ponty's later work in *The Visible and the Invisible (1968)* shifts from discussing consciousness in terms of 'the body', towards a position that speaks of 'the collective ''Flesh,'' which signifies both our flesh and ''the flesh of the world.'' [273]. Abram describes this relationship between '*our* flesh and ''the flesh of the world'', as:

> [t]he reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible, and of the sensible in the sentient, a mystery of which we have always, at least tacitly, been aware,

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[272] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception,* op. cit., (2012), Kindle Loc. 5175-5177.

[273] Abram, D. *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p66.

> since we have never been able to affirm one of these phenomena, the
> perceivable world or the perceiving self, without implicitly affirming the
> existence of the other.[274]

So, in this respect, while I have already described Merleau-Ponty's explanation of how the 'bodily presence' of the object can exist within the consciousness and the imagination of the subject, Abram can be seen to reveal how Merleau-Ponty eventually conceives of a relationship in which the element of separation between the 'reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible, and of the sensible in the sentient' is lessened still further. He also develops the notion of a transaction between human subject and non-human object to the level of an actual reciprocal response on the behalf of the object. Abram's reading of Merleau-Ponty rejects the 'contemporary discourse' that:

> …easily avoids the possibility that both the perceiving being and the perceived
> being are *of the same stuff*, that the perceiver and the perceived are
> interdependent and in some sense even reversible aspects of a common animate
> element, or Flesh, that is *at once both sensible and sensitive*… Each of us, in
> relation to the other, is both subject and object, sensible and sentient. Why,
> then, might this not also be the case in relation to a non-human entity - a
> mountain lion, for instance, that I unexpectedly encounter in the northern
> forest?[275]

This 'interdependent' transaction between 'the perceiving being and the perceived being' had been previously explored by Merleau-Ponty in relation to human relationships, in which:

> [c]ommunication or the understanding of gestures is achieved through the
> reciprocity between my intentions and the other person's gestures, and between
> my gestures and the intentions which can be read in the other person's
> behaviour.[276]

Indeed, Abram builds a compelling argument that by the time of writing *The Visible and the Invisible* (First English translation, 1968) Merleau-Ponty had extended this concept of gestural 'reciprocity' between human 'persons' to describe how this relationship similarly operates between the human and the non-human. Abram describes this relationship thus:

> When my body thus responds to the mute solicitation of another being, that
> being responds in return, disclosing to my senses some new aspect or dimension
> that in turn, invites further exploration. By this process my sensing body

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[274] Abram, op.cit., p66.

[275] Ibid., p67.

[276] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception,* op. cit., (2012), Kindle Loc. 5241.

gradually attunes itself to the style of this other presence - to the *way* of this stone, or tree, or table - as the other seems to adjust itself to my own style and sensitivity.[277]

The example of 'the flesh of the world' as an interactive relationship between the human 'sensing body' and the non-human presence of the 'stone, or tree', is particularly useful in that it highlights how the non-human 'seems to adjust itself to my own style and sensitivity'. This inter-relational bond is also supported by Landes, who specifically highlights the relevance to non-human 'nature' at the root of Merleau-Ponty's concept:

> Turning to the Romantic approach of Schelling (and Bergson), Merleau-Ponty discovers a reciprocal relation between humans and nature. "We are the parents of a Nature of which we are also the children".[278]

Landes also draws attention to Merleau-Ponty's later work in *The Visible and the Invisible* [279]*,* referring to his explanation of the reciprocal connection between the human and the non-human in order to deliver a more complex description of the concept of 'The Flesh of the World' as a process of shared 'primordial intercorporeality' that takes place 'at the level of wild being prior to the distinctions of self and other'. He states that:

> [I]n *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the reversibility between my body and itself, and my body and others, guarantees a primordial intercorporeality, a shared belonging to the reversible flesh of the world. Touch with another is reversible in just the manner of touch between my two hands, and this offers an intertwining or encroachment at the level of wild being prior to the distinctions of self and other.[280]

The definition of 'primordial intercorporeality' can clearly be seen to extend between human and non-human within 'a shared belonging to the reversible flesh of the world' and so it is reasonable to argue that some sense of 'the gestures and the intentions' communicated between human bodies via the 'flesh', should also occur between human and non-human bodies. But to explain how this transaction may be expressed through a process of gestural 'reciprocity', we must return to Landes' description of Merleau-Ponty's earlier work:

> According to Merleau-Ponty, speech is not a mere external accompaniment of thought, but rather that speech accomplishes thought and that language itself

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[277] Abram, op. cit., p52.

[278] Landes, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 1221-1222

[279] Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Visible and the Invisible (Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy),* (U.S: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

[280] Landes, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 2344-2348.

bears its sense in the very style of its gestures or the traces of its gestures. As such, the "sense" of the gesture is written into the gesture itself, and since speech too is a "genuine gesture," it too must contain "its own sense" (PhP, 189). Thus, every communication remains contingent upon an embodied taking up, and there is never a pure meaning first in the head of the speaker and then in the mind of the listener by which we might judge a complete and successful communication. [....] Communication occurs when I gear into the sense of the other's gestures. "I do not understand the other person's gestures through an act of intellectual interpretation," but rather "through my body" insofar as it "merges with the structure of the world that the gesture sketches out and that I take up for myself" (191–92). The same structure holds for linguistic gestures, allowing for a continuity that dissolves the question of the origin of language.[281]

Abram, like Landes, also emphasises how Merleau-Ponty's recognition of the 'gestural' means that 'the denotative, conventional dimension of language can never be truly severed from the sensorial dimension of direct, affective meaning'[282]. This description of 'sensorial... affective meaning' directly correlates with Kristeva's definition of the semiotic aspects of language, that as Keltner has established, also displays 'the affective dimension of meaning'. I refer back to the earlier quotation on Kristeva:

> One may think of the rhythms and tones of poetry or music – the affective dimension of meaning that is part of but remains heterogeneous to the symbol. The semiotic may thus be understood as "outside of" or "prior to" meaning proper insofar as it represents the excessive demand of affective, corporeal existence to accomplish expression. [283]

That both the 'semiotic' and the 'gestural' operate '"outside of" or "prior to" meaning' provides a justifiable connection where the linguistic semanalysis of the former can be used to describe the phenomenological origins of the latter, and I will later describe this aspect in greater detail. However, I must firstly draw attention to Abram's reading of Merleau-Ponty, which allows for the most definitive explanation of the connection between the 'affective, corporeal existence and expression' and between the human and non-human. Abram successfully argues that:

> If language is not a purely mental phenomenon but a sensuous, bodily activity born of carnal reciprocity and participation, then our discourse has surely been influenced by many gestures, sounds, and rhythms besides those of our single species. Indeed, if human language arises from the perceptual interplay between

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[281] Landes, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 1849-1862.

[282] Abram, op. cit., p70.

[283] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 688-696.

the body and the world, then this language ''belongs'' to the animate landscape as much as it ''belongs'' to ourselves.[284]

He continues:

> Ultimately, then, it is not the human body alone but rather the whole of the sensuous world that provide the deep structure of language. As we ourselves dwell and move within language, so, ultimately, do the other animals and animate things of the world; if we do not notice them there, it is only because language has forgotten its expressive depths.[285]

Abram then quotes directly from the *Visible and the Invisible* to demonstrate the extent to which Merleau-Ponty's description of the "reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other"[286] in relation to being, means that the presence of nature is inescapable within 'our' human language:

> ''Language is a life, is our life and the life of the things…'' It is no more true that *we* speak than that the things, and the animate world itself, *speak within us*: That the things have us and that it is not we who have the things…'' That it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being.[287]

There seems little doubt from these references of the 'gestural' presence of the non-human existing within language. Merleau-Ponty's unfinished project in *The Visible and the Invisible,* was successfully describing this process, but this was unfortunately cut short by his untimely death, before a more full explanation of the how the 'gestural' might have been observed in literature became possible. Abram's reading of the 'gestural' connection to language as being embodied within a 'poetic productivity of expressive speech'[288], allows Merleau-Ponty's unfinished project to be taken further. But for a more fully developed literary tool to be developed within an ecocritical perspective, work needs to be undertaken that can begin to specifically identify the presence of the non-human within literature, beyond general descriptions of 'poetic' language. I will now undertake to describe specifically how Merleau-Ponty's concept of a 'gestural language', which carries a non-human presence within it, can be linked to Kristeva's concept of 'semiotic language' in ways which allow the latter to describe the former through its ability to operate as an established literary tool.

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[284] Abram, op. cit., p70.
[285] Ibid., p85.
[286] Landes, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 4781.
[287] Abram, op. cit., p85-86.
[288] Ibid., p84.

2.3   The Choratic Nexus.

Having established that both Kristevan and Merleau-Pontian theories of the production of language describe how 'affective' meaning shapes aspects of expression, it remains to clarify how this correlation can link the two theories and reveal how it allows a Kristevan semanalysis to describe and translate aspects of the non-human corporeal 'pseudo-presence' described by Merleau-Ponty. As both theorists describe the 'affective' aspect of language as operating within the 'primordial', or 'pre-meaning'[289] stage of expression, we must return again to Keltner's description of Kristeva's definition of the semiotic (See page 49 – 50). In order to describe the location of this primordial processing of 'affective, corporeal existence', Kristeva borrows the term *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus* to detail a "receptacle of what has come to be, of what is visible or perceivable in every other way"[290]. The *chora* acts a womb-like receiver where 'drives' encounter language in a kind of ambiguous transitional location that is 'analogous… to vocal or kinetic rhythm'[291]. In this respect, in its capacity for processing external corporeal stimuli, the *chora* is indeed primordial, both in its contact with the world and in its relation to language, as Keltner describes:

> One may posit the chora as "prior to" or "outside of" understanding…[292] …and [as] an ordering or a "regulating process", the maternal, mediating principle of the chora thus motivates the most primordial differentiations of what will eventually become the separated, social subject of signification.[293]

It is apparent, then, that the *chora* acts as a primordial 'space' containing 'no thesis and no position'[294], in which 'affective' meaning is organised and 'mediated'[295]. In Kristeva's own words:

> According to a number of psycholinguists, ''concrete operations'' precede the acquisition of language, and organise pre-verbal semiotic space according to logical categories, which are thereby shown to precede or transcend language. From their research we shall retain not the principle of an operational state but that of a pre-verbal functional state that governs the connections between the body (in the process of constituting the body proper), objects and the protagonists of family structure.[296]

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[289] Kristeva, in Moi, *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 29.
[290] Keltner, op .cit., Kindle Loc. 842-843.
[291] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p24.
[292] Keltner, op .cit., Kindle Loc. 842-843.
[293] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 846-847.
[294] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p24.
[295] Ibid., p27.
[296] Ibid.

In this respect, the *choratic* 'pre-verbal' space functions by connecting 'the body' and external 'objects' via a semiotic energy that 'precede[s] or transcend[s] language'. It is in this transitional *choratic nexus* between the human body and external non-human corporeal 'objects' that 'affective' meaning is formed and expressed as aspects of semiotic / poetic language, as the *chora* perceives and attempts to organise the 'gestural' energy of corporeal objects into enunciation. To be more precise, it is in what Merleau-Ponty terms the "primordial silence" of pre-thetic sense,' prior to meaning itself being formed, that the non-human 'gestural' energy sparks the *choratic* "regulating process" to begin. Landes description also endorses this argument:

> Beneath any secondary use of constituted or spoken language one finds a "primordial silence" of pre-thetic sense, a silence that speech comes to break as a gesture that signifies not an idea or meaning, but an entire world. Thus, how do we understand gestures? When we see a gesture, we do not turn inward in order to interpret its meaning through an analogy with our own experience: "The gesture does not make me think of anger, it is the anger itself" (190). Of course, I do not perform these gestures or emotions, but I catch on to their sense, I understand them in a non-thetic, non-reflective way.[297]

While Landes is referring to human 'gesture', it has already been established that Merleau-Ponty's later work extended this theory to non-human 'gestural' energy. Therefore, following the direction of this excerpt, it is reasonable to suggest that via the "primordial silence" of pre-thetic sense', the 'gestural' energy of the 'entire world' is organised through the *chora*; which allows us to apply Kristeva's observations on semiotic / poetic language as a tool to provide a clarifying structure that effectively details and translates the direct influence of non-human 'gestural' energy within human language. This concept of a *choratic nexus* between Merleau-Pontian phenomenology and Kristevan semanalysis, is also indirectly endorsed by Keltner's reference to the concept of a 'Husserlian hyle'[298] as 'a purely sensual layer of perception'[299] and that 'Husserlian phenomenology thus functions, for Kristeva, as "the bridge"'[300] and therefore, as the womb in which the gestural energy of the pseudo-presence of the corporeal world is constituted into the 'affective meaning' of semiotic energy and poetic enunciation:

> Kristeva's strategy is to interrogate the semiotic conditions that produce and yet remain foreign to meaning and the subject. The semiotic finds its significance

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[297] Landes, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 1854-1859.

[298] In this instance, while the use of the term 'Hyle' usually relates to the Greek philosophical reference to 'matter' of things, (my note) Merleau-Ponty's 'use of the concept of hyle also recalls Husserl's use of the concept of hyle (" matter") as a purely sensual layer of perception.' Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* op.cit., (2012), Kindle Loc. 12703-12704.

[299] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception o*p.cit., (2012), Kindle Loc. 12703-12704.

[300] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 764-765.

here. In opposition to Husserlian hyle, the semiotic is pre-thetic; that is, it precedes the positing of a subject of meaning. Meaning is inherently intentional, but the phenomenological account of intentionality remains incomplete. Semiotic heterogeneity cannot be unified in or by phenomenological meaning, and yet remains essential to it. Kristeva thus situates her account of the semiotic/ symbolic distinction within the horizon of "intentional experience" and justifies her turn to the semiotic as conditioning phenomenological meaning.[301]

As previously stated, however, it is not my purpose here to develop connections between Kristevan and Merleau-Pontian positions on aspects relating to Husserlian descriptions of hyle, intentionality, or contingency. Rather, it is enough to acknowledge in the above statement, that 'the semiotic is pre-thetic', and in so being, suggests that the *choratic nexus* acts as a 'bridge' between the human subject and the world. The *choratic nexus* is a vital two-way 'reversible' connecting point of transfer, through which aspects of 'primordial intercorporeality' pass between the non-human and the world of the human body. As language is inseparable from the gestural influence of the world it inhabits, it cannot be viewed as either an exclusively human domain, or as being solely representative of a human perspective. Whatever is expressed by language is born *of* the world, albeit within a human *choratic* womb, but nevertheless that language is always inseparable from the world, connected and visible in wild semiotic/poetic detail. Indeed, the gestural influence and pseudo-presence of nature permeate deep within human language. The ongoing 'reversible' transfer of 'primordial intercorporeality' via the *choratic nexus* ensures that all language, must be viewed, therefore, as *The Language of the World*.

As if an echo of the intercorporeal connection described above, it is this theoretical bridge between Kristevan semanalysis and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology that allows the former to describe linguistic details attributed to the 'gestural' influence explained by the latter. I will now focus upon literary examples which demonstrate how the 'gestural' energy of the non-human world can be understood through the expression of semiotic and poetic language, and therefore, how a Kristevan literary perspective can operate as part of an ecocritical tool that translates the powerful phenomenological influence of the non-human world within language.

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[301] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 794-799.

2.4   Primal Writing as part of an Ecocritical Tool.

To continue an exploration of how the theoretical bridge described in the previous chapter can serve to 'decode' or 'translate' linguistic elements which draw upon, or emphasise the phenomenological influence of the non-human world within language, it is first necessary to specifically identify literary features that adhere to Kristeva's definition of the semiotic aspects of language. These aspects should, therefore, challenge the grammatical order of language. They might carry the 'affective dimension of meaning' found in the 'rhythms and tones of poetry or music' and harness the 'jolt' that the 'semiotic discharge of energy' delivers to the imagination, stimulating the reader to experience a challenge to the 'symbolic meaning' of the text. This challenging jolt to the imagination, if linked directly or thematically to a portrayal of the non-human, could then be identified as an aspect of *primal writing* that connects with the 'affective meaning' and 'primordial intercorporeality' within the 'pre-thetic' space of the *choratic nexus*. It would be an expression of the 'pseudo-presence' and 'gestural' energy of the non-human world within the text.

For the purpose of this thesis I have chosen to focus primarily on examples that include aspects of *primal writing* that relate to elements of 'affective meaning' and the 'pseudo-presence of language' in the actual language of the text. However, I will also briefly explore how some aspects of narrative that challenge the grammatical order of language also need to be considered within the context of the greater narrative. For in order to assess the impact of how nature is being represented within a text, that representation's status needs to be considered within the narrative's hierarchy of discourse. The level of status given to the non-human is an aspect that is often linked to the amount of word-space it is awarded within the narrative, but this is not always the case, as the 'jolt' that the 'semiotic discharge of energy' within *primal writing* provides is often capable of bringing the non-human towards the foreground of narrative focus, in spite of a limited emphasis.

So, having previously established how the 'gestural' energy of the non-human world can be understood through the expression of semiotic and poetic language, it then becomes possible to observe and evaluate the effect that the presence or absence of semiotic and poetic language has upon how the non-human is viewed in relation to the human, within a narrative. If the semiotic aspects of a text can be said to represent the 'gestural' element of the non-human and call into action its 'psuedo-presence' within the imagination, then they can, of course, in the context of an ecocritical reading, be seen to operate in *opposition* to the more 'symbolic' aspects of the text. Taking this point into consideration, it becomes inevitable that the more human, anthropocentric elements of the text can be seen to be aligned with the 'symbolic' and the

'Phenotext', which are evident in the grammatical order of language. Therefore, the more 'semiotic' and 'Genotextual' aspects of the text, which may subvert the grammatical order and are evident within poetic language, can be seen to be aligned with a more zoocentric, non-human bias, within the narrative.

Taking into consideration the fact that humans themselves are animals and therefore part of a more inclusive concept of nature, we should also look to consider that any aspect of a narrative that carries a strong 'Genotextual' element in its portrayal of human characters, is therefore also aligned with a more challenging zoocentric bias that erodes the separateness, and therefore also the perceived status and imbalance, between the human and the non-human. For the sake of recognition, I have provided a table that gives an outline of some of the literary features that are more aligned with the Zoocentric, Semiotic / Genotextual elements in opposition to those of the Anthropocentric, Symbolic / Phenotext, and therefore may possibly be used within an ecocritical reading of a text.

(See table on following page).[302]

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[302] The concept for the Primal Writing Zoocentric / Anthropocentric textual recognition table was inspired by the Semiotic / Symbolic textual recognition table in the course content for Critical Perpsectives, Module ENL108, University of Chichester, English & Creative writing BA Hons.

Semiotic, Genotextual and Zoocentric elements.	Symbolic, Phenotextual and Anthropocentric elements.
Lack of punctuation	Traditional paragraph/sentence structures
'Echolalia' (Baby talk)	Typical spelling/punctuation
Alliteration	Literary references
Word invention	
Compound words	
Poetic tone / voice	
Experimental features	
Musicality	
Onomatopoeia	
Word invention	
Nonsense	
Magic realism	
Stream of consciousness	
Mimesis of natural voices	
Any aspects that can be defined as eroding the difference between the human and non-human (such as confusing shifts in POV between them)	Aspects that define the human and non-human as separate (character attitudes / themes)
Increased foregrounding of the non-human (via word-count)	Maintenance of human status (using the non-human as a backdrop to human events and themes)
Features that subvert a Literary form or genre – (ie that deconstruct or challenge the recognised format of a sonnet or a detective novel) and that can be linked to a shift towards the zoocentric	Textual/grammatical cohesion
	Features that conform to a Literary form or genre – (ie a sonnet or a detective novel)
Any feature that challenges the grammatical order or literary form	Any feature that maintains the grammatical order or literary form

2.5   An Analysis of the Writing of David Almond.

The texts under consideration from this ecocritical perspective are by the author David Almond, a writer whose expansive body of fiction is written for an audience that includes children, adolescents, young adults and adults, and is often quite experimental in style. My own YA novel holds some similarities to his work and therefore provides some fair opportunities to assess the narrative bias from which the non-human is portrayed. (This analysis, of course, is not assessing the intentions of the author or judging the merits of their text. It is simply making observations on how the text operates from an ecocritical *primal writing* perspective). For the purpose of this study I will concentrate on three texts. The first, *Jackdaw Summer* [303], I consider to be a more traditional and anthropocentric text, which can, however, still be seen to contain elements of *primal writing*. The second, *The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean* [304], is a much more challenging and experimental novel which exhibits many aspects of primal writing. The third, *Secret Heart* [305], also has some relevant experimental sections.

To begin with, a reading of *Jackdaw Summer* reveals a predominantly anthropocentric narrative, but one which is also interspersed with some examples of genotextual language that can be aligned with a more zoocentric representation. For instance, throughout Chapter One, Almond can be seen to employ a semiotic representation of the non-human, albeit a subtle one, through the character of the 'jackdaw'. This representation contains the 'psuedo-presence' of an actual jackdaw:

> I pick up a stone and try to sharpen it.
> Then a bird flutters on to the grass six feet away.
> 'Hello, crow,' I say.
> 'It's a jackdaw, townie,' says Max. He imitates its call. 'Jak jak! Jak! Jak jak!'
> The jackdaw bounces, croaks back at him.
> *Jak jak! Jak jak!* [306]

By mimicking the non-human call / voice accurately, Almond taps into the element of affective dimension of meaning by drawing on the authentic sound of the bird itself. Firstly, the human character Max's imitation of the jackdaw's call: 'Jak jak!' employs an element of non-English spelling and word invention that challenges an anthropocentric symbolic grammatical order. This

[303] Almond, D. *Jackdaw Summer,* (Hachette Children's Books, Kindle Edition, 2014-02-06).

[304] Almond, D. *The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean,* (Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition, 2011-09-01).

[305] Almond, D. *Secret Heart.* (Hachette Children's Books, Kindle Edition, 2014-02-06).

[306] Almond, *Jackdaw Summer.* Kindle Loc. 31-34.

element foregrounds the bird's non-human character. The impact of the bird's call is then amplified through the use of italics, after Almond has clarified that it has its *own* interactive voice:

> The jackdaw bounces, croaks back at him.
> *Jak jak! Jak jak!*

The narrator's declaration that 'The Jackdaw … croaks back at him', and subsequent italicisation of the jackdaw's utterance, differentiates the non-human voice from the human voice, but also emphasises it, and, in spite of this element of separation, implies that the bird is replying to the human characters, or the human narrator, with a suggestion of equality within the interaction. The visual differentiation of the italics, in combination with the emphasised exclamation and repetition of the phonetic power and authenticity of the jackdaw's utterance, can be seen to exemplify a 'semiotic jolt' and 'energy', stimulating the reader's imagination and prompting them to experience the jackdaw as a non-human character which interacts with a certain amount of equality with the human characters. This foregrounding of the non-human represents a shift towards the zoocentric within a predominantly anthropocentric narrative and this aspect is strengthened by the challenge to the 'symbolic meaning' of the text within the semiotic and gestural qualities of a jackdaw's actual voice. From this angle, the non-human can be seen to be given an authentic voice, legitimised by the human narrator's recognition and the interaction with the human character of Max.

However, when considered in the context of the novel's hierarchy of discourse, the jackdaw's momentary equality as a character can be viewed as more of an ongoing lyrical motif, rather than a shift towards a more zoocentric narrative bias. Despite the fact that the jackdaw inhabits the title of the novel, the word-space given to its character when it does feature, is comparatively small within chapters that consist almost entirely of human character interaction and narrative. In Chapter One, the jackdaw can be seen to 'speak' just four times in all and although this is increased to a further eight times within Chapter Two, from this perspective the non-human is clearly secondary to the human influence within the hierarchy of discourse. The novel is narrated by a human from an anthropocentric perspective that constantly adheres to the grammatical order. Elsewhere, throughout an effectively concise and deftly crafted narrative that does feature references to the non-human, the novel, for the most part, can still be seen to adhere to an anthropocentric perspective, where, other than the jackdaw's voice, there are no instances of actual semiotic language being employed to challenge the anthropocentric grammatical order. There *are* other representations and themes (such as the description of the adders in Chapter Ten Section 1, occasional descriptions of nature and landscape, the metaphor of Liam's body as a world or human landscape, in Chapter's One and Two in Section Two, etc) that

all relate to a more zoocentric portrayal of the human and non-human, but these do not drastically subvert the anthropocentric bias of the text.

Indeed, within *Jackdaw Summer*, the non-human can be said to exist predominantly as a backdrop to the interactions of the human characters and anthropocentric plot precisely because the use of language in its representation is mostly confined to that which maintains the grammatical order. Although the jackdaw leads the boys to find an abandoned baby, the emphasis is on a human being saved, while the poetic motif of other jackdaws, or *the* jackdaw, as a non-human character features only occasionally throughout the narrative; in Chapter Six (section 1); Chapter One (section 2); Chapter Eleven (section 3) and Chapter Three (in the final section). Moreover, their utterances are strictly monosyllabic and restricted to the repetitive call of '*Jak Jak!*'. In regards to this non-human voice, closer observation of the calls of jackdaws would have revealed that they use a wider variety of calls, sounds and movements in their communication; all details that could be employed to shift the emphasis towards the non-human within the novel. Indeed, a more accurate attempt to replicate the jackdaw's utterances using *primal writing* techniques might not only have made its voice more authentic, but the process itself would have demanded employing language and word invention that harnessed the gestural origins of an actual jackdaw's voice within the 'pseudo-presence' of its literary representation. By attempting to capture this presence using *primal writing*, the genotextual aspect of the words would contain a greater semiotic discharge to challenge the grammatical / anthropocentric order of symbolic language. Doing this successfully would have created a shift within the novel's anthropocentric hierarchy of discourse towards a new position more balanced towards a more zoocentric representation of the non-human.

In comparison to *Jackdaw Summer*, *The True Tale of the Monster Known as Billy Dean* is a novel that contains many semiotic features that challenge the symbolic grammatical order of language. In fact, it would be more accurate to state that the heavily stylised narrative of the entire novel directly confronts the grammatical order of language. The book is mostly narrated within the first person present tense and includes many words that are spelled as though perhaps written by a child. For instance:

> I am told I wil lern how to rite the tale by riting it. 1 word then anotha 1 word then anotha. Just let the pensil wark. Let it move like footsteps throu the dust & leev its marks behind. Let it leev its marks just like birds & beests leav ther misteryous footprints in mud.
> Just fill the pajes.
> A word a mark a word a mark.

What do I hav to begin with?[307]

From the very start, the spelling of words is distorted and is even inconsistent with itself, as seen by the two versions of 'leev' and leav'. This aspect creates a narrative in which, to some degree, *all* the language carries a semiotic jolt that challenges the symbolic and therefore, constantly contains a heightened sense of stimulation for the reader. Within this consistently semiotic text the challenge of reading misspelled words becomes the norm and so any representations of the non-human that might have employed the semiotic jolt of poetic language to bring it to the narrative foreground, largely become indistinguishable from the semiotic / poetic language that describes human character interaction and events. While this might be seen to be diminishing the 'jolt' of a non-human voice that could have been distinguished within the narrative (as in the case of the jackdaw), it does however, have the equally powerful effect of blurring the boundaries between the human and the non-human characters and descriptions, which positions the reader to reassess their understanding of each object that has been *re-spelled* and redefined by Almond. That this process is demanded for both human and the non-human representations ultimately brings a greater equality to the representations of nature within the novel's hierarchy of discourse.

For example, in the following section the *re-spelled* semiotic language used to describe both the human and the non-human can be seen to heighten the impact of Almond's post-apocalyptic environment, in which both are brought closer together; both equally strange and distorted, but within a representation that is united by these challenging aspects:

> I see the sky abuv them reddenin lyk fyr & darkenin lyk death. I hear the screemin guls the rattl of the breez. A dog barks sumwer nereby & sumwer faroff thers a deep deep groanin. The breth is weezin in my throte & wisslin throu my teeth. & thers crunch crunch rattl crunch crunch crunch rattl rattl crunch..
> The lites all red & golden. The woman & the boy ar silowets in it. They wark on the shattad payvments the potholwed rodes throu weeds & shrubs past crumblin howses emty howses empty shops ruwind restronts empty spaces. Thers driftin smoak arownd them thers scattad litta rampant weeds.[308]

The strange, semiotic *re-spelling* of 'screemin guls' taps into the phrase's musical 'affective meaning' and encourages the reader to *reassess* and *reconnect* with the combined audio and visual image of a screaming gull. This 'jolts' the imagination towards a greater connection with the inherent gestural origin within the imagined 'pseudo-presence' of the thing itself. Similarly, the *re-*

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[307] Almond, *The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean,* Kindle Edition, p. 5.
[308] Ibid., pp. 85-86.

spelling and the poetic phrasing of 'the rattl of the breez', stimulates a reassessment and reconnection with the non-human sound image. However, on this occasion the image is inextricably echoed and linked to the human sounds of the narrator's own breath: 'The breth is weezin in my throte & wisslin throu my teeth', and also to the 'crunch crunch rattl crunch crunch crunch rattl rattl crunch' of the narrator's steps through the rubble and debris of the fractured human environment:

> shattad payvments the potholwed rodes throu weeds & shrubs past crumblin
> howses emty howses empty shops ruwind restronts empty spaces.

In this way, the representations of the human and the non-human are unified through the semiotic strangeness; the musicality, poetic tone and experimental nature of the re-spelled words, the jolt of which triggers the reader to reassess and reconnect with the gestural origins of the thing itself. By presenting the human and the non-human as equally strange, and in an equally semiotic, poetic way, Almond has blurred the difference between the two, and in so doing created a greater balance within the novel's hierarchy of discourse.

A more powerful example of this re-unification of the human and the non-human comes much later in the narrative, in the chapter 'Elizabeth in the Glayd', when a shift to a third person perspective increases the semiotic jolt of the poetic language:

> Look how the wilderness has grown with the growing Billy Dean. Ther are trees
> growin throu the shattad roofs & dilapidayted walls. Green turf spreds across the
> fallen stones. Dark green ivy creeps & creeps. Ther is hether in the rubbl &
> byutiful wild flowers flurish in the dust. Rabits liv & hop here. Ther intricate deep
> tunels are carvd throu fowndayshons and roots. Ther ar hedjhogs and rats and
> weesels and bee hives and wasps nests.[309]

The shift itself jolts the reader from Billy's previous first person point of view, which is more internal and subjective, into a new more omniscient perspective that is more authoritative, objective and reflective. The opening line: 'Look how the wilderness has grown with the growing Billy Dean', uses this distancing objectivity to announce how both 'the wilderness' and 'Billy Dean' have 'grown', in a manner that suggests togetherness. This togetherness denotes more equality between them within the hierarchy of discourse and is reinforced by the more omniscient voice. Almond can be seen to echo the previous example of 'shatted pavements', as human structures are shown to merge with nature while being overgrown by non-human vegetation: 'Ther are trees growin throu the shattad roofs & dilapidayted walls'. As with the previous example, this is shown

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[309] Almond, *The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean.* Kindle Edition, p. 222.

to be a positive thing; seen in the line 'byutiful wild flowers flurish in the dust'. But this example demonstrates a progressively greater equality between 'wilderness' and 'Billy', the non-human and the human. The semiotic strangeness of the childlike / nonsensical aspect of the re-spelled words describing mixed human and non-human objects; 'dilapidayted walls', 'hether', 'rubbl', 'byutiful', 'hedjhogs', 'weesels' etc, and the blurring between them, is made more effective by the distance which the more omniscient perspective allows. This jolt reinforces the effect of the theme of re-unification. The switch to the third person perspective during the description provides an omniscient moment of clarity within a narrative point of view which is predominantly rooted in the first person. Therefore, the narrative point of view can be seen to work in conjunction with semiotic language to emphasise the equality between the human and the non-human, in a way that makes this theme more prominent and powerful in its influence on the reader. The important point here is that it is the jolt / switch of perspective in conjunction with the semiotic language that connects with the gestural element of the described natural object. The jolt would also have been effective in a sudden switch from a predominantly omniscient narrative to a more subjective point of view, as long as semiotic language is being used in the depiction of nature. As I will demonstrate in my own creative research, similarly effective jolts can be made through combinations of narrative shifts in tense, in conjunction with semiotic descriptions of the non-human.

This theme of cross-boundary one-ness is further cemented in the almost biblical, baptismal image of when Billy and Elizabeth enter the 'riva':

> She tiptoes on the stony riva bed she balanses herself to stop from farlin. They grip each other's hand and go deeper deeper. They see the fear in each other's eyes but they also see the laffter. They go deeper. They stand with the river flowin acros ther chests. Theyd only need to lean back to be swept away. Billy laffs at the fish below and he points down and they see them flikering and flashing ther. Elizabeth gasps as they swim and twist about her as they rise and say ther sylent O O O O. Billy dips his head into the water & moves it back & forward & feels the shugar in it being nibbld by the fish and being washd away.[310]

At this point, the blurring of boundaries between the human and the non-human is reinforced symbolically as Billy and Elizabeth literally enter the water. This image is made more effective by the semiotic aspects of the re-spelling of the non-human 'flowin' 'riva', and the human sound images of 'laffter' and 'laffs'. The interaction with the fish being examples where the spelling creates more immediacy; 'flikering' and 'nibbld' contain more of a jolt than flickering and nibbled. Similarly, the mouthing movements of the fish are represented with an image that contains their

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[310] Almond, *The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean.* Kindle Edition, pp. 225-226.

gestural pseudo-presence, in the description of how they 'say ther sylent O O O O'. So after consideration, it can be said that in comparison to *Jackdaw Summer*, *The True Tale of the Monster Known as Billy Dean* contains a narrative that has moved beyond the point where the non-human simply operates as a background to human interaction, and that this foregrounding of the non-human is largely successful because of the use of semiotic language in conjunction with shifts in perspective.

However, it can be seen within examples from *Secret Heart*, the third text under consideration here, that Almond's work also contains *primal writing* techniques that move beyond the semiotic aspects of word invention and phrasing. While the narrative is, to some extent, anthropocentrically centred on the progress of the human characters, this hierarchy is undermined because wild, non-human elements are shown to exist within the human characters. *Secret Heart* uses empowering, poetic, metaphoric representations of animal nature ('larks and tigers') as descriptions of human emotions. It builds a dreamlike character of a 'Tiger' with small but significant images containing the pseudo-presence of the object itself, which trigger the imagination. Similarly, it uses moments of magical realism that jolt the reader's imagination; allowing the reader / human protagonist to inhabit a non-human perspective, and blurs the distinction between the two.

An example of the first technique is visible during the subtle, poetically toned, omniscient, metaphoric descriptions of the emotions of the protagonist, 'Joe' when he first attempts to climb the trapeze. The lines: 'Then the larks inside him started singing, helped to lift him to the platform's edge'[311], and 'The larks inside him hung high in the blue and sang and sang'[312], both portray the 'larks' as positive emotions within him; as courage, which 'helped' him, as freedom in flight, 'high in the sky', and as joy, when they 'sang and sang'. These poetic, metaphoric representations of nature as positive human emotions not only call upon the pseudo-presence of the 'lark' itself and all that the original gestural pseudo-presence evokes, but simultaneously represent nature as a positive influence. This element of *primal writing* within the portrayal of the non-human can be seen to empower the reader's perception of nature, and undermines what might be an anthropocentrically dominated narrative.

More powerful, however, is the motif of the 'Tiger' that features throughout the narrative as a kind of wild alter-ego for the timid character of Joe. The moments whenever the 'Tiger' symbolically foregrounds nature within the narrative are very powerful. It is constantly referenced throughout the text, first referenced in Joe's dream during Chapter One, when smell-imagery is used to call upon the pseudo-presence of the wild animal:

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[311] Almond, *Secret Heart*. Kindle Loc. 920.

[312] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 926.

> He opened his eyes: just his bedroom, pale sunlight filtering through thin
> curtains, childhood drawings Sellotaped to the walls, his clothes in a heap on the
> floor. He sniffed the air, trying to smell the tiger again.[313]

The presence of the tiger in Joe's imagination is one that holds fear for him, however, as seen in his inability to even speak its name to his mother:

> 'I had a d-dream,' Joe said.
> 'Now there's a change.'
> 'There was …'[314]

This aspect of fear imbues the character of the tiger with great status within the hierarchy of discourse, because of its effect upon Joe. The element of fear is also combined with smell and visual imagery, which all serve to connect the reader to the pseudo-presence of the wild object itself, triggering an intense, imaginative / gestural response of fear and fascination that an actual tiger holds:

> He recalled the tiger's sour scent, its vicious tongue, its teeth. It all seemed so
> familiar. Like a memory, not a dream.[315]

Eventually, like the larks, the Tiger is also described in an emotional context, symbolising Joe's inner anger alongside the joy / freedom of the 'lark', when he reacts to the teacher nicknamed 'Bleak Winters',[316] who belittles him for being absent from school:

> Joe felt the lark singing inside himself and the tiger prowling inside himself. He
> looked at the teacher, and knew that Bleak Winters was never anything else
> except Bleak Winters. He looked at the children. He knew that they, like him,
> might have larks and tigers inside themselves, but they kept them hidden, and
> one day their larks and tigers might disappear, just like Bleak Winters' had…[317]

Almond uses the phrase 'the tiger prowling inside', to describe the wildness of his anger at being ridiculed, and the metaphor links directly to the pseudo-presence of the wildness of the tiger. This section also 'writes back' against the constraining influence of the human institution of formal education, symbolised by the teacher, Bleak Winters, who has lost the inner wildness of 'larks and tigers'.

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[313] Almond, op. cit., *Secret Heart*, Kindle Loc. 28-29.

[314] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 39-40.

[315] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 170-171.

[316] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 379-382.

[317] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 379-384.

Perhaps the most effective and challenging aspect of *primal writing* employed by Almond in *Secret Heart* is the use of 'magical realism', which is a technique ideally suited to writing which seeks to challenge the reader. In her book, *Magic(al) Realism*[318]*,* Maggie Ann Bowers states that:

> The characteristic of magical realism that makes it such a frequently adopted narrative mode is its inherent transgressive and subversive qualities.[319]

While Bowers does provide a definition that 'in magic(al) realism it is assumed that something extraordinary *really* has happened'[320], her discussion mainly seeks to:

> …distinguish between 'magic realism' as the concept of the 'mystery [that] does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it' (Roh:1995: 15) and 'magical realism' that is understood, in Salmon Rushdie's words, as the 'commingling of the improbable and the mundane' (1982:9).[321]

My own observations and use of magical realism develop a definition that is less fixed than Bowers' statement that 'something extraordinary *really* has happened'. *Primal writing* utilises the challenging question of what is or what is not real, so my definition explores the unresolved question; '*has* something extraordinary really happened?', which allows the reader to decide for themselves. However, rather than pit these definitions against each other, for the sake of this study I shall focus on magical realism purely in relation to how it may be used within *primal writing*, as a semiotic poetic aspect of writing which subverts and challenges the symbolic order of the text. For indeed, Bowers states that because magical realism:

> …breaks down the distinction between the usually opposing terms of the magical and the realist, magical realism is often considered to be a disruptive narrative mode.[322]

Furthermore, she quotes Zamora and Faris, who describe how '''magical realism is a mode suited to exploring […] and transgressing […] boundaries'''[323]. So, from this perspective, magical realism can clearly be used as an effective, experimental and challenging aspect of *primal writing*, which, when linked to themes of nature, can be instrumental in 'transgressing' the boundaries between the human and the non-human. This 'experimental' transgression delivers a jolt to the imagination that connects to the pseudo-presence of any non-human object being portrayed. For

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[318] Bowers, M.A. *Magic(al) Realism*, (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[319] Ibid., p.66.
[320] Ibid., p.21.
[321] Ibid., p.3.
[322] Ibid., p.4.
[323] Ibid.

instance, when *Secret Heart's* protagonist, Joe, puts on the tiger skin and performs the 'tiger dance', Almond gives the reader access to a non-human perspective, which transgresses the boundaries between the human and the non-human, thus creating a greater equality between them within the hierarchy of discourse:

> He felt the skin draped over his own skin… He felt fur breaking through his skin. He felt heavy paws and lethal claws. He felt the power of his muscles, his bones. His breathing deepened, sighed from deep new lungs. He felt the heart, his tiger heart, drumming in his chest. He heard the roar that echoed from his throat. He clawed the air. He bared his massive fangs. Memories rushed through his blood, his bones, his flesh, his brain: he ran through hot grassland, with antelope running before him and other tigers running alongside him; he prowled the shadows of forests. Beneath the pelt, beneath that curious tent of skin and striped fur, Joe Maloney danced a tiger dance, was transformed by tigerness, became a tiger.[324]

In effect, this transgression of boundaries is a form of vicarious re-embodiment within the imagination, during which the reader is challenged to shape-shift their perspective, travelling vicariously within Joe's human character as he shape-shifts to take on the non-human 'tigerness' of the animal character. While the ethical issue of using the skin of an endangered species isn't addressed by Almond, this portrayal of Joe's transformation is one of empowerment. This aspect of shapeshifting is common to 'Native American mythology'[325] and other indigenous cultures, as Bowers points out:

> [The] belief in man's ability to change shape at will and take on the shape of an animal […] is a recognised aspect of Caribbean mythology […] and is a trace of West African culture retained by the slave population.[326]

Both these cultures arguably existed more harmoniously with nature than present Westernised society. So, there is also perhaps a cultural aspect to the poetic jolt caused by employing a shape-shifting representation / technique more familiar to the myths of other, less industrialised cultures, within a relatively urban setting of a work of modern Western fiction.

Almond also seems to use magical realism as an invitation for the reader to embody a perspective which is perhaps more closely connected to nature through imaginative exploration and the pseudo-presence of childhood play. This is seen when Joe and 'Corinna Finch', the circus acrobat, are accompanied by the 'tiger' during a midnight walk in the forest:

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[324] Almond, op. cit., *Secret Heart*, Kindle Loc. 1307-1314.

[325] Bowers*, op. cit., Magic(al) Realism*, p59.

[326] Ibid., p.91.

> Corinna gasped. She stroked the tiger…
>
> It prowled. It went no closer to the sleeping bodies. It traced circle after circle after circle with the sleeping bodies, the fire and the panther head at the centre. More creatures took wing from the crags above. Shadows shifted at the edges of the glade. The tiger prowled, prowled, its great tail held out behind, its head held high… The creatures in the sky spiralled downward. Already several were silhouetted in the treetops. Animals stepped out from the forest, half-seen, half-understood things, things half in and half out of the deep darkness: beasts with four legs but with heads that seemed human; beasts that stood erect but with broad horns growing from them; small silvery beasts with single horns; great shaggy beasts as tall as young trees; small shy beasts as short as grass.[327]

It seems that Corinna can interact physically with the tiger, stroking it, which is not realistic. Similarly, there are unrealistic 'beasts with four legs but with heads that seemed human'. The suggestion here is that whilst playing and pretending the characters are simultaneously calling something magical into existence and connecting with nature through this imaginative exploration. Therefore, this depiction allows the reader to vicariously connect to the non-human through the pseudo-presence and memory of their own childhood play. In relation to imaginative exploration, Bowers argues that:

> Magical realism provides a perfect means for children to explore the world through their imaginations without losing a connection to what they recognise as the 'real world'.[328]

This statement reveals the potential for exploiting the connection between the 'real world' and the imagined pseudo-presence of representations of pretending and playing in nature, within children's fiction. Indeed, the gestural, phenomenological aspects of that 'real world' are inescapable in their influence upon the imagination. Obviously, for a younger reader, the connection with exploration and play would be more accessible than it would be for older readers of adolescent, YA, or crossover-fiction, but the principle remains the same. I suggest that regardless of the age of the reader, simultaneously tapping into both the pseudo-presence of the non-human and the pseudo-presence of childhood experiences of pretending and playing in nature, could prove very effective in creating stronger connections with the wild object being represented. This technique could, therefore, increase scope for producing more empowering representations of nature.

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[327] Almond, op. cit., *Secret Heart*, Kindle Loc. 1377-1388.

[328] Bowers*,* op. cit., *Magic(al) Realism*, p.104.

These examples from some of the work of David Almond, have identified how the 'gestural' energy of the non-human world can be understood through the expression of semiotic and poetic language, and techniques that disrupt the symbolic order of language and theme. I have demonstrated how Kristevan literary perspective in conjunction with Merleau-Pontian concepts can operate as part of an ecocritical tool that utilises the powerful phenomenological influence of the non-human world within language, in order to create more empowering representations of nature. In the next Chapter I will draw upon examples from my own creative research to demonstrate how, using these same concepts, it is possible to use primal writing techniques as part of a writing palette, in YA fiction.

Chapter 3:   Readjusting the Narrative Focus: Primal Writing as part of a Creative Palette.

Introduction.

Written in the light of my exploration of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological and Julia Kristeva's semiotic theories of language, this Chapter continues with my findings that connect the 'gestural' origins of language to a bodily experience of reading. As a commentary on my creative research, it details how I have put my critical findings and primal writing techniques into creative practice. Taking the form of a YA novel, the project seeks to address the imbalance in the 'narrative focus' between human characterisations and non-human *biospheric* representations, so that voices and forces of nature can be seen to exist with greater equality alongside, and to interact with, the human characterisations within the narrative.

I have previously referred to Dominic Head's reaffirmation of Lawrence Buell's statement that it is necessary for literature to 'abandon… its most basic foci of: character, persona [and] narrative focus'[329] in order for nature to become more than a 'backdrop'[330] for human characterisations. However, it is my contention that literature in general, and children's and YA fiction in particular, actually offers a perfect platform from which to demonstrate what Buell refers to as an 'interdependence of the human and non-human'[331]. For, if we substitute Buell's directive to 'abandon' the idea of 'narrative focus' with a concept of *readjusting* it, then bringing nature into the foreground of narrative becomes more feasible. For nature to be more equally represented in literature, a readjustment is required to the lenses of both the writer's and reader's imaginations. This process involves refocusing the narrative depth of field, zooming in on non-human (natural, not mechanical) elements that may simply have been viewed as a part of the scenery against which human activity unfolds. Instead of being subordinate within an anthropocentric hierarchy of discourse, the biosphere can be actively presented as an interdependent, vital entity. This might be achieved by including and promoting non-human representations with a more equal status alongside human characters and personas in a way that demonstrates the considerable influence of nature upon their lives. By shifting the animated presence of non-human nature towards the foreground within the hierarchy of discourse, natural

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[329] Kerridge & Sammells, op. cit., *Writing The Environment*, (1998). p.33.
[330] Ibid., p.32.
[331] Ibid., p.33.

representations are less likely to be regarded as subordinate to human character interactions and anthropocentric plot-lines. In this way, what might have been a mere 'backdrop' can become more clearly perceived with greater equality and value.

Of course, any attempt to foreground representations of non-human nature in literature must involve an adjustment to an anthropocentric hierarchy of discourse that favours human characterisations over depictions of natural environments and entities. This foregrounding can be accentuated by building a structure of thematic tropes that challenge perceptions of nature as a passive commodity that is subordinate to humanity. These themes can be further developed by using challenging techniques and linguistic devices that portray natural voices more directly and by drawing upon the 'gestural' origins of language described by Merleau-Ponty. These origins are born of a phenomenological and transactional relationship of 'reciprocity' between humanity and its carnal, natural environment.

As outlined in Chapters One and Two, I am building on my argument that the 'gestural' origins of language are often displayed within what Julia Kristeva terms the 'semiotic' or the 'poetic voice', and that by using appropriate aspects of the 'semiotic' to challenge 'the symbolic order of language', the writer can harness the 'reciprocity' between the human and the non-human by tapping into what Merleau-Ponty has termed the 'pseudo-presence' of the natural objects being represented. In this way, semiotic representations of the non-human can achieve an expression of the 'pseudo-presence' and 'gestural' energy of the non-human world within the text, as the poetic / semiotic voice is capable of jolting the reader's imagination into a reconnection with their own innate sense of essential wildness. As I have previously mentioned, writing which taps into this processing of 'gestural' 'affective meaning' and 'primordial intercorporeality' within the 'pre-thetic' space of the *choratic nexus*, has led me to describe this aspect as a form of *primal writing*.

This process of reconnecting the reader with their own natural wildness via the reciprocal origins of language holds massive potential for the writer attempting to move away from an anthropocentric narrative and shift towards a more biocentric position within the hierarchy of discourse. Indeed, *primal writing* opens up great possibilities for fiction to create a greater vicarious empathy and affinity for nature within the world itself. By encouraging readers to become more aware of humanity as another element of the biosphere, and not separate or superior to it, it is my hope that this return to a reciprocal relationship with nature, via language, can be beneficial from an eco-political perspective.

In respect of using the more challenging elements of narrative, my critical and practice-based research has taken place within the medium of children's fiction, adolescent fiction, and the YA novel. These are genres which lend themselves to the use of experimental techniques. In fact, it is partly this aspect of challenge that encourages a process of empowerment within the

reader as a child, adolescent or YA 'subject', helping to empower this 'subject' to become what Paul Smith describes as a better 'agent of a certain discernment'[332], via the reading process. While there isn't scope within this thesis to discuss subjectivity and agency at length, Robyn McCallum provides a succinct description:

> In Discerning the Subject (1988) Smith makes the following distinctions. The subject is to be understood as a conglomeration of provisional subject positions "into which a person is called momentarily by the discourses and world s/he inhabits" (p. xxxv). A person is not, however, "simply determined or dominated by the ideological pressures of any overarching discourse or ideology, but is also the agent of a certain discernment" (p. xxxiv). Agency, then, refers to "the place from which resistance to the ideological is produced and played out" (p. xxxv).[333]

She continues:

> …subjectivity is an individual's sense of a personal identity as a subject— in the sense of being subject to some measure of external coercion— and as an agent— that is, being capable of conscious and deliberate thought and action. And this identity is formed in dialogue with the social discourses, practices and ideologies constituting the culture which an individual inhabits.[334]

So, it can be seen that by increasing an individual's sense of agency, he or she is better able to consider their own subjectivity in relation to existence, and crucially, their relationship to 'social discourses' and narratives in both literature and society. This is a major consideration if writing with an eco-political aim; as fiction for younger readers provides an ideal platform for encouraging its audience to consider their relationship to narrative in literature. By extension, from an eco-political perspective, it also seems possible to stimulate the 'subject' to question his or her own relationship to society and nature, and society's relationship to nature, by challenging an anthropocentrically weighted literary model. Furthermore, fiction for younger readers has long been recognised as a playful form with much potential for an experimental narrative. There is also good evidence to suggest that challenging texts that are aimed at younger readers should not exclude an older readership and can, in fact, cross markets and genres. Indeed, the concept of a 'Crossover Novel'[335] which also appeals to adults is one explored by Rachel Falconer, who states that:

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[332] McCallum, R. *Ideologies in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity,* (London: Garland, 1999), p.4.

[333] Ibid., p.4.

[334] McCallum, R. *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*, (London: GBR: Routledge, 1999. ProQuest ebrary). Web. Accessed 31.07.15. p.4.

[335] Falconer, R. *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership,* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

> In Bakhtinian terms, we might see crossover fiction emerging as a new genre as a response to a particular moment of crisis and change.[336]

So, from this perspective it seems that my own experimental 'Crossover Novel' and the broad spectrum of narratives for younger readers, are a form well-suited to exploring the current 'particular moment' of environmental 'crisis and change'.

Indeed, some attempts have already been made to explore the effects of nature and the environment on human identity, and similarly related eco-political issues. Since the 1970s, these themes have been approached indirectly in children's fantasy texts such as *Watership Down* [337], which incorporated an original and challenging rabbit's-eye perspective (albeit hampered by a largely anthropomorphic narrative), and perhaps more directly but less experimentally by Melvin Burgess in *The Cry of the Wolf* [338] and *Kite* [339], although *The Cry of the Wolf* does offer some imaginative animal characterisations and attempted narrative insights into the wolves' point of view. However, as demonstrated in my previous chapters, author David Almond can be seen to utilise complex narrative techniques and semiotic *primal writing*, to both directly and indirectly explore alternative representations and themes of nature in children's and YA novels. As I have shown, *Secret Heart*, and most notably *The Tale of the Monster Billy Dean*, are two texts that combine elements of magic realism and semiotic language to *refocus* the narrative lens and bring nature to the foreground in the hierarchy of discourse.

The findings of my previous critical examination of Merleau-Ponty and Kristeva's approaches to language have been central to my creative exploration of the most effective techniques for portraying a greater equality between humanity and nature. This chapter will explore my own writing processes. It will demonstrate how I incorporated my personal phenomenological response to nature, and also detail my use of *primal writing* techniques that aim to foreground the non-human within the narrative. I will demonstrate how they can be used to correspond to, and interweave with, thematic tropes that question human attitudes to nature. During the novel, my protagonist's perspective is altered through his exposure to a more natural as opposed to an urban environment, and his point of view reflects a progression from a blindness / dyslexia to nature, through a gradual awakening to nature. From this position, he develops an ability to see / read nature and a reciprocal communication with nature.

Within this chapter, I will discuss the progressive themes and stylistics that reinforce the protagonist's evolving point of view, along with details of corresponding manipulations of the

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[336] Falconer, op.cit., p.3.

[337] Adams, R. *Watership Down,* (London: Rex Collings Ltd, 1972).

[338] Burgess, M. *The Cry of the Wolf*, (Essex: Anderson Press, 1990).

[339] Burgess, M. *Kite*, (Essex: Anderson Press, 1997).

hierarchy of discourse intended to foreground nature within the narrative. On its course to a more a reciprocal communication with nature, the narrative incorporates disempowering representations of nature in order to demonstrate the shift in the protagonist's transitional perspective; i.e. from anthropomorphic to reverse-anthropomorphic, and from anthropocentric to biocentric, until a greater balance between human and non-human representations is achieved within the hierarchy of discourse.

3.1   From Blindness and Dyslexia, moving towards an Awakening to Nature.

In order to demonstrate a shift from a disempowering anthropocentric representation of nature to a more empowering perspective, it seemed appropriate to create a narrative that embodied a transitional and gradually evolving attitude of 'awakening' to, and interacting positively with nature, in at least one major human character's point of view. To contrast and interact with this major voice, there would also need to be other non-human perspectives surrounding it, and these individual natural voices (to be addressed in greater detail in due course) would initially be perceived to be of a seemingly lesser status within the hierarchy of discourse, due to the comparatively small number of words used in their portrayal. However, these non-human perspectives would be presented in a far more radical and dynamic *primal writing* style that would accumulatively influence the tone of the main human narrator's discourse. This change in tone would coincide with his developing awareness of nature, throughout the course of the story. It is my intention that the human protagonist's discourse would take on elements of the grammatical and stylistic qualities used to portray the natural voices of lesser status, as his perception of nature changed. This bleeding of the more radical *primal writing* qualities from the representations of nature into the more conventional human narrative is intended to suggest the external influence and transformative effects of nature upon the main narrator, and therefore reinforce the theme of 'awakening' to nature, in a process stimulated through his reciprocal interaction with it.

I decided to choose a male protagonist because of the autobiographical elements I was using in the text. I named the character Stewie and decided to write in the first-person past tense, in order to give the reader greater insight into the tumultuous process of his transitional attitude towards nature from an internal perspective. Concerning his back-story, I felt the narrative should be told from the perspective of a character with an urban background; one whose previously limited experience of nature had caused him to view it as something subordinate, something he was blind to as a living entity, and something with which he had previously had no conscious sense of reciprocity; no communication towards, or from. The best way I thought I could communicate this 'blindness to nature', as though the natural world was something invisible to him, something that just existed as a backdrop to his life, was through the use of a metaphor. The notion of being in a state of 'blindness to nature', of not being able to see or feel its movement or presence, or register or understand the natural signs of swaying trees, to not even be aware of hearing the elemental sounds of water or wind, or animal calls and voices with which nature constantly communicates its existence, made me think of a similarity between this and the state

of non-receptivity to meaning in dyslexia. Dyslexia is a form of blindness to language, and indeed, was known as 'word blindness' during the 1970's, when my story is set. I decided that my character, Stewie, would suffer from a dyslexia to both human and natural language, but would gradually learn to recognise meaning in the language of nature better than he could ever read human words, and that this example would metaphorically demonstrate his symbolic shift away from Western society's blindness to nature towards an understanding of the voices and languages of the non-human.

Embedding Stewie's blindness to nature within his narrative required me to provide an early example in which he specifically demonstrates a negative or anthropocentric attitude towards it, suggested through the way he describes his surroundings. As the first chapter is written in a flash-forward to a future event, *after* Stewie has been awakened to nature, the second chapter, 'The Rain of Leòdhas', provided the first opportunity to establish his attitude towards what he perceives as an alienating non-urban environment, when he lands on the Isle of Harris:

> It was tipping it down when I landed on the Isle of Harris… (Page 7 to)
> … rocks that formed the harbour wall. (Page 7).

To portray Stewie's reaction negatively required me to imbue his narrative with a downbeat tone, so I peppered his description of the Rodel Quayside with subdued adjectives: 'grey… ashen… drab… dingy… dim… leaden' and 'granite'. At this early stage in the narrative Stewie's perspective is anthropocentric, symbolised by the only bright colour existing in his description being that of a human form; the 'yellow oil-skinned figure' of his grandad. Similarly, my narrator can only perceive animal life anthropocentrically, so I employed a simile to demonstrate this attitude through his description of a 'mass of gulls… billowing up into the dingy air - like white litter and old ragged newspapers'. He cannot acknowledge them as living things. They are of no more significance to him than the waste and debris he's accustomed to seeing blown across the city streets of his urban London home.

In order to further establish Stewie's anthropocentric attitude in the earlier stages of the narrative, it was necessary to provide concrete examples of his interaction with, and reaction to both his environment and other non-human animal life. When Stewie first arrives at his grandad's croft, I make it clear in his narrative that he was 'not into this nature stuff'. He specifically states in regards to his own artwork, that:

> I ain't interested in landscapes. I like doing machines – motorbike wrecks and
> smashed up cars, or people's faces and hands. (Page 17).

But when he actually views the hills that surround the croft he is moved to try and describe their

beauty. However, he can only do this in anthropomorphic terms, by referencing the colours he sees in relation to their human oil paint equivalents:

> I rubbed my knuckles into my face… (Page 18 to)
> It blinded me.
> Too big.
> Too bright. (Page 18).

This excerpt demonstrates how Stewie's ability to describe his wonder at the natural scenery around him is constrained by his anthropocentric attitude, and also shows that, while he is beginning to respond to and describe his non-human, non-urban surroundings in his own words; 'a thousand muted browns, dark ambers, and deep, raw reds', he is still constrained by, and only able to relate to, what he sees through the human artistic medium of Rowney oil paints; 'raw – Raw Sienna, Venetian Red'. Stewie is only able to connect with his environment by applying human attributes to it, and this removes him from a more direct contact with and understanding of the natural thing itself. I pursue this theme of art as a constraining medium when, on the first journey to Dr MacKenzie's house, Stewie is so moved by the beautiful colours of the sea that at first he can only describe the numbers from the Rowney Oil Paint Chart:

> But, wow! The colours! The blinding colours! I nearly blundered off the track.
> Pure 299. Pure 123. 112. 382. 338. French Ultramarine, Coeruleum Hue, Viridian, Viridian, Emerald Green Hue. (Page 26).

There is some progression in his reaction to the non-human, when later, he starts to connect more directly with his environment:

> All the air and cloud and rock… (Page 53 to)
> … the names of colours I'd learnt so far. (Page 53).

In this connection with nature, not only has Stewie 'forgotten the numbers' of the oil paints, but he is touched and influenced by the light itself, his face is 'melting' under its touch, and his ability to see the colour of nature has 'changed… beyond the names of colours… learnt so far.' Through experiencing this vivid interaction with nature, Stewie is learning new ways of seeing his environment; it holds attributes that cannot be described in human terms of oil paint reference numbers, thus signifying his recognition, for the first time, of the more-than-human world.

While Stewie's anthropocentric attitude is made clear through the initial descriptions of his environment, which are shown to be limited by human reference points of colour and art, I also needed to create an early example of his more overt anthropomorphic reaction to the animals that feature most symbolically in the narrative. So, when Stewie sees the golden eagles

for the first time he describes them; 'at the back of the shed, standing motionless – still - like two living statues'. In his mind they are 'Harryhausen harpies, come to life in my grandad's shed', which Grandad feeds 'bunny-burgers'. These descriptions suggest that even though he is impressed by their beauty, Stewie's view of the eagles is still constrained by a need to objectify them and reference them in terms of human artistic creations. He describes them as 'statues', and as 'Harryhausen harpies', but most anthropomorphically, as creatures that hold human values; that would eat 'bunny-burgers' as a human would eat a ham-burger. In these early examples from the narrative, Stewie is unable to see nature on its own terms. His view of animals and the environment is veiled by his own urban attitudes and experiences; constrained by a form of blindness and inability to connect with what he encounters on any other than his own human terms.

Having established Stewie's anthropocentric attitude and blindness to nature, I developed the metaphor of 'dyslexia' further, by demonstrating his 'word blindness'. I initially hinted at his condition during the description of his arrival on Harris, when he narrates how he 'wobbled back… towards an unreadable sign - English? Gaelic? - all the same to me'. I continued to reinforce this at the beginning of the sixth chapter; 'the beach at the edge of the world', when Grandad asks Stewie: 'What's the matter with yer? Can't yer read?', and in the same section, when Stewie describes 'spidery, black scratches of words'. As the chapter progressed I displayed the severity of his condition, when he suffers a panic attack during an attempt to read a magazine about 'fly fishing', before making his escape from the situation by running off to the beach, where he is soothed by the sound of the sea. This example cements the deep extent of his 'word blindness' within the narrative, but is also intended to suggest that he can find a sanctuary in nature and that he is just beginning to become aware of its voice. Having researched the symptoms of dyslexia and incorporated them into Stewie's narrative, I introduced an element of discomfort regarding human attitudes towards nature within the subtext of his actions. Stewie runs away from human language towards the solitude of the beach; once there, nature begins to speak to him. The first part of the section begins with the description of his extreme dyslexic reaction which is heightened by semiotic aspects of language that challenge the grammatical order of meaning:

> Big words were spread across the cover… (Page 29 to)
> … so I put the magazine down. (Page 29).

At this point, I began to employ subtle aspects of *primal writing,* using experimental ungrammatical phrasing and punctuation to represent Stewie's dyslexia: 'F… l…y… Fl… y… Fly. F… i…… s… h… Fi… sh i…n…g Fishing'. This, in combination with images of the 'fat smiling men in wax cotton jackets, holding big, dead-eyed glassy fish', serves to jolt the reader's imagination, while

simultaneously making an overt, unsubtle eco-political point about the commodification of the non-human. I also described Stewie's physical reaction to human language: 'words rippled like waves… I was starting to feel like throwing up, again', and this sequence aligns his struggle to read with a negative example of humanity's use of nature as a commodity. In this instance, he describes how: 'I turned the pages and my heart began to beat faster… The letters swam, then grew jagged, and my stomach turned over'. His reaction is brought on by attempting to read and disguise his dyslexia, but his panic and confusion are also displayed as a reaction to the anthropocentric attitudes to nature displayed in the use of the 'fish' as a commodity. Taking these multiple associations further, I implemented an echoing technique to align Stewie's dyslexia to his self-harm, by inserting the word 'Jagged' to describe how 'dyslexia' distorts his view of human words. I had previously used the word to describe the 'jagged wound under the dressing' and the 'jagged lips of the gash', caused by the re-harming of his original wound, as described in chapter two. I continued this echo in the above section in the line: 'The jagged lips of my wound began to whisper again'. In this way, I hoped that human attitudes (human words / language) and self-harm (the result of human attitudes) are linked by one word; jagged. Stewie repeats the word as he flees across the field to escape from human language and attitudes:

> The clot of pain screwed tighter… (Page 30 to)
> … gasping, holding onto knees. (Page 30).

In order to bring more immediacy to the description of the narrator's experience of his physical environment, I transgressed literary conventions by shifting tense between the simple past tense, simple present tense, and present perfect progressive tense, in the phrases: 'Legs pumped. Arms pump. Heart pumping'. This active voice is then contrasted against Stewie's subsequent exhausted tranquillity when he arrives at the beach, and I attempt to convey his relative sense of calm in the following section:

> After a few dizzy minutes… (Page 30 to)
> … and washed and rushed again. (Page 31).

I was able to further enhance this effect, by incorporating *primal writing* techniques that draw upon the onomatopoeic values of words, in order to depict the aural landscape of the beach and link the protagonist / reader experience, further still. The sibilant qualities of 'silver-white sand' and the onomatopoeic values of 'rushing, shifting shoreline', 'fresh', 'washed' and 'rushed', are intended to replicate the soothing sound of the sea, indicate its influence on Stewie's mood, and draw the reader into *his* experience, so they would vicariously 'hear' what he hears. There is an increasingly persuasive argument that onomatopoeia can be used as a *primal writing* technique.

Chapter 3

As David Robson states in the *New Scientist* [340], while it 'seemed clear to [linguists like] Saussure that the sounds of words do not inherently reflect their meanings… recent studies challenge this idea'[341]. He describes how:

> [w]e seem instinctively to link certain sounds with particular sensory perceptions[342]

and how an element of 'sound symbolism'[343], possibly universal to all languages, in which aspects of synaesthesia common to all human brains, 'might automatically link two different sensations'[344]; those being, the shape of an object and the vowels used to describe it, such as '"bouba"'[345] for a 'curvy'[346] object and '"kiki"'[347] for a 'spikey object'[348]. Similarly, he writes that:

> English words that begin with "sn" are often associated with our organ of olfaction: think "snout", "sniff", "snot", "snore", and "snorkel".[349]

Likewise, the Japanese language:

> …contains a large grammatical group called "mimetic" words, which by definition are particularly evocative of sensual experiences. [350]

So, from this perspective, onomatopoeia seems to hold direct connections to the phenomenological, gestural origins of language, described by Merleau-Ponty, and this is cemented by Robson's reference to Gabriella Vilgiocco's statement that:

> "Manual gestures seem like an obvious way [to imitate], but vocal imitation is possible as well, from imitating the shape of an object with the mouth, to imitating the size of an object by adjusting the length of the vocal tract."[351]

So, in this way the positive depiction of the influence of nature upon Stewie's mood is strengthened by the elements of *primal writing* that draw on the gestural onomatopoeic values of

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[340] Robson, D. 'Kiki or Bouba? In search of Language's Missing Link', *NewScientist*, Online Edition, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21128211-600-kiki-or-bouba-in-search-of-languages-missing-link/>. Accessed 14.3.2017.
[341] Ibid., p.31.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Ibid.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid., p.32.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid., p.33.

individual words. These words hold the pseudo-presence of the beach because their origins lie in the reciprocal, gestural relationship between human language and the objects they describe. Because onomatopoeia lies so close to the sound of the thing itself, this kind of language can be said to give a voice to nature and is most effective in the representation of the non-human. For instance, Les Murray's poem 'Pigs'[352], uses onomatopoeia to connect to the presence of the creature, using phrases like 'glutting mush' to represent the sound of the pig feeding, or 'We nosed up good rank in the tunnelled bush', a phrase which uses onomatopoeia in conjunction with a semiotic, poetic attempt to inhabit the pig's non-human perspective ('We nosed up good rank)'. Although this may still only be what Les Murray calls 'a translation' from the original sound and object, this semiotic, human language approximation, or copy, can still bring us closer, almost within hearing or touching distance, to the essence of the natural thing itself. While it must be acknowledged that the use of onomatopoeia on its own is not uncommon in descriptive portrayals of nature, it is when it used in conjunction with other aspects of *primal writing* that it becomes more effective. Flooding the narrative with phonetic language that delivers a poetic / semiotic jolt enables the writer to draw on the power of 'affective meaning' and connect more closely to the pseudo-presence of the non-human. The accumulative use of these combined techniques begins to shape an inescapably direct and empowering representation of nature.

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[352] Murray, L. *Translations from the Natural World*, (Carcanet, Kindle Edition, 2012-07-27). Kindle Loc. 587-597.

3.2 From an Awakening, towards a reading of Nature.

Synchronised alongside the natural voices within the metaphor of learning to read nature, I also portray Stewie's ability to learn new, more positive attitudes regarding bereavement and self-harm. This theme operates in conjunction with a clearly vocalised and externally demonstrated concern for the animal life and environment of the Scottish Islands, where the story is set. During the course of the narrative, Stewie moves from being paralysed by fear of death and post-bereavement anger, towards a more accepting perception of death as a natural cyclic event. This theme is demonstrated by Stewie's rejection of self-harm and suicide following the death of 'Grandad', near the end of the novel, in the chapter 'Somersault':

> *Scratch… scratch… Scratch… scratch… Scratch… scratch…* (Page 335 to)
> ... soaring, circling above the stone-bone Cairn. (Page 335).

The story has travelled in a complete loop since the flash-forward of Grandad being seriously ill, at the beginning of the story. Stewie's acceptance of the life / death cycle, is shown by his rejection of suicide and self-harm, symbolised by throwing away the knife: 'I fling the knife away and run run run', and the positive description of: 'I'm feather-flying - eagle-soaring', as he runs and falls. The sense of Stewie choosing life is reinforced by the *semiotic* jolt within compound words, and the motif of the life / death cycle is doubly reinforced; first, by the statement that: 'My heart just won't stop beating, not beside the dead, or the living-dead', and secondly by the image of: 'not one, but three golden eagles - soaring, circling above the stone-bone Cairn'. The symbolism is one of reincarnation; that Grandad is the extra eagle in addition to the pair that has been released, and that life is somehow continuous, 'soaring… above the stone-bone Cairn', which symbolises death, and that Stewie will also soar like an eagle when his time comes. In terms of *primal writing* techniques, the whole section carries a vivid semiotic jolt that challenges the reader. From the incessant threat of self-harm in the potential '*Scratch… scratch… Scratch…*' of the knife, to the pseudo-presence of the 'bright blue bay' and imagery of 'wind-whispers through heather-fingers', the tone is that of a frantic emotional rush down the hillside. To achieve this impression I linked a technique of textual-overload, bombarding the reader with the *jouissance* contained within a semiotic barrage of sensual touch, smell, sound and visual images. This overload is structured within a sequence of long sentences with unusual punctuation (dashes and continuation marks) that are intended to increase the pace of the narrative and challenge the symbolic order of language. In this way, the theme of natural cyclic death is synchronised with *primal writing* techniques that connect to the immediacy of Stewie's interaction with the non-human environment and the pseudo-presence of nature.

Stewie's transition towards this understanding of death is also portrayed throughout the course of the novel by his gradual acceptance of an ability to hear the voice of his dead mother among other *living* voices of nature. Inserted at the very beginning of the narrative, is a one-page section of narrative written in a radically poetic / semiotic 'stream of consciousness'[353]. This is another natural voice, seemingly minor within the overall hierarchy of discourse in comparison to that of the human characters in the following first chapter, but this 'voice of the dead', which contributes to the patchwork of other natural voices, is intended to accumulatively influence the tone of the narrative. The ghostly voice of the dead mother is intended to convey a sense of otherness; of someone or something '*reaching out'* and attempting to communicate with her son across the natural and inevitable divide between life and death. In crossing this divide, the voice of the 'once-human' is also intended to act as a kind of translator / interpreter between nature and humanity; the ghost voice is symbolic of an entity that guides Stewie away from his metaphoric dyslexia towards a reading and greater comprehension of nature. On some occasions, she is seen to address him during dreams; operating through his subconscious, but at other times in the narrative, her voice seems to reach out directly to the reader, blurring the boundaries between what Stewie experiences as a dream, and what the reader simply experiences as a voice within his or her own head. In this way, the ghost voice is symbolic of bridging divides between life and death, humanity and nature, and narrative and reader. This is the case at the very start of the novel. At this point, it is not even clear who Stewie is, which further blurs the distinction between reader and narrator. However, I chose to write the ghost voice in the form of 'concrete', 'pattern' or 'shape poetry', using the typographical arrangement to form the shape of a tree in order to link the mother's ghost voice to the theme of the *Ghosts of Trees*, which feature as a myth throughout the novel: (See 'shape poetry' on page 1). This voice reaching out to the reader across narrative boundaries is meant to echo the way memories of the dead reach out to cross the boundary of death. When we remember a dead person we are often visited by the pseudo-presence of their past sensual physicality; their touch, their smell, aspects of their very being, and most crucially in terms of attempting to depict this visiting in literature, the pseudo-presence of their human voice. Although the dead mother is not the dominant narrator in terms of space, because this section is right at the start of the story it signifies her discourse as being of high status within the narrative hierarchy. But at the same time, there is little indication of who is speaking, other than that the words she communicates with contain references and compound word-links to '*trees, lucent branches, earth-root-meat, reef-wood* ', mixing the elements of sea and wood and flesh to create an impression of her state of death being suggestive of that of a human ghost experiencing being '*adrift in an ocean of trees*'. The idea of a dead person being in

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[353] Burroway, J. *Writing Fiction: A guide to Narrative Craft*, (New York: Addison Wesley, 2002), p.209.

'*an ocean of trees*', ties in with Hebridean Sorley Maclean's poem; Hallaig[354]*,* in which he describes humans; the long dead inhabitants of the deserted village, as trees:

> …and my love is at the Burn of Hallaig,
> a birch tree, and she has always been
>
> between Inver and Milk Hollow,
> here and there about Baile-Chuirn:
> she is a birch, a hazel,
> a straight, slender young rowan….
>
> In Screapadal of my people
> where Norman and Big Hector were,
> their daughters and their sons are a wood
> going up beside the stream….
>
> …the dead have been seen alive
>
> The men lying on the green
> at the end of every house that was,
> the girls a wood of birches,
> straight their backs, bent their heads.[355]

Building a connection between ghosts / spirits and living trees in the way that Sorley MacLean has achieved offers exciting possibilities in developing a more stimulating and mysterious narrative tone. This connection can exploit elements of myth, fairy-tale and fantasy literature that contain symbolism and metaphor, but can also operate as a conceptual device which serves to erode the perceived separateness of humans from nature. Particularly over the last decade, and largely as a result of the success of the film adaptations, fantasy literature such as J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* [356] trilogy and C.S Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles*, has become even more popular within the adolescent / YA reading age. As a result of the nature themes in these texts, trees, specifically, have gained a higher profile in being portrayed as powerful entities capable of influencing the direction of human progress, while in some ways still tied to a traditional anthropocentric representation of nature. Nature is visible as a symbol of spiritual strength and freedom through the 'seedling of Nimloth'[357], which grows to become the 'White tree'[358], but this emblem becomes anthropocentric when emblazoned upon human battle shields as the emblem of Gondor. Again,

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[354] Maclean, S. <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/hallaig>. Accessed 23.08.2015.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Tolkien, J.R.R, *The Lord of the Rings*, (London: Collins, 2001).
[357] Tolkien, J.R.R, *The Lord of the Rings, Appendices*, (London: Collins, 2001), p11.
[358] Ibid.

as a metaphorical agent of faith, the 'dancing trees'[359] that lead the way to Aslan (in *Prince Caspian*)[360] are still 'dancing' anthropomorphically 'as if in a complicated country dance'[361], in a manner reminiscent of the Romantic anthropomorphism of the 'Daffodils… Tossing their heads in sprightly dance' in Wordsworth's famous poem[362]. Similarly, the human / tree hybrid characters of 'Treebeard'[363] and the 'Ents'[364], in *The Lord of the Rings*, walk and talk like humans (speaking English), and have 'lost the Entwives'[365], ignoring the biological fact that most trees are monoecious. I wanted the representations of the mythical *Ghosts of Trees* to remain rooted in *primal writing* that connected the reader to the pseudo-presence of trees, such as when Stewie is chased and touched by their apparition:

> Twig-finger branches - grasping-wood-limbs… (Page 305 to)
> … flailing-failing-fall deep into-under earth-sssoil-darknesssss… (Page 306).

I used compound word invention within Stewie's description of 'Twig-finger branches - grasping-wood-limbs', to deliver a semiotic jolt that connects the reader to the pseudo-presence of trees. Then I used an italicised and heavily poetic tone to portray the voice of the trees themselves, increasing that semiotic jolt to carry a greater sense of their otherness: '*clasp our ferned-fingers lick our lichened-lips*'. Then, as Stewie is smothered by the trees his language is seen to take on tree-like qualities, with pronounced sibilance to accentuate that impression: 'root-armsss grow vinesss acrosss my moss-legss'. In this way, I found myself to be walking a fine line between attempting to represent nature more authentically while also increasing the dramatic tone within the narrative. The 'voice' of the trees remains less anthropomorphic because it remains omniscient and addresses the reader. This avoids the anthropocentric characterisation that straightforward dialogue designations (He said, she said, it said, etc.) would inevitably bring. I also feel that the *primal writing* techniques helped in this respect, as the vivid poetic tone and onomatopoeic elements of the tree-related words concentrate the reader's focus on the pseudo-presence of trees, roots etc, more than a clearly defined description would.

Similarly then, with regard to Tolkien's depiction of trees, it should be acknowledged that he also developed relatively tree-like qualities within the characterisation of 'Treebeard' and the 'Ents', which included a unique and onomatopoeic language that took large steps towards creating a more-than-human representation. For instance, parts of the ancient language of

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[359] Lewis, C. S. Prince Caspian, (The Chronicles of Narnia, Book 4) (HarperCollins, Kindle Edition, 2009-05-05), Kindle Loc. 1325.

[360] Ibid.

[361] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 1280.

[362] Abram, M.H. & Greenblatt, S. *Norton Anthology of English Literature,* Volume 2, 7th edition, (London: Norton, 2000), pp284-285.

[363] Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers, Book Three: The Treason of Isengard*, (Collins, London: 2001), p.68.

[364] Ibid., p.73.

[365] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings, Book Three: The Treason of Isengard,* op.cit., p.86.

'Treebeard' can be said to contain *primal writing* techniques in its representation of tree-creatures:

> Merry and Pippin caught no proper words: it sounded like *boom, boom, rumboom, boorar, boom boom, dharar boom boom, dharar boom*, and so on.[366]

Tolkien has clearly attempted to connect the Ent's language to nature by using low phonetic tones that suggest a gestural onomatopoeic connection with roots and wood through the double vowels of '*oo*', and these successfully call upon the pseudo-presence of the objects themselves. Simultaneously, the language provides a semiotic jolt via the use of italics, the element of nonsensical echolalia, word invention, and the lack of decipherable conscious meaning, all of which challenge the grammatical order of the English language spoken by the narrator and Hobbits during this chapter. However, recognisable *primal writing* techniques such as these are very limited in *The Lord of the Rings*, despite the presence of nature featuring heavily within descriptions of landscape throughout the saga.

These examples from fantasy literature demonstrate the difficulties faced in attempting to erode the boundaries between human and non-human characters in a way which does not compromise more authentic representations of nature. In *Pinhead*, I am attempting to avoid an overtly anthropocentric portrayal of trees, and nature, in general, that limits the non-human pseudo-presence with human characteristics or anthropomorphic voices. Within my representation of trees, it seems possible to blur the boundaries between the human / nature divide by focusing on the pseudo-presence of the mythical '*Ghosts of Trees*' within the otherness of non-designated, semiotic, omniscient narrative interjections. It is also made possible through maintaining that Stewie's dead mother speaks as something that was once human and that now resides within 'an ocean of trees'. While the aspects of *primal writing* within her narrative voice portray the otherness of the world she inhabits, she remains *of the trees* without speaking *for* them. These techniques avoid the anthropomorphic trap of putting human words into the mouths of trees, and in this way Stewie's mother exists as a kind of mediator between the human and the non-human characters, while the omniscient voice of the *Ghosts of Trees* functions in a more subliminal way, which avoids links to an anthropocentric characterisation.

As I have previously referenced, in the same way that Stewie's dead mother mediates between the human and the non-human, she also serves to mediate between the living and the dead, and her 'visits' to him during dreams are central to an exploration of the theme regarding his bereavement. In the time following a funeral, the closest contact between living and the dead

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[366] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings, Book Three: The Treason of Isengard*, p.92.

may take place during dreams, and this interaction seemed a most effective way of introducing non-realist and experimental elements into the narrative at an early stage in a form that avoids alienating the reader with too many challenging literary techniques too soon. Since the eighteenth century, novels have incorporated a dream interaction between the living and the dead. The ghost of Catherine Earnshaw inhabits the dream of Mr Lockwood, in *Wuthering Heights* [367] & 'The Ghosts of Christmas Past' visit Ebenezer Scrooge during his dreams, in *A Christmas Carol* [368]. So, this form of event has been made acceptable within the context of a plot, even if that plot mostly contains realist conventions. The acceptable ambiguity surrounding a narrator's dream state overcomes the question regarding if the dreamer is asleep, half-asleep, or awake, and this element empowers the narrative with a sense of otherness. This uncanny aspect allows an author to explore non-realist techniques while still maintaining the authentic illusion of 'reality' that realist techniques provide. I feel that this is particularly true in work that employs an intimate first-person narrative, especially if efforts have been made to establish the authenticity of the narrator's voice, with regards to their emotions and reactions. If the narrator's account of more usual events is believable, then the more unbelievable events will also be accepted by the reader. Because the fantastical qualities of dreams are believable within the context of being unrealistic, using them as a narrative device has allowed me to gradually introduce several challenging themes and *primal writing* techniques that might otherwise alienate the reader. These themes and techniques increasingly jolt and challenge the reader more substantially when portrayals of otherness regarding both the dead and the non-human cross-over into Stewie's waking narrative. These include the aforementioned bereavement and Stewie's fear of death, the life / death cycle of trees and nature within dreams, and, the beginnings of Stewie's awakening relationship with nature.

The element of Stewie's relationship with nature is fed through his growing attraction to Lorna, and the ways in which his sexual awakening is inseparably linked to a later and greater reciprocity with nature. Firstly, though, in the section entitled 'bed storm', I was able to introduce elements of unreality within the framework of a dream, making this quite clear in the opening phrase:

> I fell into my usual dream… (Page 13 to)
> … falling away in a blizzard of leaves, her mouth moving, silent. (Page 13).

This is the first of Stewie's dreams in the narrative and it provides the first opportunity to suggest links between his sense of loss and fear of death, survivor's guilt and self-harm, in the hope that the reader will make these connections for him or herself. The reader's own fears may be kindled

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[367] Brontë, E. *Wuthering Heights,* (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847).
[368] Dickens, C. *A Christmas Carol,* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1843).

by the image of the 'yellow, death-coloured' patient in the 'cancer ward'. Similarly, the gentle introduction of foundations for more experimental and challenging *primal writing* that connect with themes of trees and cyclic life and death is begun through ghostly images of Stewie's dead mother 'walking silently towards me through a forest of dark shadowed trees', and 'she turns from me - falling away in a blizzard of leaves, her mouth moving, but silent'. However, more challenging for the reader at this point is the introduction of a voice of nature that calls directly upon Les Murray's concept of poetry that acts as a 'translation' of what it describes. I have attempted to transpose this technique from poetry to a prose form by introducing a third perspective that, like Stewie's mother's, is independent of his narrative. Also narrated in the first-person, it is a radically poetic voice that challenges Stewie's status within the hierarchy of discourse. Suddenly, and in contrast to the gentle and mysterious voice of the dead mother, there is now a non-human perspective for the reader to inhabit:

> *Coit do'n buin sibh?*
> *Shell down, boy. Shell down. Sheer are We… Soon enough us flukes'll tear us red*
> *flesh and marrow. We'll rip this shack, sail back on voice of air - back to the High -*
> *to singing crags. We shun beLow. Watch your fingers, boy! Follow close the fame*
> *of your fathers. Watch for ghosts of trees! Coit do'n buin sibh?*
> *Sheer are We…*
> > *Now, shell down, boy. Shell down.*
> > > *Shell down…*
> > > > *shell down.*[369]

This voice, belonging to '*The Sheer'*, is inspired by techniques encountered in Les Murray's poem *Eagle Pair* [370]*,* and like his poem, attempts to capture what he terms the 'presence' of eagles within its 'translation' of their perspective; to 'shift our focus away from habitual and human-centred notions … to surprise the reader into new perceptions'[371]. While phrases such as '*Shell down'* and *'the High'* (developed from Murray's 'Up'[372]) and the internal first-person plural (or perhaps, 'first animal') perspective of '*We',* are directly inspired by Murray's poem*,* I further developed my prose 'translation' by portraying a voice of nature as an interactive perspective. While Murray's *Eagle Pair* displays a translated presence of the bird's perspective, it contains a detached narrative tone in which the birds appear oblivious to human observation. In contrast, I wanted to suggest through the eagle voice of '*The Sheer*' that nature is continually directing communication towards humans, but that humans are largely oblivious to it. So, for the sake of

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[369] Pinhead, page 13.

[370] Murray, L. *Translations from the Natural World,* (Carcanet, Kindle Edition, 2012-07-27). Kindle Loc. 300.

[371] Dunkerley, op. cit., 'Unnatural Relations?', pp.11-12.

[372] Murray, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 300.

the plot, my eagles are able to communicate with Stewie in an assertive tone that he cannot ignore. He is a human who becomes increasingly open to understanding their non-human language, but initially, and so as not to completely alienate the reader, the communications from *The Sheer* are largely made in an English language that is heavily laden with the pseudo-presence of the eagles. While this process approaches anthropomorphism in its initial introduction, the eagle voice develops and becomes less anthropomorphic during the course of the narrative. However, the balance between more authentically representing this animal presence / pseudo-presence and possibly alienating the reader with too radical a prose style so early in the narrative was difficult to judge. Eventually, I decided that even at this early stage, the voice of *The Sheer* should include enough challenging features to intrigue the reader and that this demanded the subversion of literary conventions in order to imbue their characterisation with a strong sense of otherness.

Immediately, and as with the narrative of Stewie's mother, the use of italics acts as a visual signifier that another voice has entered the narrative, but the aggressive tone of this voice: '*Shell down, boy…. We'll rip this shack… watch your fingers, boy!* ', differs from the gentler and more ethereal tone of her voice: '*Stewie can you feel me now I am salt-air-breath now I am I am rain-milk-sap* '. In this way, linking the two voices via the simple use of an altered font, reinforces the sense of 'otherness' previously associated with her voice, while the more aggressive tone effectively avoids any confusion between the two. Similarly, the untranslated Gaelic phrase: '*Coit do'n buin sibh?* ', challenges the literary convention already established by my predominant use of the English language in the novel to this point. This phrase echoes Grandad's greeting to Stewie, on his arrival, and suggests that this new voice also belongs to an islander, while cementing a connection to Grandad's character (a connection that develops via reverse anthropomorphism towards the denouement of the story). In this way, the meaning of the Gaelic language remains hidden to the narrator and sustains the sense of 'otherness', further intriguing a reader who is probably unfamiliar with Gaelic and posing the question; what do these words mean? The reader must wait, for the meaning ('Where do you belong to?') is withheld until the end of the narrative.

However, in order to do more than simply develop Murray's previous techniques in 'translating' from a non-human animal voice, I had to undergo prolonged attempts at experimentation and had to engage more closely with my own senses, alongside my imagination. Through my own personal experience of a process of reciprocity with a non-human subject, I found that opening myself up to a more phenomenological approach was crucial in making a more authentic and accurate 'translation' of the non-human pseudo-presence. For instance, when I initially wrote the opening section of the novel, I used the word '*Twee-ooh!*' to describe the call

of a golden eagle:

> *Twee-ooh!* I can hear the eagles calling overhead, circling above us on the mountainside. *Twee-ooh!* Their wings can't sweep away this fog that drifts, surrounds us here, on An Cliseam.

Initially, keen to be as authentic as possible in translating a voice from nature I had researched the birds call using an RSPB encyclopaedia[373], which described it as; '*twee-oo* '[374]. Never having actually seen or heard a golden eagle at this point, I took this description as verbatim. I added a letter 'h' and an exclamation mark to the end of the word, to create more resonance and impact to the sound: '*Twee-ooh!*'. Interestingly though, after field trips to the Zirbitzkogel peak, Steiermark, in the alpine area of Austria, and also on my second field trip to Raasay, wild camping in the Scottish Highlands, I discovered that the RSPB description of '*twee-oo*', actually sounded nothing like the eagles that I heard. The birds I encountered were some distance away, but I was able to make an approximation of what I heard, in note form; '*Tsiww* '. Then later, working with an mp3 sound-file from the British Library[375], I tried to 'translate' these particular eagle calls into written English language. In doing so, I was not only attempting to approximate what Les Murray referred to as the 'presence' of the sound of the call into a poetic impression that involved inhabiting an animal perspective; in creating new written human words, I somehow had to capture the phenomenological impact that the sound had on me and what it called back from me in a process of 'reciprocity' with the eagle itself; when I'd seen and heard it, both in the flesh, and on the sound file. I tried to capture what Merleau-Ponty terms the 'pseudo-presence' of the eagle within this new word, using new spelling to shape the impact of the sound, whether it is read silently, or aloud.

When listening to the British Library sound-file, I found that I also drew on experiences of listening to blackbird song on my first field-trip to Harris, in which I had observed subtle changes in emphasis and stress in the repeated phrases of blackbird songs, as the birds called and answered each other across the loch at Lickisto. I observed similar subtle changes in the phrases of the eagle call sequence. Listening in the dark, I recorded the reactions that I 'felt', as well as heard, in the bird's calls, and was struck particularly by the subtle variations in each utterance. These demanded that equally subtle changes should be made in the written recording of the translation. The words I shaped to represent the call underwent several changes before I settled on: '*Tsil! Tsill! Tschil! Toh-tschil! Toh-tschil! Toh-tSchil!* ', as the opening phrase of the eagle voice. These results, using my own physical and reciprocal reaction to the sound in combination with

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[373] Hume, R. *Complete Birds of Britain and Europe*, (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2010).

[374] Ibid., p.126.

[375] <http://sounds.bl.uk/Environment/British-wildlife-recordings/022M-W1CDR0001387-0600V0>. Accessed 23.07.2015.

word invention, demonstrate a huge difference to the original version of '*twee-oo*'; the RSPB's approximation. Using the phenomenological approach of *primal writing* in this way responds to the gestural element in the bird's call and taps into the reciprocal relationship between myself and the non-human object. By necessity, the replication of the gestural element demands a departure from the grammatical order of language and requires the use of semiotic word invention to better represent the pseudo-presence of the eagle itself. In this instance, the translation of the bird's call replication delivers a literal phonic jolt to challenge the reader's imagination.

The point of using a phenomenological method such as this to 'translate' a non-human voice, is that it can change the way in which the reader listens to non-human sounds. By incorporating both semiotic Gaelic phrases and phenomenologically translated eagle phrases into the voice of the Sheer, I am suggesting, by means of a comparison, that in the same way that a human language is unintelligible until it is learned, so a non-human animal language is unintelligible until it is felt. In amidst the semi-anthropomorphic phrases that carry meaning in a more recognisible form, are written approximations of human (Gaelic) and animal utterances, whose meaning is primarily affective. But in the same way that we can recognise affective meaning in a human cheer of celebration, or a wail of despair in any language, so we can also recognise the affective meaning held in the semiotically represented roar or a lion proclaiming its territory, or the semiotically represented scream of a captured eagle in distress.

To return to my previous point about dreams, I would like to discuss how Stewie's relationship with nature is fed through his growing attraction to Lorna, and the ways in which this sexual awakening is inseparably linked to a later and greater reciprocity with nature. To achieve this, I used more extreme elements of *primal writing*, introducing reverse-anthropomorphism in order to simultaneously blur the boundaries between the human and the non-human, while challenging the reader with semiotic language that carries the pseudo-presence of nature. In this dream section, Stewie's awakening to Lorna's sexuality is represented by reverse-anthropomorphic descriptions of her as a non-human dream entity:

> Her body trembles… (Page 131 to)
> … slipping beneath the crashing-surf wall. (Page 131).

Lorna is alternately depicted as many non-human creatures and elements; as ocean: 'the sea of her face', rock: 'pebble-cheeks', bird eggs: 'egg-shell freckles', anthozoans: 'anemone-nipples', air and grass: 'she breathes – it's a breeze of heather, rain-fed grass', tree: 'her beech-bark waist', etc. Compound words were crucial in this respect as they allow a challenging *semiotic fusion* in a combination of the human and the non-human that supplies a jolt to the reader's imagination. Stewie is seen to be fantasising sexually within his dream, focussing on her 'breasts', 'nipples',

'belly-mound', etc. and this sexual human / non-human element is shown to develop Stewie's wildness, as his voice becomes animal, and is described in reverse-anthropomorphic terms: 'I cry to her - croak and bark, shriek, snap and whistle'. In this way, the more experimental elements of *primal writing* blur the boundaries between the human and the non-human, while challenging the reader with semiotic language that contains the pseudo-presence of nature.

3.3   A Reading of Nature, moving towards a Reciprocal Communication.

In order to continue the progression of Stewie's relationship with nature and portray it as a more reciprocal communication, the novel employs techniques that increasingly blur the boundaries between his character and the surrounding terrain, as well as with the animals that he encounters. In some respects, the chapter 'Dùn Caan', in which Stewie encounters the 'wilderness' on the isle of Raasay, is a pivotal point in the narrative because he begins to experience a truly reciprocal relationship with nature. This journey up Dùn Caan is a life changing event for him and is the equivalent of a 'vision quest' during which he undergoes great spiritual change. Saqamaw of the Benoit 1st Nation and Local Lnu'k, Mi'kmaq Chief and activist Jasen Sylvester Benwah describes the vision quest, thus:

> The Vision Quest is common to many Native American nations and is a form of connecting and communicating with the forefathers and ancestors who often serve as teachers or our spiritual guides. Most often our spirit guides will appear in the form of an animal.[376]

The Algonquin National Tribal Council give this explanation:

> [On] reaching puberty, each group member had to isolate himself and go on a vision quest where his name, the name of his protecting spirit and his role in life (to become a hunter, a medicine man, etc.) would be revealed to him.[377]

In Stewie's case, his quest is a dangerous and traumatic experience, in which he undergoes a trial of initiation into the more-than-human world. It is a symbolic event that shifts him towards the beginning of a greater instinctual understanding of himself, other characters, and the natural world of which he is part. This section was largely based on my own vivid experience of climbing Dùn Caan, where I actually experienced a 'white-out', saw an eagle soar by, and a mountain hare speed off down the mountainside. This part of the story is intended to portray Stewie's physical interaction with his environment in such a way as to draw the reader into a powerful sense of the reciprocity between the internal first-person narrative of the human character and the external elements in the representation of nature, before increasingly eroding the separation between them. I wanted to reveal that the presence of nature reaches out to him as much as he to it; that it regards him as he regards it, and that it speaks to him as he does to it. However, while utilising

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[376] <http://www.benoitfirstnation.ca/mikmaw_article26_visionquest.html>. Accessed 23.07.2015.

[377] <http://www.anishinabenation.ca/eng/alg_history_en.htm>. Accessed 23.07.2015.

aspects of primal writing to convey Stewie's reciprocity with the non-human, his narrative perspective also contains certain concepts of 'wilderness' that I highlighted in my references to Cronon's essay, in Chapter One. At times, my descriptions of Stewie's scaling of Dùn Caan are reminiscent of the Romantic poets who found themselves: 'surrounded by crags and waterfalls'[378], felt themselves 'literally to be in the presence of the divine… [and who] experienced an emotion remarkably close to terror'[379]. I wasn't unduly concerned that Romantic elements of the sublime inherent in my own culturally shaped relationship to wilderness may have transferred into the representation of what I experienced, as long as I contrasted these aspects with more challenging, alternate ways of representing the non-human. I cannot escape how I have been culturally positioned to experience 'wilderness', and therefore, accept that aspects of a Romantic perspective of nature creep into the heightened tone of the narrative. So, even when aiming to work from a phenomenological perspective that focussed on the gestural, it was difficult trying to avoid expressing some of the physical wonder, fear and awe that I felt by describing Dùn Caan as a dreadful and magnificent terrain. Indeed, this first excerpt demonstrates how I balanced aspects that draw on elements of the sublime, previously described by Cronon as 'vast, powerful landscapes where one could not help feeling insignificant and being reminded of one's own mortality'[380] alongside smaller details that emphasise a more earthy and sensual intimate connection with nature. I have previously referenced these alternate attitudes in representing 'wilderness' as described by Don McKay, in Chapter One, firstly, as including the 'aeolian harpism'[381] of the Romantic view of nature, and secondly, 'the phenomenal surprise which constitutes the sharpened moments of *haiku* and imagism'[382], as demonstrated in his reference to the element of wilderness in 'shit on the carpet'[383]. I tried to observe these aspects in my own work:

> When I next looked up… (Page 216 to)
> … a slow strong bass-drum-beat. (Page 217).

So, having attempted to relate elements of my own interaction with nature, while avoiding representations that limit perceptions of it to something separate and other, I can still observe a friction between aspects that support this aim and descriptive phrases which perpetuate an anthropocentric bias towards the Romantic sublime. For instance, when the depiction of Dùn Caan presents Stewie's insignificance in the face of the awe and splendour of the mountain: 'I

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[378] Cronon, op. cit., p.5.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid., p.4.
[381] McKay, op. cit., p.17.
[382] Ibid., p.21.
[383] Ibid.

stood as tiny as an ant at the foot of a sheer grim-grey wall - piled-up like a huge pyramid or ancient fortress' the description is anthropocentric in its likening of a natural structure to a human one. However, this bias is juxtaposed by Stewie's denial of his anthropomorphic comparison: 'But, gawping up at Dun Caan, I could feel in my bones that this old mass of rock wasn't made by people.' The tension in Stewie's contradiction is indicative of a transformation in the way he views nature, from a position that makes nature in a human image, to one that shows an awareness of this tendency. Similarly, this shift away from an anthropocentric position is increasingly suggested in his descriptions, which now reveal a closer reciprocity with nature in relation to how he senses the touch of the wind and the texture of the elements of his environment. This is shown through the increasingly poetic nature of his internal idiolect that corresponds with McKay's reference to 'the phenomenal surprise which constitutes the sharpened moments of *haiku* and imagism'. Stewie's earthy sociolect can also be seen to undermine the grandiose elements of the sublime. For instance, in the lines 'Wind whipped and whacked me', and 'My fingers gripped rough grey-tan close - cold-crusted bird-shit-scabs moss-green growths. It was all so old, so bloody old', his senses are shown to respond to nature's presence by expressing its touch and texture with 'sharpened moments' of phonetic reinforcement and sense imagery', which ground the description in earthy phrases, such as 'whacked me' and 'shit-scabs'.

However, while these examples can be seen to show an increasing sense of Stewie's interaction with his environment, in order to demonstrate a more complete reciprocity between the human and the non-human, it became necessary to use more experimental techniques, such as magical realism, in order to erode the narrative boundaries between representations of the human and the non-human. The following sections describe this process of reciprocity as a series of temporary transformations, in which Stewie takes on the perspective of the non-human entity he regards. This depiction of the interactive process also incorporates the transformation of the observed non-human entity as it takes on Stewie's perspective:

> But the rock weren't dead… (Page 217 to)
> ... cast its shadow across Loch na Mellich to the North. (Page 218).

Magical realism is a particularly useful technique when attempting to portray the perspective of 'the other', or when depicting a transformation of some sort, as it allows the opportunity to step outside 'the narrative rules' in a way that challenges the reader. As previously observed in Chapter Two: 'magical realism is a mode suited to exploring… and transgressing… boundaries'[384], which contains 'inherent transgressive and subversive qualities'[385]. So, by employing this

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[384] Bowers, op.cit., p.4.
[385] Ibid., p.66.

'subversive' narrative mode in conjunction with vivid 'sharpened moments', as referred to by Don McKay, to describe the non-human, I am delivering a challenging semiotic jolt to the reader that connects to the pseudo-presence of the natural object. Specifically using magical realism in this way enables the writer to transgress the boundaries between the human and the non-human. The short bursts of magical realism destabilise the predominantly realist aspect of the text and make it more possible to shock the reader into an imaginative state that brings them closer to a post-reading reflective understanding of 'the other', and even to an experiencing of a more authentic real-time phenomenological sense of 'otherness', relating directly to the process of reciprocity being described. To achieve this effect, I increased the semiotic aspect of Stewie's internal idiolect to a much higher level, using many compound words in conjunction with Gaelic phrases, in order to challenge the reader's perception of meaning, but in such a way as to suggest a link in meaning between phrases. For instance, placing the Gaelic phrase '*Iolair-shuileach'* above the English phrase 'Eagle-eyed-boy' encourages an association of meaning. In fact, the Gaelic *Iolair-shuileach,* is not meant to be a direct translation of the English phrase, and roughly means 'Eagle-eyed' (See footnote on Gaelic phrases)[386]. Similarly, '*Air aonadh an Iolair',* can roughly be translated as 'a union of / with eagles', and this link between human languages was meant to be symbolic of the forthcoming connection and transformation between human and non-human perspectives. This 'crossover' was achieved by a shift in narrative position from Stewie's first-person, singular point of view, to one of a first *persons* plural perspective, shown by the change in emphasis from 'I', to 'our', in the lines 'I reeled as a bright eye-bolt shot between us', and 'Our sight spanned the air', and again later, to 'we' in the line 'For flickered seconds we soar on the air-currents past Dun Caan.' This transgression of boundaries between human and non-human points of view, joining them through singular and plural perspectives, is then confirmed in Stewie's first-person narrative, when he states 'I stood up and watched myself fly past. We were full of fire', before the human / non-human separation and delineation is re-established in the line 'Then, I reeled and fell over - fell back into Stewie, again', which serves to confirm that the narrative has returned to a less reciprocal position.

I repeated the technique later in the section, but this time used it to suggest a reciprocal transformation between Stewie and the mountain itself:

> Over and over… (Page 219 to)
> … followed her trail towards Hallaigh. (Page 221).

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[386] I will address the issue of authentic and unauthentic Gaelic at the end of this subsection.

On this occasion, I introduced several additional elements to increase the impression of reciprocal exchange between the human and the non-human, by giving the mountain a voice. Working in a form of echoing call and response between Stewie and the mountain, he can be seen to describe what he feels is happening, before the phrase is repeated in bracketed italics from the mountain's perspective. However, the added complexity on this occasion in this symbolic exchange is that when Stewie describes what he feels the mountain is doing to him, the voice of the mountain can also be seen to include Stewie in its description of what it is doing, but to *itself,* which defines mountain and boy as joined rather than separate entities. This can be seen in the lines 'It reached out across the loch. (*I am reaching out across the loch*) And it clamped my feet in rock. (*I am clamping my feet in rock*).' To bring a further sense of immediacy to these 'sharpened moments' of poetic description, I played with the tense in which statements are made, in the lines 'I saw myself from the summit - rooted in rock. (*I did see I see now*)'. Bringing the tense from the past (*I did see*) into the present (*I see now*), challenges the stability of the 'grammatical order' and has the effect of shocking the reader into a more direct, real-time imaginative contact with the story, which addresses him or her in the '*now'.* However, due to the challenging nature of what I was attempting through the medium of magical realism, in which an author walks a fine line between capturing the imagination and baffling the reader, I felt it necessary to clarify what is happening a little in the lines 'I was hard living rock. (*I am hard living boy of rock I am mountain of boy*), which show the transformation that has occurred. However, the beauty of magical realism as a medium of *primal writing* is that it offers the reader the opportunity to step outside what is expected, and in so doing go beyond a usual sense of meaning and understanding. Confusing the reader's understanding in this way requires that he or she should instead begin to *sense* with their imagination, rather than *know,* which not only grants them more autonomy in the fiction transaction / contract they have entered into with the author, but also that they are more open to a phenomenological experience. Not only is the story asking that they undergo a reconsideration regarding how nature is viewed via the themes and situations within the narrative; the shock-blurring of the human / non-human divide through magical realism demands that they undergo a more physical, imaginative experience that addresses the reciprocity between the two by way of a more intimate, vicarious participation. The process of crossover and transformation is cemented in the phrase (*But we are holding YOU! ME! I! WE!*). The human is shown to exist within nature, nature is shown to exist within the human.

With regard to the aforementioned authenticity of certain Gaelic phrases during *primal writing* sections, I did experience some initial concerns that my use of Gaelic wasn't verbatim; a problem which was compounded by my lack of access to translators. However, after some reflection I dispensed with these concerns on the grounds that I was using Gaelic as a semiotic subversion of the English language, and in so doing my primary focus was on the musical / poetic

quality of the words, not on their literal accuracy of meaning. Had I been writing in Gaelic and subverting that language with semiotic English phrases, then of course this would have been another matter. Nevertheless, outside of primal writing sections where authenticity wasn't required, I did research and use authentic Gaelic proverbs, relying extensively on Alexander Nicolson's invaluable book *Gaelic Proverbs*[387] for Grandad's dialogue and for chapter headings etc. For chapter headings, I sometimes followed an English translation of the Gaelic proverb with the Gaelic original in order to suggest the Gaelic meaning to the reader. Using another language created a semiotic jolt, which I then linked to a description of a non-human element. For instance, the chapter title 'after wind comes rain…' is followed by the original Gaelic proverb '*An dèidh gaoithe thig uisge*…' and the description 'it pummelled down on the barn roof.' In this way, it was more possible to convey the pseudo-presence of the rain, which had been the subject of the proverb. Similarly, it was also possible to link Grandad's use of a Gaelic proverb regarding a storm to the onomatopoeic element of an English compound word:

> We were both dazzled by a flash of lightning. (Page 318 to)
> Looks like this one's gonna last.' (Page 318).

On this occasion, Grandad translates the Gaelic proverb spoken by the non-human characters of the eagles / *Sheer* (although it is unclear if this intervention is actually audible to the characters). The meaning of the restless storm is then fused with the jolt of the 'flash' imagery of the 'lightning', and the semiotic, onomatopoeic sound imagery of the 'deep thunder-rumble' in the compound words. In this way, the Gaelic proverbs are serving as a linked meaning between human languages, while calling on the *jouissance* and semiotic otherness of the Gaelic phrase to heighten the pseudo-presence of the thunderous storm.

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[387] Nicolson, A. *Gaelic Proverbs*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1996).

3.4 A Reciprocal Communication with Nature: Embedded Primal Writing.

Towards the story's conclusion, I established Stewie's perspective as being inclusive and awake to the non-human, demonstrating that he has a relationship of reciprocity with the nature around him. In the chapter 'Slan leat, a charaid choir', *primal writing* is integrated into the narrative, both within Stewie's voice and as an omniscient / character / voice in its own right, so that the non-human weather, gulls etc. are represented more equally within the narrative. References to, and descriptions of Lorna, are indistinguishable from those of non-human nature as primal writing techniques are interspersed amongst the human character's dialogue:

> 'Thanks for coming. For coming to see me off.'… (Page 339 to)
> 'Aye. People always do that, here… help out.' (Page 339).

Stewie's own internal perspective now contains semiotic, compound words and poetic phrases laden with the pseudo-presence of the non-human; descriptions which indicate his new reciprocal relationship with nature, as these aspects were predominantly featured within non-human voices, earlier in the narrative. This transformation is seen in his description of 'this grey grounded sky-meadow-shore-lark… this… mist-seep-silver', which is immediately followed by an italicised omniscient semiotic description of 'this… *mist-taste mist-seep-silver - salt-tang-air gull-screaming air* '. This implies that the external non-human is able to infuse itself into Stewie's internal description. It continues:

> 'Turns out he was a bit matey with my dad'… (Page 339 to)
> 'Your dad's not taking you to Uni, then?' (Page 339).

In this way, by the time of the story's conclusion, Stewie no longer has a blindness / dyslexia to nature, and this can be seen to influence and inhabit his perspective. His reciprocal communication with the non-human is evident within the poetic /semiotic style and tone of his voice, and his echoing of wild *primal writing* phrases is symbolic of his transformation. The pseudo-presence of the non-human, via wild, omniscient narrators, is now evident within his own internal narration. This signifies a major shift in the hierarchy of discourse, away from the anthropocentric, towards a new position which is more inclusive of the non-human, so representing nature more equally within prose fiction.

Conclusion.

Firstly, it should be mentioned that the inter-relational aspect of crossover between the critical and creative elements of this thesis was crucial in recognising, developing and applying perspectives and techniques that make up *A Theory of Primal Writing*. This was a most enjoyable and valuable aspect, set against the frustrations of not being able to fit a complete spectrum of all elements relating to *primal writing* into this thesis, due to the limitations of the critical word count. With regard to the research findings, I reaffirm my aim that *A Theory of Primal Writing* can utilise aspects of Kristevan semanalysis to provide a connection with, and a framework for, aspects of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, particularly the concept of an 'affective material dimension of language, that contributes to meaning', which is common to both theorists. I believe that this hybrid position allows the development of a new ecocritical perspective for literature, which can encourage fresh readings of how nature is portrayed in fiction. Through the identification of relevant narrative techniques, this approach also develops a creative tool with which to foreground nature, empowering creative representations of nature by means of a palette of semiotic primal writing techniques. As previously mentioned, while other writers may have used elements of *primal writing* to convey qualities of wildness when portraying nature in fiction, no-one has specifically identified or catalogued *how* these techniques operate, *why* they are successful, and *what* might be the most effective way of employing them in literature to achieve an eco-political challenge to anthropocentric narratives.

In Chapter Two, I reference the concept of the 'pre-thetic', 'gestural' 'affective material dimension of language, that contributes to meaning'[388] revealed by a Merleau-Pontian phenomenological approach to language. I then describe how this could be connected to a theory of an 'affective' 'semiotic' aspect of language that expresses the 'pre-thetic' via *the chora*, detailed by Kristevan semanalysis. This connection establishes the concept of a *choratic nexus,* whereby 'affective' meaning is organised and 'mediated'[389], acting as a kind of bridge between the human subject and the world. Revealing the *choratic nexus* as a vital two-way reversible connecting point of transfer, through which aspects of 'primordial intercorporeality' pass between the human body and the non-human world, has allowed the development a new eco-critical structural perspective. This essentially Kristevan structure can be used to observe semiotic, poetic language, and can be used to recognise the absence or presence of the 'affective',

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[388] Keltner, op. cit., Kindle Loc. 630-631.
[389] Ibid., Kindle Loc. 861.

'gestural' aspects of language, and utilised to express or recognise the 'pseudo-presence' of nature. Observing how the semiotic aspect, or the lack of it, operates in relation to representations of nature, can enable an analysis that reveals how nature is portrayed within a narrative. This is demonstrated in examples of children's and YA fiction, through its application to the literature of David Almond, in Chapter Two.

The development of *A Theory of Primal Writing* also allows me to address the problem defined by Dominic Head and Lawrence Buell*,* that representations of non-human nature are subordinated by human characterisations*.* My findings challenge this notion and suggest that it is possible to readjust the narrative lens beyond the 'most basic foci of: character, persona [and] narrative focus'[390] in order to represent nature as more than a 'backdrop'[391] for human characterisations. This does not require the narrative to 'abandon'[392] its human characterisations, but instead, to increase the 'pseudo-presence' of non-human characters and representations within the hierarchy of discourse. In this way, by increasing the amount of *semiotic narrative energy* from 'poetic' language and techniques that carry the 'affective', 'gestural' 'pseudo-presence' of non-human characters and environment, *primal writing* can be seen to *readjust* the narrative lens away from its current anthropocentric focus and enable a more equal representation of nature in prose fiction.

This refocusing of the narrative lens is demonstrated in examples taken from my YA novel, *Pinhead*, in which I have explored aspects of *primal writing as a creative palette*. These examples reference various techniques, including those based on Les Murray's concept of using a more direct 'translation' of non-human voices to create a more zoocentric depiction of specific animal characterisations, such as the *Sheer* / golden eagles, in *Pinhead*. I have also demonstrated how the technique of linking challenging shifts in tense and perspective in the first person narrative of my protagonist can be used to blur the boundaries between human and non-human characterisations. This is especially effective when employed in conjunction with semiotic, onomatopoeic descriptions of human internal emotions alongside descriptions of animals and environment. Also, using a metaphor in which a human character's blindness / dyslexia to nature was progressively transformed to one of awareness and reciprocity, was enhanced by semiotic techniques such as magical realism, stream-of-consciousness, word invention, poetic musicality, etc. Similarly, using a phenomenological approach to translate the sounds and images of nature was highly effective in moving closer to representing the 'pseudo-presence' of nature more directly and authentically, in comparison to more anthropocentric, anthropomorphic

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[390] Head, op. cit., 'The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism', p.33.
[391] Ibid., p.32.
[392] Ibid., p.33.

representations. By building up layers of *primal writing* techniques in this way, it was possible to create more empowering representations of non-human nature within the hierarchy of discourse and portray them with greater equality alongside human themes and characterisations, thereby increasing, what Buell referred to as the 'interdependence of the human and non-human'[393]. Don McKay's references to 'poetic attention' and metaphor were a useful touchstone in this respect, but whereas 'poetic attention' can be instrumental in heightening the semiotic jolt, I feel that a reliance on anthropomorphic metaphoric imagery can detract from a more direct connection to the pseudo-presence of the non-human object. However, the use of a 'metaphorical stretch' which reaches out towards the non-human and moves away from anthropomorphism, such as those that employ reverse-anthropomorphism, for instance, can utilise the powerful action and force of metaphor to create a more direct and reciprocal gestural connection to the non-human other.

It was interesting to observe the influence of cultural notions of 'nature' and 'wilderness' in western culture (as described by Soper and Cronon), within my own creative project, and I was forced to accept how these inescapable historical concepts shaped my perception of the non-human, and any representation of it. However, using Romantic anthropomorphism in portraying the awesome visual presence of nature, made it possible to display how the anthropocentric attitude within my protagonist's narrative perspective could also be revealed and then undermined by progressively introducing reverse-anthropomorphic descriptions to challenge the Romantically influenced mode of representation. I also suggest that semiotic *primal writing* techniques can effectively circumnavigate the tendency towards culturally shaped, anthropomorphic Romantic representations of wilderness (as described by Cronon), by using the 'gestural' elements of language to connect more directly to the 'pseudo-presence' of the non-human object.

While my creative research did not directly reference points from Kate Soper's book regarding the historical background of how the culture / nature divide relates to perspectives of religion, politics and gender, it helped shaped my creative exploration and encouraged me to seek new experimental routes forward in portraying a relationship with nature that allows for a greater equality between the human and the non-human. Similarly, Dunkerley's point that the complex relationships between nature and language, and reality and language, tends towards anthropocentricity, is a valid one. However, I feel I have shown that by foregrounding of the non-human within a narrative hierarchy of discourse, *Primal Writing* techniques can, to an extent, successfully address the problems that exists for narratives that attempt to 'speak for or about

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[393] Head, op. cit., 'The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism', p.33.

nature'[394]. *Primal Writing* can help to connect with 'that which is beyond the human'[395] via the pseudo-presence of the natural thing itself and move beyond 'representations of human states of mind'[396] that resort to the use of 'language [in a way that] is already freighted with human ideas'[397].

I have also been forced to question if this attempt to create a more equal translation of nature in comparison to a more anthropocentric representation such as Romanticism, for instance, is in some respects irrelevant? For, if *any* attempt to represent nature, no matter *how* anthropocentric, is still representative of *all* nature and therefore not just that part in which humanity resides, then non-human nature cannot be said to be excluded, as its influence is still inherently present within any representation of human culture. Is it worth trying to achieve a less anthropocentric perspective if human and non-human nature are inseparably fused, even if that is not immediately apparent? I would suggest that it is, because the industrialised commodification of nature and the resulting climate crisis are proof that humanity is largely in denial of its links to the non-human, and its cultural narratives seek to hide this link.

From the perspective of writing a YA novel that attempts to create a greater sense of agency in its readership, the relationship between the ecopolitical and the ecopsychological / ecopoetic contains an interesting narrative turn. My process of writing back against the climate crisis employed a positive metaphor in which Stewie learns to overcome his dyslexia to nature, but still fails to learn to read or write human texts that might convey this knowledge. Ironically, this conflict in the narrative could be seen to diminish the argument for YA fiction as a medium of ecopolitical change through shared themes and knowledge. However, the negativity surrounding Stewie's inability to read is offset by the theme of Lorna attempting to pursue her dream of becoming an environmentalist by attending university. So, Stewie's knowledge of, and instinctual communication with, nature, is something he cannot share through the written word, but equally, Lorna's escape from her island home to research nature, removes her from the non-human voices and the natural world portrayed in the narrative. It is left to the imagination of the YA reader to make a connection between what Stewie has learnt with what Lorna seeks to achieve, and how they themselves might integrate this opposition between the ecopoetic and the ecopolitical in a new way forward, that works for the benefit of the earth, in the face of the climate crisis.

I consider that as an ecocritical tool *Primal writing* can help to reveal this human / non-human divide within fictional narratives, while the techniques available within the creative palette suggested in this research can connect more directly to the non-human and foreground it within

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[394] Dunkerley, op. cit., 'Unnatural Relations?' p.1.
[395] Dunkerley, op. cit., 'Translating Wilderness', p.210.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Dunkerley, op. cit., 'Translating Wilderness', p.210.

the hierarchy of discourse. In this regard, it is still necessary to recognise the conflict involved as the human seeks to ignore its reciprocal relationship to the non-human, within the corporeal world to which *all* beings belong. Perhaps *A Theory of Primal Writing* can assist in highlighting the futility of this attempt to escape, by revealing and reinforcing the element of the non-human, alongside and within the human, within narratives that are inclusive of *all* nature.

Any future study exploring this area of conflict in which humanity seeks to separate itself from nature and deny human culture as part of nature, might benefit from acknowledging the biosemiotic perspective developed by Wendy Wheeler in her book *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture* [398]. Indeed, future research that focusses on linking the aspect of phenomenological reciprocity to how non-human nature reads / recognises the human person as much as the human person reads / recognises non-human nature would find Wheeler's work invaluable. An understanding of the creative process, could also be informed by aspects of biosemiotics, particularly Charles Sanders Pierce's concept of '''abduction'''[399], which Wheeler describes as 'the strange— obscure and dark— semiotic process whereby signs are read, and interpreted, often without ever necessarily having reached consciousness at all.'[400] This could possibly be linked to area of 'affective meaning' referenced in this study. However, this study necessarily maintains its focus on revealing the structure that Kristevan semanalysis can provide to Merleau-Pontian phenomenology and clarifies the practical possibilities of this connection within analysis and creative techniques. Indeed, to avoid too broad a focus and due to the constraints of the critical / creative thesis format, it is with regret that I was also unable to develop links between *primal writing techniques* and the 'vicarious'[401] '*Empathy*'[402] of the reading process, developed by Suzanne Keen in her study 'A Theory of narrative Empathy'[403], and her later work, *Empathy and the Novel* [404].

Finally, alongside my reference to future attempts to research connections to these areas, I would like to also state my regret at not having being able to include an in-depth exploration of *A Theory of Primal Writing* in relation to Gaelic, and also to representations of nature in the area of fantasy literature, specifically the research undertaken by William Gray. Gray's work in the area of fantasy suggests that there are clear connections to be made in linking "the maternal vessel" of

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[398] Wheeler, W. *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture,* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006).

[399] Rigby, K. & Goodbody, A. eds. *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches (Under the Sign of Nature),* University of Virginia Press. Kindle Edition. Kindle Loc. 6050-6052.

[400] Ibid.

[401] Keen, S. 'A Theory of Narrative Empathy', Narrative, (October 2006), 14,3,209.

[402] Ibid.

[403] Ibid.

[404] Keen, S. *Empathy and the Novel*, (U.S.A.: Oxford University Press, 2010).

the *chora* to the production of a semiotic language that connects to the 'pseudo-presence' of nature via the semiotic 'affective meaning' present within 'synaesthesia'. Having also made the connection between *primal writing*, semiotic onomatopoeia and synaesthesia, I am interested in exploring how *primal writing* may possibly link to an expression of human abjection in regards to the non-human, 'mother' Earth. That expression of hope, however, signifies the end of this study.

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