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Field Book:
Environmental Activism and Contemporary Lyric Poetry

Andrew Forster

PhD 2018

Field Book:
Environmental Activism and Contemporary Lyric Poetry

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Manchester Metropolitan University
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This practice-led thesis explores the ways that lyric poetry contributes to the understanding of the environmental crisis, through a collection of new poems and a critical exegesis. The poems develop the field of place-based nature poetry, specifically to address facets of the environmental crisis. They reflect on the ethical complexities of living in a time of environmental crisis, and highlight initiatives taken to alleviate the crisis. The poems seek to answer the question of whether poetry can be ideologically-driven while still being alert to the resonances of language within the lyric tradition.

The second part of the thesis places the poems within an investigation of the critical context of ecopoetry, drawing on the work of Jonathan Bate, Terry Gifford, Leonard Scigaj, Tom Bristow and Sam Solnick. It points to recent criticism of the lyric, in the work of Timothy Morton, Timothy Clark and Matthew Griffiths, for its perceived inability to go beyond the immediate sensory environment and reflect the complexity of the environmental crisis. The thesis develops the criticism of Tom Bristow to highlight the contemporary lyric as being ideally placed to explore the human dimension of the environmental crisis, in the way it articulates complex layers of thought and feeling, inviting the reader to share in the poet's explorations.

The thesis highlights a difference in tradition between Britain and America, which has a longer tradition of more direct ecopoetry, and draws out common threads of 'activist' poetry from the poems and critical prose of Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, John Kinsella and Ted Hughes. It explores the way that these poets have approached issues around conservation, as a key concern of this thesis, and highlights techniques in their work that I seek to develop further in my lyric poems. It finishes with a detailed discussion of my collection of poems, in which I situate the engagement of the poems into the critical context, broadly conceived, of ecopoetry.

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Introduction

Nature Poetry in a Time of Ecological Crisis

This thesis explores the ways that nature poetry, in the British lyric tradition, can merge ideas of 'dwelling' with environmental activism to contribute to our understanding of issues surrounding the ecological crisis. It does this through a collection of my poems that raise awareness of environmental issues and model environmentally appropriate behaviour, along with a critical exegesis that places the poems in the context of developments and debates within environmentally-aware criticism and poetry. The thesis aims to answer the central question of whether lyric poetry can be ideologically-driven while still maintaining the layers of language and meaning associated with lyric poetry. The poems and the critical exegesis are intended to be read together to constitute the argument of the thesis.

The Nature of the Crisis

The earth is in a state of ecological crisis so vast and disparate that it becomes bewildering. The complexity of this crisis can be seen by identifying just a few strands of it: deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels are contributing to an increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere which is trapping the heat of the sun, causing global warming which, in turn, is melting the icecaps and causing increased rainfall and rising sea levels; the use of chemicals in agriculture is depleting the quality of topsoil so much that crop growth in many places is completely dependent on artificial fertilisers, and contributing to declining numbers of birds, animals and insects[1]; in Britain specifically, management of the uplands for grouse shooting is contributing to habitat decline for species that may influence the growth and numbers of red grouse, such as the hen harrier, and, through cyclical burning of heather to provide food and habitat for grouse, depleting natural drainage and contributing to flooding of the lowlands.[2]

The scale of the crisis has resulted in the coining of the term 'Anthropocene' to recognise a new geological epoch. Timothy Clark defines it as 'the epoch at which largely unplanned impacts on the planet's basic ecological systems have passed a dangerous, if imponderable,

[1] Conor Mark Jameson, *Silent Spring Revisited* (London: A & C Black, 2012), p.3.
[2] Mark Avery, *Inglorious: Conflict in the Uplands* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.3.

threshold.'[3] Clark discusses how the original coiners of the term, atmospheric scientists, dated the Anthropocene from the industrial revolution and the invention of the steam engine, but others argue that mass forest-clearing and extensive agriculture had already brought about a significant change in the earth's agricultural system and started a new epoch much earlier.[4] Clark goes on to highlight that although the term has not yet been recognised by geologists, it is in increasingly wide usage in the humanities, which have adopted the term 'in a sense beyond the strictly geological', to address the question of what it means to live in an age affected by the repercussions of the global environmental crisis. [5] For Clark the term has become 'shorthand' for 'all the new contexts and demands – cultural, ethical, aesthetic, philosophical and political – of environmental issues that are truly planetary in scale'.[6]

He goes on to suggest that the complexity of the types of environmental destruction we are now aware of is such that it is not always a straightforward case of protesting against them. It is difficult to identify the issues or separate them from each other, and more difficult to find commonly agreed solutions. Clark suggests that these forms of environmental damage:

> cannot immediately be seen, localised or, by some, even acknowledged. Phenomena such as ocean acidification, climate change, the general effects of incremental forms of ecological degradation across the planet, global overpopulation and resource depletion do not present any obvious or perceptible target for concern or protest at any one place, or often any immediate antagonist perceptible at the normal human scale. [7]

David Borthwick, in his introduction to the anthology *Entanglements: New Ecopoetry*, cites Timothy Morton's idea of 'the global mesh' that humans inhabit, describing how the

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[3] Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.5.
[4] 'The term was coined by Eugene F Stoermer in 1980s and arrived at, apparently independently, by Paul Crutzen at a conference in 2000.' Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (London: Routledge, 2017), p.5.
[5] Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*, p.2.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid, p.10.

connectedness of all things can destabilise our ability to see them clearly.[8] Borthwick goes on to say:

> We are hopelessly entangled in global environmental issues, each one connected, at once distant and close at hand: animal extinction to water pollution, …. plastic waste to wind turbines, washing powder to bottom trawling. [9]

It is this very lack of ability to grasp the scale and complexity of the issues that makes a response from poetry, with its emphasis on subjective experience, relevant. Despite this, the critical context for the relationship between poetry and the environmental crisis was slow to develop.

The Emergence of Ecocriticism and Ecopoetry

Jonathan Bate, in *The Song of the Earth,* discusses how, from the 1960s onwards, literature was increasingly subject to revisionist readings through the lenses of feminism and post-colonialism, but such reading in the light of increasing awareness of the environmental crisis was not established until the 1990s. Bate coined the term 'literary ecocriticism' in *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition,* a book which aimed to re-emphasise Wordsworth as a nature poet protesting against increasing industrialisation and urbanisation.[10] With the publication of Shewry, Glotfelty and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, by the University of Georgia in 1996, ecocriticism became a generally accepted term, recognising environmental issues as a significant part of the literary-critical agenda, but the focus was largely American and largely on prose writers.[11] J. Scott Bryson, editor of the first critical anthology on ecopoetry, in 2000, notes his increasing recognition of what he wanted to term 'ecological poetry' that seemed to depart from 'traditional nature lyrics' in favour of 'ecological and environmental issues', but it seemed to him that this was largely ignored by the increasing number of ecocritics, who

[8] Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, (London: Pelican 2012) cited in 'Introduction' by David Borthwick in David Knowles and Sharon Blackie, *Entanglements: New Ecopoetry* (Isle of Lewis: Two Ravens Press, 2012); p.*xx.*
[9] David Borthwick, ibid.
[10] Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991).
[11] Teresa Shewry, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader : Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

focused 'almost exclusively on nonfiction and some fiction'. [12] Exceptions to the lack of focus on poetry in ecocriticism were John Elder's *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* in the United States, and Terry Gifford's *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* in the United Kingdom. The focus of Bryson's anthology is again mainly on American writers, and Gifford's book is the first comprehensive British study of ecologically-aware contemporary poetry.

Bryson notes a significant shift in poetic criticism with the publication of *Sustainable Poetry: Four Ecopoets* by Leonard M. Scigaj in 1999, and Bate's *The Song of the Earth* in 2000. Scigaj's book marks the first use of the term ecopoetry. He focuses on the poetry of A. R. Ammons, Wendell Berry, W.S. Merwin and Gary Snyder. For Scigaj, ecopoetry is poetry that refers us 'in an epiphanic moment to our interdependency and relatedness to the richer planet whose operations created and sustained us.'[13] It is poetry that leads us towards a revelatory understanding of our relationship with the environment. Bate's *The Song of the Earth,* which focuses primarily on the English Romantic poets, saw a flourishing of ecopoetry in Britain, with poets such as Kathleen Jamie acknowledging the book as an influence.[14] This culminated in a number of ecopoetry anthologies.[15]

Interestingly, though, a number of poets with ecological concerns have written significant bodies of critical work on their own poetic practice in relation to the environment, and this predates the emergence of the critical discourse within the academy. These include Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, and Mary Oliver in the United States, and Ted Hughes in Britain. Their critical ideas, and the way these ideas manifest themselves in their poetry, are explored in this thesis.

The Desire to Make a Difference: Poetry and Environmentalism

As a poet I have worked primarily within the lyric tradition. My second and third collections, *Territory* and *Homecoming* respectively, were both attempts to map particular places.[16]

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[12] J. Scott Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction,* p.1.

[13] Leonard M. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets* (United States: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), p.7.

[14] Kathleen Jamie *Poets Statement* in 'Winter Choice' (PBS Bulletin Winter 2003), p5.

[15] Discussed in Chapter One.

[16] *Territory* focuses on the former mining village of Leadhills in South West Scotland, and *Homecoming* on Cumbria.

Each book took as its starting point my move to a new geographical area, the village of Leadhills in South West Scotland, and Cumbria, respectively. Writing the poems was a way of exploring what it meant to make a home in each landscape. From very early in the writing, each project took on a life as a book rather than as separately accumulated poems, mapping each place through poems exploring its history, literature, landscape and ecology. While working on these collections I became aware of the work of Bate and the resurgence of British nature writing, through poets like Kathleen Jamie, Alice Oswald and John Burnside, and prose writers such as Robert Macfarlane, Roger Deakin and Richard Mabey, a movement given focus by publications such as the 'New Nature Writing' issue of the quarterly magazine *Granta*.[17]

The concept of dwelling gave me a retrospective critical context for my writing: the poems were a way of helping me live in a landscape in a meaningful way, enabling a paying of attention to nature through documenting the quotidian. A poem like 'Wordsworth, Skating' in *Homecoming*, for example, arose, like many poems in the collection, out of the experience of driving to work, but observation of Grasmere Lake in the coldest winter for a number of years, led to making a connection with the Romantic period when Wordsworth skated there.[18] Writing these poems were my way of opening myself to the 'being' of the place, in the way suggested to Bate by Martin Heidegger, but as my awareness of the environmental crisis grew, through increasing evidence of climate change, both in news reports and through observation of local manifestations such as increased flooding, I became increasingly concerned and wanted my poems to take on a more political dimension.[19] In particular I wanted to explore possibilities for the incorporation within my poems of environmentalist ideas, in the service of a politically-charged activism. The concept of dwelling remains relevant to the new poems to the extent that they take their starting points from the individual sensory experience of particular localities, but they aim to make connections from these experiences to the wider global environmental context. The sequence 'An Allotment Handbook' is an example of the way the poems aim to use their

[17] Jason Cowley (editor), 'The New Nature Writing' *Granta* Issue 102 (London: Granta Books, 2008).
[18] Andrew Forster, *Homecomin*g (Sheffield: Smith Doorstop), p,20.
[19] Heidegger discusses the term in his essay 'Poetically Man Dwells' on Hölderlin's poem 'In Lovely Blueness'. Laurence Coupe (editor), *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.96.

initial stimulus to explore the broader questions of how an individual can make a difference in the context of the global environmental crisis.

While considering the work of recent ecocritics such as Timothy Morton, Timothy Clark and Matthew Griffiths I encountered ideas of the limitations of both influential British ecocritics such as Bate and Terry Gifford, and of the poetry which their work explores and has influenced. Such views see what Griffiths calls ‘post-Romantic lyric nature poetry’ as failing to show the complexity of the relationship between humans and their environment.[20] Susanna Lidström and Greg Garrard attempt to clarify this division by making a distinction between what they term ‘ecophenomenological poetry’, which focuses on individual sensory experience and seeks to ‘heighten individual reader’s awareness of their natural surroundings’, and ‘environmental poetry’ that tries to grapple with more complex questions of the changing relationship between human societies and their environments’.[21] Lidström and Garrard acknowledge the ecological importance of poems that begin with the individual experience of the environment, showing the way that Ted Hughes’s animal poems aim to reconfigure our understanding of nature by taking a non-anthropocentric perspective where humans are no more important than the animals or plant life they describe. They suggest, however, that this kind of poetry does not explore the wider political context of our relationship with the environment, and posit Seamus Heaney as a poet whose sense of the social context and traditions of our relationship with the environment, and of the knowledge that many of the decisions that affect our environment are made externally to us, make his poetry ‘environmental’. Lidström and Garrard summarise their position by suggesting that ‘the ecophenomenological poem starts with the experience of the individual, while what we call environmental poems tend to start from the points of view of societies.’[22] This placing of Hughes and Heaney at opposite ends of the spectrum is problematic. The environmentalism in Hughes’s poetry is explored later in this thesis, and Heaney’s awareness of social context often has its starting point in individual experience. [23]

[20] Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World*, (London: Bloomsbury 2017), p.5.
[21] Lidström, Susanna and Garrard, Greg, ‘Images Adequate to our Predicament: Ecology, Environment and Ecopoetics', *Environmental Humanities*, Issue 5, (2013), p.36.
[22] Ibid, p.47
[23] See for instance the poem ‘Digging’, which Lidström and Garrard cite in support of their argument but which begins with Heaney at his desk writing, or the poem ‘Death of a Naturalist’ which is rooted in sensory description of a childhood memory. Seamus Heaney, ‘Digging’, *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).

Despite this, Lidström and Garrard make an important distinction. Chapter One explores the debate around how much ecopoetry, in the British lyric tradition, should be politicised. In the context of my own poetic practice however, my chief difficulty, is that Lidström and Garrard seem unaware that the two things can be operative in a single poem at the same time, with a poem beginning with an individual experience of the sensory environment but making connections to the wider context of the global environmental crisis. This is the challenge that the poems in this thesis have set themselves.

The thesis argues that the contemporary British nature lyric has a significant role to play in aiding our understanding of the environmental crisis, through its ability to engage a reader in the immediate sensory aspects of the crisis, and to acknowledge and explore personal emotional responses to the Anthropocene while still making connections to the wider political context, therefore being both ecophenomenological and environmental. Tom Bristow's *The Anthropocene Lyric* supports this position, describing how the lyric poem's emphasis on complex layers of thought and feeling situates it to give us 'emotionally-sensitive reports from the natural world.'[24] The emphasis within the lyric on the use of language to create layers of meaning also positions it to address the complications and ambiguities of the human experience of the crisis. The thesis also points to differences between the British and North American traditions of ecologically-aware nature poetry, where poets such as Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver, Pattiann Rogers and W. S. Merwin have a long history of writing directly activist environmental poetry, that has a global dimension, within the lyric tradition.

The poems in the collection submitted within this thesis aim to function as an ecologically-aware, activist, lyric nature poetry which aims to be both ecophenomenological and environmental. Their purpose is to raise awareness of facets of the environmental crisis from an individual standpoint, while considering measures taken to alleviate it and exploring the ethical complexities of the choices we make when we live in a time of crisis. Trying to meet this aim did create a tension in the writing of some of the poems, between following the individual lyric impulse and exploring the wider political questions. A personal backstory began to emerge in some of the poems that did not always suit a more direct political

[24] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric*, p.1.

exploration, and some of the poems explore a sense of unease in the landscape rather than moving towards a more direct activism. Though some of the poems aim to operate in a way that is, as Lidström and Garrard put it, both ecophenomenological and environmental, others highlight a tension between these approaches. This is explored in some of the individual poem discussions and, more fully, at the beginning of Chapter Four.[25] The thesis does explore, however, the way that the sense of wonder in the natural world, created by an ecophenomenological poem that is rooted in the immediate sensory environment, can play an important role in changing an individual's perspective on the environmental crisis. The discussion of Ted Hughes's farming poems shows us how poems can be written out of political activism rather than writing expressly of that activism.[26] In the collection of poems within this thesis, such poems play an important role, suggesting to a reader why they should care about the natural world, as a prerequisite for individual action.

The End of Nature: A Note on Terms

The problematic character of some of the terms and concepts associated with poetry and environmentalism is discussed as part of the critical overview in Chapter One, but I want to highlight here the use of two recurring terms that have become increasingly problematized: 'nature' and 'animal.'

Sam Solnick summarises some of the critical concerns over the use of the term 'nature'. For Solnick, Bill McKibben's environmentalist book *The End of Nature* referred not just to damage to particular ecosystems but to 'a certain set of human ideas about the world and our place within it.'[27] The Anthropocene calls into question received ideas about the human relationship with nature, which makes the term artificial and difficult to pin down. It is no longer always clear what nature is. Gary Snyder questions the use of the term in the title of his 1992 selection of poems *No Nature*. For Snyder there is 'no single or set "nature" either as "the natural world" or "the nature of things."'[28] It is always elusive. Solnick suggests the term can be referring to 'genes, individual organisms, species, local ecosystems, national

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[25] See the discussion of The Badger on p.90 and the introductory section to 'The Anthropocene Lyric: Unease and Re-Enchantment' on p.178.
[26] See in particular 'Ted Hughes and Implicit Activism' pp. 123-129.
[27] Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p.8, quoted in Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p.3.
[28] Gary Snyder, *No Nature: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), p.v.

parks or the planetary biosphere'. Latour and Morton take this elusiveness further, seeing it as a term that is often used to obfuscate rather than elucidate. Its associations with what Griffiths calls 'an un-interrogated green vision', implying naïve nostalgia, can be used to avoid genuine ecopolitical awareness where the human relationship to the environment is authentically considered.[29] Despite these reservations Solnick suggests that 'the term Nature and its associations are too fundamental to be so easily divested': it is too widely-used, with too many implications, for us to simply stop using it, as Latour suggests.[30]

Kate Soper provides assistance here by trying to clarify the complexity of the term. She differentiates between 'metaphysical', 'realist' and 'surface' ideas of nature. The 'metaphysical' idea is a philosophical perspective on nature, where humanity considers its differences and similarities to other species. The 'realist' idea refers to the structures and processes that are operative within the physical world, the laws to which we are subject and the objects of study of the natural sciences. Finally the 'surface', or 'lay', idea of nature, refers to the ordinarily observable features of the physical world, to the landscape and the flora and fauna within it.[31] Identifying the different strands within the concept of the nature in this way both pins down its elusiveness and allows it to accommodate the complexity of the Anthropocene in a way that is useful to my own poetry.

The debates around the terminology used to describe poetry which explores the human relationship with the environment are reflected in the brief map of the critical history of poetry and environmentalism in Chapter One, which shows a number of terms in use for such poetry. I have noted nature poetry, green poetry, ecopoetry, ecological poetry, environmental poetry, post-pastoral poetry, anti-pastoral poetry, activist poetry, radical landscape poetry and the Anthropocene lyric. Even within some of these terms I show there are there are differences of definition relating to disagreements over how much, and in what ways, poetry should directly address the issues at hand. This thesis uses the terms used by the particular poet or critic under discussion, but when speaking more generally I

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[29] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene : Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p.3.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Kate Soper, *What Is Nature?: Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), p.155-6. Both Jonathan Bate and Matthew Griffiths draw on Soper's framework. Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth, p.33-4* and Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change : Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World*, p.17.

return to the original term: nature poetry. To emphasise its continuing relevance, I qualify it by referring to 'ecologically-aware nature poetry'. I favour this over the alternatives as I see my poems within a tradition of British lyric nature poetry that developed from Romanticism, but also accommodating a global awareness of the environmental crisis. My poems move between Soper's 'lay' or 'surface' ideas of nature, where they occur in an observable locality, or the 'metaphysical'' idea where humans consider their otherness, towards the 'realist' idea where the poems widen their focus to incorporate nature's structures and processes. The term also has the advantage of not having to justify the inclusion of a particular poet or poem based on which school of thought it is identified with, and the question becomes one of how it handles environmental themes and ideas.

The term 'animal' is perhaps more problematic still. Humans are of course animals, and the term has come to imply that the creatures with whom we share a planet are inferior to ourselves in significant ways. This inferiority is still implicit in the term 'non-human animal', the term 'animal' often being used disparagingly in relation to other humans whose behaviour we are judging. Critics such as Solnick and Yvonne Reddick occasionally refer to 'other-than-human' animals.[32] The Centre for Alterity Studies, an international network of writers and artists, also refer to 'other-than-human', and Tom Bristow talks about the 'more-than-human.'[33] The difficulty with these latter terms is they are not specific to the creatures we commonly refer to as animals, incorporating plants, minerals or wind, the inclusivity emphasising what Bristow calls 'our situatedness in ecology'.[34] My difficulty with talking about 'other-than-human animals', is that the relationship between humans and animals is one of my key themes and this can become blurred if we use a different term. As with the tradition of nature poetry, I also see myself writing within a tradition of animal encounter poetry and, with some reservations, continue to use the term animal, which in the context of the poems can also be taken to represent insects and marine creatures.

***Field Book*: Structure of the Thesis**

The first part of the thesis consists of a collection of my new poems. The poems and the

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[32]Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p.68. Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.110.

[33] http://www.alteritystudies.org; Tom Bristow *The Anthropocene Lyric* (London: Macmillan, 2015).

[34] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric,* p.3.

thesis as a whole take their title, *Field Book*, from a naturalist's notebook. It reflects an individual's experience of being 'in the field', the poems arising from moments of engaging with nature and the environment, a relationship that is intimate and face-to-face. It also reflects the idea that the critical discussion of the relationship between poetry and the environment arises from a particular experience of that environment. As part of a practice-led PhD, the collection of poems is presented as the first part of the thesis. This introduction provides a brief context for the poems, but the poems embody the ideas of the thesis and are intended to be engaged with first and foremost as poems. For this reason they should be read before the critical part of the thesis, suggesting their own context ahead of the exegesis which opens out different ways of reading them. Where poems are discussed in the critical text, page references are given for the main discussion of each poem.

The poems aim to incorporate ideas from environmental activism into an ecologically-aware lyric nature poetry. They have arisen from one person's experience of living in the Anthropocene, drawing on Tom Bristow's concept of the 'Anthropocene Lyric' to reflect on the complexities of the environmental crisis. They are rooted in the sensory experience of particular places while making connections to the wider global environmental context. They attempt to raise awareness of ecological issues, particularly issues of conservation, and model environmentally appropriate behaviour, while considering the complexities and ambiguities of living in the Anthropocene. Examples of this are the nine-poem sequence 'An Allotment Handbook', which explores issues around working a small plot of land in an environmentally-conscious way, attempting to model environmentally-conscious practice but coming face to face with some of the contradictions of the Anthropocene, such as tackling weeds and pests and coping with water shortages during a drought.

In the second part of the thesis, the first chapter places my own work within the context of ecologically-aware nature poetry. It includes a survey of the critical background for this work. The chapter discusses the apparent resurgence of nature poetry within the British lyric in the early 21st century, expanding on the influence of the critical work of Bate and Gifford, and exploring differing developments between the English and American traditions of nature poetry. Drawing primarily on the work of Timothy Clark, Tom Bristow, Sam Solnick, Matthew Griffiths, and Greg Garrard and Susanna Lidström, it explores subsequent developments in ecocriticism that have interrogated the ideas of the early ecocritics, and

discusses differences in definition. The chapter places both my previously published and new poetry in the context of this discussion and introduces the key poets under consideration: Ted Hughes, Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder and John Kinsella, four poets self-identified as environmental activists whose activism is expressed in both poetry and critical prose. The selection for close analysis of four male poets gives a gender imbalance which is not reflected in the bibliography for this thesis. Though a number of female poets were given consideration, in particular Alice Oswald, Kathleen Jamie and Mary Oliver, the final selection was based on the poets' explicit identification with an activist agenda. Alice Oswald, for instance, seems to actively resist such identification, suggesting that 'rather than making a plea for the planet […] the job of poetry is to change the aesthetic rather than challenge the system.'[35] The four poets chosen all have a particular relationship with land that allows them to explore their activist ideals and this relationship gives a foundation for the environmentalism in their poetry.

The second chapter explores political activism in lyric poetry. It discusses perceived difficulties with incorporating political ideas into British lyric poetry, drawing on Terry Gifford's correspondence with Ted Hughes, and on Jonathan Bate and Gifford's respective readings of 'Mother Earth: Her Whales' by Gary Snyder. It goes on to discuss each of the key poets in this thesis as environmental activists, and explores ways in which their activism manifests itself in both their critical work and their poetry. In addition to my own readings of poems, it draws on Yvonne Reddick's critical work on Hughes, and on the essays of Berry, Snyder and Kinsella. It closes by highlighting elements common to activist nature poetry. It suggests the importance of emotional engagement with nature through poetry of personal experience, and the ways in which ethical behaviour can be modelled in poems, while also addressing the complexities and ambiguities of the issues. The chapter also introduces ideas of implicit and explicit activism, suggesting that poems can be activist by writing from a particular ideological position which may not necessarily be explicit in the poem.

The third chapter explores the way that themes around ideas of conservation, as a particular concern within the wider environmental concerns of the thesis, manifest

[35] Claire Armitstead 'Interview with Alice Oswald' (The Guardian.com, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/22/alice-oswald-interview-falling-awake), accessed 5th July 2016.

themselves in the poetry of the four key poets. It specifically addresses conservation of land and animals as it links to species loss. The chapter starts by exploring land management, pollution and deforestation, and goes on to look at the significance of animals for us, at ways in which we may usefully live alongside animals, and at hunting and zoos. It draws on my own close readings of poems by the four key poets, and discusses examples from my own poems which address similar issues or use similar techniques. The chapter finishes by identifying particular techniques that the key poets use to address issues of conservation, such as the use of imagery to both connect emotionally with the subject of the poem and to communicate environmental ideas, the praise of a subject to remind readers of its value, and the personal epiphany as a way of involving a reader in a moment of personal transformation. It also explores ways that factual information may be incorporated into lyric poems in order to raise awareness of issues, while maintaining the lyric integrity of the poem, and the ways that the controlled use of direct statement may add political urgency.

The final chapter reflects on themes and techniques in the collection of poems as a whole and places them in a critical and creative context, returning to examples from the collection for close reading. It groups the poems under three approaches: living with the Anthropocene, modelling environmentally-appropriate behaviour, and raising awareness of environmental issues. These approaches, though not mutually exclusive, reflect key ways that my poems seek to contribute to an understanding of the environmental crisis, and are intended to open out potential ways of reading the poems. The poems discussed deal with a range of environmental themes, such as land and animal conservation, rising sea-levels and coastal erosion, flooding, and nuclear waste. The chapter highlights the ways the poems draw on elements from the work of Hughes, Snyder, Berry and Kinsella, but place these elements in a contemporary British context, working for a commonality of experience by coming from the perspective of a more conventional working life. It also shows how the poems seek to develop the work of the four key poets within this context, by:

1. exploring the complexities and ambiguities of the situations they arise from, as in the sequence of poems ‘An Allotment Handbook’;
2. by incorporating information about environmental initiatives, such as the rewilding of Foulshaw Moss in the poems ‘Floods’ and ‘Ospreys at Foulshaw Moss’, and

3. by attempting to find a poetic language for scientific ideas, such as the effect of the neonicotinoid chemicals, as evidenced in the poem ‘Bees on the Cheshire Lines’.

The chapter also develops the idea of implicit and explicit activism, suggesting that proximity of poems to each other in a collection can have a cumulative effect, and can contribute to creating a context for poems where the environmentalist agenda may not be explicitly stated, such as the encounters with skylarks and the badger.

The chapter presents the collection as a group of lyric nature poems arising from personal experience of dwelling in a locality, and focusing on the immediate sensory environment, but written from an ideological stance and connecting to wider issues. This indicates that an ecologically-aware lyric nature poetry can contribute to understanding of the Anthropocene by raising awareness of issues arising from it, suggesting modes of behaviour appropriate to it, and reflecting on the ethical and emotional implications of living within it.

The range of ecologically-aware nature poetry is such that there are a number of poets who have influenced my own work in various ways but for whom space prevents significant consideration. The bibliography provides a comprehensive list of these. Where individual poems carry a direct line of influence this is acknowledged in the footnotes.

Part One

Field Book
A collection of new poems

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The Blackbird's Egg

He reached in and with an *abracadabra*
brought out the egg. Cushioned in his palm
it looked like a whisper might shatter it.
The sprinkling of gold on the turquoise shell
made it glitter like treasure in the dull lane.

I didn't know then that it was a crime
but how could taking something so precious
be right? Breaking off a hawthorn twig
he poked a hole at either end, blew out
a clear yolk with a ribbon of scarlet.

Forty years on, in this small paved space,
the best I could do for a garden round here,
I can still feel the stickiness of the shell
as I look at holes I've sheared in the privet
hoping that something might come and nest here.

The Eel

Glenn showed me how to cast, and the line
settled on the water like a hieroglyph
then sank, the float pointing straight as a finger.

We waited for the bite of chub or dace,
the slow current tugging my thoughts,
and when the float vanished, I flicked the rod

to secure the hook. Glenn guided me through
the give and take of reeling in, and I saw
the living knot of eel tie itself up

in a frenzied dance, colour darkening around it
from grey to black, long fin like an edging
of lace, eyes still despite its twisting body.

Glenn swore and grabbed it with an old rag,
trying to free its lip from the hook
while it thrashed and slipped through his fingers.

Back home I read about them: elongated miracles.
Born at sea they navigate upriver
for thousands of miles, climbing weirs and dams.

I sometimes desire the meditation of fishing,
and can almost tell myself I imagined the blood
as the eel was hurled like a twist of rope.

On the Grass near Abington Service Station

The fox cub is about four months old,
colour sharpened to russet with
a snow-white bib, but its body hasn't yet
caught up to paws like outsize slippers.

The rabbit is young too, darting from side
to side, but the fox mirrors its movements,
springing as if picked up and dropped,
feet doing a soft-shoe shuffle.

I would swear the fox is laughing! Trickster,
even at this young age. It's playing
with the rabbit, its jerked movements
shrugging into a sense of itself.

It must be fifteen years since I saw this
lovely and savage tableau, trapped between
the comings and goings of daily routines,
and since then I've changed jobs, houses, lives,

but I still see it so clearly I can smell it:
these two young creatures on the verge,
at the mercy of nature, slipping into
what it means to be fox or rabbit.

Grouse Moor

A dozen chicks lost in the last week
and grouse-shooting parties pay good money.
Sometimes he drops poisoned voles on the path
but today he must be sure, so he settles
into the shooting butt, balaclava for warmth
and secrecy, gun close as a lover.

He wrinkles his nose as the tang
from the stink pit drifts up on the breeze.
Foxes kill grouse too and the pit,
lined with snares, lures them with rotting hares.
If the odd pet cat strays too far
he'll haul it out and bury it later.

As the weak sun struggles over the hills
a grouse rattles from heather on clockwork wings
too short to lift its bloated body high,
and the hen harrier swoops in low,
fast as a comet, its wings lighting up
the pale canvas of early morning.

As the keeper takes aim, for just a moment
he is again that young lad in thrall to the hills,
who saw the male drop a mouse over a nest
and its mate and chick rise to catch it, wings blurring,
like trapeze artists, or small spirits of the sky.
He blinks away the memory, squeezes the trigger.

The Blackbird's Nest

At first glance the bird doesn't look alive
except for its eye, like obsidian,
the shining black speaking of purpose
and deep faith in its chosen spot.

It almost seems part of the nest,
so still and snug in the perfect cup
of twigs and grass that is lined with mud
and built to last several summers.

I probably wouldn't have seen it
in its leafless gap in the hawthorn,
but it's eye-level with my seat,
as I pull into the usual place.

It's May, the gravel carpark bustling
with tourists gathered loudly around
the info board, only an arm's reach away.
Don't let them disturb you, blackbird!

As I pass to and from the office, where
I'm less and less sure I belong, I cast
a quiet eye on the nest: so obvious
once you know. It grounds my days

as if its success in hatching and fledging
hold a reminder of what really matters,
but I'm careful to keep my distance,
leave a space between its world and mine.

Fell End

On February days the wind steals my breath
and fumbles at the gaps in my clothing;
the muddy path is locked in ice,
brambles are barbed wire, and ivy, shrivelled
and brown as old paper, hangs off beeches

but the sky can still be a perfect blue
as air is fired with the song of wrens
and the first snowdrops hang like tiny lights.
Fell End slants and tilts in a sprung rhythm
and I climb up between damp husks of gorse.

From this height, Morecambe Bay is a slow curve,
defining those of us who live here.
The tide, often a distant brushstroke, is swollen,
filling the channels of the saltmarsh
like the completion of a puzzle.

I could lose all this. The job that helps
to keep me here is unsettled as last year's leaves
when the hooligan breeze riffles them.
Questions tumble around in my thoughts
but the fell is full-stopped with boulders.

Silverdale Shore

Signs warn of *Quicksands*, *Fast Incoming Tides*,
Floods. It's a landscape in flux,
hard to get a purchase on the sliding stones:
mainly limestone, shining grey under flat cloud
but migrant remnants of sandstone
carried in by the waves, are scattered.

*

Footsteps impress the wet sand but it pushes
them off, smooths itself clean. A strait,
silver in the trapped light, bars further passage.
Across it, oystercatchers pipe along their new
territory. Boulders covered in bladderwrack
guard the beach, make claims to permanence.

*

Up the beach a sandstone wall, crumbling
to pinkish powder, is reclaimed by tide
and weather. Steps climb towards a garden.
Shards of limestone, shunted by the sea,
cover the first step and litter higher ones
like signs left by a careless intruder.

*

A hawthorn pleads from the cliff-face:
stripped of bark, its hold so loose
a breeze will shift it. The first drops of rain
pit the shore. The yellow shock
of dandelions is out of place
and already starting to mark time.

Benllech Bay

Summer is hanging by its fingertips,
the flowering broom at the border of the beach
still yellow but stained and tearing at the edges
like a well-thumbed page. Walking is easy
on the soft sand but the breeze sharpens
as the sun eases down. The shock

of a walled garden attempts to manage space
here on the margins, but even the wall
is returning to sand. Limestone cliffs beside it
have been fissured by coastal weather
forging sharp-edge shelters and chambers
that hint at secrets but are washed clean.

Further down the beach the laughter of youths
barely ripples the evening. A labrador
runs in widening circles, chasing something
that I can't see. The sand here is ridged
with the tide's cipher, reefed with wrack,
stray pools dyed magenta by the sinking light.

Far out, sea meets sky in a fiery line
unlike the closed horizons of home.
A ferry slides across the open blue, something
no longer seen in the silted Morecambe Bay,
and I'm called by the chain of decklights
and steady course to somewhere out of sight.

Formby Beach

(1)

Sand whispers down slopes, echoing my steps
on this vast beach. The dunes are eroding
and squeezing the coastal pinewoods,
space for three trees washed away each year.

Sedge and marram, planted to grip the sand
in a net of roots, have fallen too,
their bindings fraying with the weight,
tumbleweeding across the beach.

Layers of history revealed like barbed gifts,
in a land that is travelling back through time.

(2)

Softer slopes have been torn away and left
a cliff. Below it slabs of cemented brick
litter the sand like segments of a crossword.

Home to soldiers in the war, an aching memory
it was demolished, then recast as a carpark
but fell prey to the fickle coastline.

Buried in sand it came to light
like a bad habit, pieces of the walls
jutting out after restless winds, until
Storm Keith revealed the whole puzzle.

(3)

These brown rocks are islands in a tiny lake
left by the tide, but they crumble at a touch
from my boot, an oily sweetness cloying
even in salt breeze. The dog sniffs but moves on,
too much discord in the concert of smells.

Industry’s dustbin: old tobacco leaf
buried in time’s factory, rolling
from unsettled dunes like misshapen marbles,
resting on sand with the gravity
and mystery of standing stones.

(4)

Sand here is darkly streaked like distant rain,
and nuggets of sea-coal, formed by the slow weight
of water and gifted by the current, nest in wrack.

Years ago beachcombers chased the falling tide
with hessian sacks, to harvest enough
for a few evenings by a warm hearth.

People no longer seem to gather
on this stretch of sand like a charcoal sketch,
though a few yards around the beach’s long curve
barbecue smoke and music make a carnival.

(5)

Here’s a ledge of hardened mud, pressed with tracks
from the neolithic age, baked by sun
and revealed by the tide’s troubled moods. Deer, wolf,
auroch: a bison to take the breath away,
only known to us now from bones in peat.

There’s a human print too, a hunter,
from when this beach was forest: four toes,
clawed by arthritis. I can’t resist
seeing how my own print measures up to it
but wet sand shrugs me off without a trace.

(6)

Out in the channel, wind turbines, graceful
as gymnasts, form a gleaming barrier
beyond which we have no control.

A pilot boat picks its way into the dock
leading a lumbering ferry around sandbars.
This coast is a history of foundered ships.

Up the beach a boy edges across dunes
to rescue a stranded Frisbee. Once there
he leaps on the sand to dislodge it
and ride it back down like an escalator.

(7)

This beach is ideal for horses to stretch themselves.
No matter how crowded there is always space.
This length is deserted and the rider
pats his horse's mane as it trots down the sand.

They do not stop as waves fizz around hooves
and it may be a trick of increasing distance
or morning light still steadying
but I watch the rider, stroking his horse's neck

as they lose themselves beneath the waves
from where stories cast up in random pages.

The Badger

I don’t quite believe in the badger.
The hills press in on this village sometimes
like locals forming a clique, and I’m trudging
along the December-quiet lane, back to the office,
heavy with thoughts of the afternoon ahead.
It pads across my path, a sage,
white-blazed head comfortable with wisdom,
and stops to scratch with a stumpy leg, claws
rasping through coarse hair. A creature

of shadows, but looking at home in the day,
it knows safety in the slowing of the seasons.
As if time were not a luxury, I can’t
tear myself from this unexpected gift,
It hops onto the low wall and plods
into the screen of trees, soon gone from me,
but as I stare at the empty space it’s left
light shifts subtly through the clouds and
I can still see it nodding in perpetual affirmation.

The Stag

As a sliver of moon drips into a tarn,
the sceptered antlers and braced legs
are more wicker sculpture than stag lapping water.

The last train home only went to Carnforth
and I was shunted on to a replacement bus.
Slowed right down on country roads,

I settle back, enjoying the gathering night
and the coastal road that's new to me.
It takes a moment to know what I'm seeing.

A friend on Mull told me his children
teased stags from the hills in mating season -
how they would bellow down the glen-

but my only sightings have been distant
herds galloping across fields,
or roe deer springing into woods.

From here, as another secular day closes,
it is more myth than mammal,
a celtic spirit taking earthly form

or the old woman in the tale
who became a stag to escape invaders,
quietly resting after the long chase.

It isn't disturbed by our headlights
and I don't know if anyone else sees it
but it's still there as the road arrows on,

part of a different world, this leaving
of the expected track leading
to a brief enchanted crossing over.

Hutton Roof Crags

This is land reduced to its bones:
a tattered map of runnels and grikes
carved by millennia of rain, stretching
beyond sight. Walking across
the limestone pavement on Holme Park Fell

the motorway behind is in clear view
but oddly silent like a waking dream.
Wind rattles through dried hawthorn and ash,
blown in, seeded in the thin soil of clefts,
postures twisted in the contours of the breeze.

It's hard to balance on the tilted rock
and rifts open out before us, forcing
shifts of direction. Easy to get lost here,
the place shrugs off any meaning we impose
and scattered erratics are signs we can't decipher.

Resting by a boulder, my fingers find
an ammonite in a crevice, in perfect relief.
We wonder at melting ice that brought it here
and strange peace that kept it undisturbed,
then leave it as a gift for the next stranger.

It is easier not to look for a fixed path,
but put faith in patterns of limestone.
Out of the corner of my eye, a common blue
butterfly rises from a brittle bouquet
of hart's tongue, briefly charging the air.

Mare and Foal

I nearly stumble upon them as I emerge
from the lane: in the clearing by the field gate.
The foal can't be more than a day old.
It seems provisional, a sketch
for a later self, each twitch of its legs
loose as water, startled
by its own hoof-beats on hard earth.

The mother watches its every move,
licking the ebony of its coat,
her muzzle pushing it back to standing,
firming its presence into something real
but her ears are radar-stiff, alert
to my boots on the ground,
blocking the path with a snort of challenge.

The purpose of my walk is to give myself
briefly to the moor and I've no wish
to cause mother and foal distress
so I back away, some strange need
pushing out my empty palms.
Once I'm gone they'll forget I was here
but I want them to know I mean no harm.

Lambing Season

Down the grassy lane into Kettlewell
a ewe and lamb become statues before me.
It is spring and I've spent much of this walk

trying to give space to feeding lambs.
I fall into the shadow of the drystone wall,
hope my stillness speaks of safety.

Their freedom to roam is illusion of course:
boundaries, however broad, are fixed by the farmer
and the mother-child bond is quickly curtailed.

The ewe follows my movements and her eyes flare
as if she is about to charge, but then
she seems to search inside me, and her hoof

edges forward to test the path. Satisfied,
she trots through the gateway, lamb following,
and my step is lighter for this fleeting understanding.

Grey Squirrel at Hawthornden Castle

It's my solemn duty to shoot them.
The gardener's laughter drops like a rock.
We are polite, as guests are, and later
his shotgun cracks through the storm-wrecked woods.

Others seem gentler. The ranger
at Glenridding lays cage traps by oak trees
but only so reds, or birds, can be released.
Any grey found trembling in the mesh at dawn

is *humanely dispatched* with a gun at close range.
They are hooligans, undesirables, taking over;
strip the bark off trees that haven't found their feet,
carry a virus that's lethal to the reds.

In Ireland, wardens brought pine martens back
to prowl like policeman, slinking through brush
and the canopies of trees, so the greys
that survive migrate to other woods.

The gun fires again and a squirrel
leaps onto the window ledge, in close-up:
haunches like springs, fingers clearly
defined as a child's, eyes watery, staring

through the glass as if seeking shelter,
Go and hide or he'll shoot you.
The cook rattles the window to shoo it away,
risking becoming an accessory.

The White Deer

I'd heard rumours of them
drawn to the Moss as it slipped back
to the wild wetland that it used to be

but I didn't really believe it. My God!
Of all days: crawling home in traffic,
redundancy letter beside me, wondering

what this landscape still offers,
and there it is, in the newly-minted light,
white as snowdrops, paint, clouds!

A Celt would have seen a messenger
from the otherworld, a warning to turn back
from whatever path they were following

but like Arthur and his knights I prefer
to see this deer as the start of a quest
for whatever Grail I seek.

It looks perfectly at ease, well clear
of the stand of beech, knowing safety
in the legends that it can never be caught.

Top Withens

From below, it looks cantankerous,
digging heels in the brown valley.
We hike through mist to make a connection

but a plaque in the wall denies
any resemblance to *Wuthering Heights*.
The restoration has been abandoned:

bright green door newly-fitted, porch tiled
with slate, some walls rebuilt, mortar shining
in the feeble light, but most of it is roofless,

open to the elements, the side door just a gap
in the wall, loose stones choked on the grassy floor
the house being pulled back into the valley.

Ted Hughes brought Sylvia Plath here,
photographed her in the sycamore
by the gable-end, talked of buying the house

but looking out over unforgiving hills
they both knew nothing much would grow here.
From that same tree, a kestrel's cry is scratched glass.

On the path back down, a hare – fur peeled back
from the empty cavity of its chest,
spine picked clean – is melting into the mud.

Brothers Water in August

It’s the warmth of light on grassy hills
that makes this valley intimate.
I’ve often walked beside the shallow lake
with notebook and pencil, jotting thoughts
about knapweed, moon daisies, Queen Anne’s Lace,
searching for the single image to unlock
the poem. Today, though, I’m empty-handed.

Two bikers with cameras zoom in
on lichen smoothing the bark of an oak.
A woman at an easel sacrifices
particulars of rocks and flowers
to a pastel rub of greens and blues.
Parents line up a photo of their baby,
before Dove Crag, grounding its future self.

Romantic travellers turned their backs
on the landscape altogether, preferring
to see nature as painters portrayed it,
through a Claude Glass, natural colours
harmonised by a sepia tint. They named
the lake for two drowned brothers
but there is little to prove the story is true.

Each of us who comes here is compelled to make
our own sense of all the things we see.
Strolling the path by birches like iron,
listening to wind on sun-dyed water
and feeling the burgeoning of green around me,
I try to keep my footprints small.

Ospreys at Foulshaw Moss

Huge nest knitted from deadfall and grass,
the male balanced on the lip like an Emperor,
its cloud-like body robed in pitch-brown wings
but face masked in black like a raider;
its mate slyly tearing at a fish.

We are rapt around the telescope, focused
on the crook of a spruce like a ruined tower.
Around us the Reserve wakes with white breaths
of cotton grass, tiny flames of bog asphodel,
and damselflies, electrifying the morning.

Rescued from plans for a landfill site
this place nudges nature the way it wants
to go: uprooting spruce to let it be
the wetland it was before fields were drained;
building a nesting platform when Ospreys flew over.

We take these things as signs of an easing
back to health. Once rare as a Golden Eagle,
now the male is everywhere: on a telegraph pole,
soaring around Whitbarrow Scar, and
dropping into the bay, wings back, talons forward.

Floods

Foolish of me to set off this morning.
The radio has talked of little else:
Pooley Bridge swept away like pebbles
and a crater sunk in the A591
cutting off the North Lakes from the South.
Down here, my car is idling in a long queue.

These fields have returned to wetlands,
drainage channels unable to cope
with rain like a tap turned on full.
Husks of left-over maize float like buoys,
a forgotten sheep is petrified while water
rises around it with terrible beauty.

My best friend just phoned. He had to retreat
to an upper floor with whatever
he could grab: family photos, books,
all the fragile barriers we build around us,
while sandbags at the downstairs door
are sodden with broken promises.

It's flooding more often and there's no real plan.
Oak on riverbanks can slow the flow;
at Foulshaw they're pulling out spruce
like rusted springs so moss can grow,
locking carbon in peat like petrol in a tank,
but it's a finger in a dam that's bursting.

Words whisper along the cars like dragonflies.

Water from the fields is meeting in the road

like hands clasping. The sky is too full of rain

to resolve. We’re going nowhere,

and try to turn, the new lake’s edge lapping at tyres.

Whitbarrow Scar looks suddenly small.

Looking for a Way Up Black Combe

Far below, the blocks and towers of Sellafield
are a geometric puzzle we can't resolve.
We focus on the slope ahead, try not
to think of leaking pools of waste
that pass diseases through our children;
of the sealed remains of a reactor fire
locked in time like a museum reconstruction
but a dormant volcano that might erupt again
if the door is opened; enough powdered plutonium
to blow out Cumbria like a child's breath
extinguishes a birthday candle.
The secret spreads north through shoreline mud
picked up by the gossip of Geiger counters.

There's no simple way up this mountain.
We splash through bog that cakes our boots.
Our feet heavy, we pause for a second
both wondering what the hell we're doing.
It's easy to think that, knowing what's below,
Black Combe prefers us to keep our distance.

Gary Snyder in the Forest

Choker-setters, they worked in pairs.
They hauled cable from the Caterpillar tractor,
wed it to a felled tree, and as the winch
dragged timber over forest floor, they watched
for snags which could jar the cable, topple the Cat
or bounce the tree onto the waiting loggers.

He signed on at Warm Springs as a logger
when McCarthy banned him from working
as a forest lookout, the only way
he could make a living while listening
to the racing meter of racoons on branches
and reading the language of light in the trees.

As logging goes we would all see worse.
Back then the harvest was quietly measured
with a good old-growth left standing, and the Cats
would weave around saplings without crushing them
but the deer still trembled into deeper woods
and once a high rigger shot a bear for sport.

There was one pine they could barely see
the top of. It fell for what seemed like minutes
and took three cables to get it moving. Not quite
having the words back then, he made an altar
- a broken bird’s egg, a bit of bark –
a kind of record, or a quiet apology.

The Coronation Beech

I knew little of trees, only that it was old
but in a town tied to rhythms of steel
where the primary colour was grey
there was something to love in its wild green sweep
and the rasp of bark against my fingers.

It reaches through memories of Sundays
skirting the park to visit grandparents:
its branches struggling to keep themselves aloft,
resting on the path, with one propped in the crook
of a younger tree like a walking stick.

It has never let me go, this tree. Forty years on
the steel factories have become museums
but it's still here, behind iron railings
with a name and interpretation board:
The Coronation Beech, planted for Victoria.

The wizened bark is full of tired faces,
limbs trail even more than before, knotting
themselves as they weave across the ground,
arthritic fingers spilling mast. Its crown
is balding, with patches leaves no longer hide.

The bough that was propped up is now lost
in the heady leaves of a full-grown tree
but all around the trunk in the long grasses
mossy fallen branches nourish the ground
and saplings spring from its dropped seed.

Driving over Carkin Moor

The road seems like this land’s sole purpose.
Crabbed fields fall away on either side, fenced
with barbed wire, yellow grass lank like hair,
silent as if even farmers have given up.

The verge is cluttered with Coke bottles,
lumpen Tesco carrier bags, Fanta cans,
sodden cardboard boxes: the detritus of daytrips
tossed from cars, the only sign of habitation.

A kestrel bludgeons the air, tracking
the ultraviolet streak of rats’ piss
through the rubbish. The sky is tight-lipped
with cloud. At any moment it will curse rain.

I imagine a new Angel of the North:
raw material of litter piled high, bound
with the luminous blue poly-propylene rope
that snakes around fence posts, growing daily.

The Serval

It’s the proportions that make it strange
to our limited perspective: as high
as my knees but body not much bigger
than a tabby, head like a large fist
bobbing on a long neck with ears
sharp enough to hear moles tunnelling beneath it.
‘Wolf deer’ for its tracking, and the way it runs
on those long, long legs, rippling the marvellous
symmetry of black spots on tawny fur
for which it is hunted, its pelt stitched into robes.

The spreading branches of trees and wild grass
in this zoo compound try to mimic
its disappearing African savannah, but
the way it jogs around the boundary!
It does not scrabble at the fence for a way out
but if the barriers suddenly vanished
it would run and run and never stop.
Its pinched, elderly face sees everything
at once, deeply, as if it knows
my every thoughtless act, but does not care.

In the Fruit Bat Forest

Rodrigues flying foxes, big as crows
with the same fluid script of flight
hook onto fibreglass trees and fold themselves
into sacs with their rubbery wings like

magicians performing vanishing tricks.
The sound is almost too high for hearing,
ghost-voices that disappear when I try
to tune in, like a memory just beyond recall.

Seba's fruit bats, no bigger than my thumb,
move like shadows detaching from darkness,
flying with a stuttering broken syntax
past a lightshade painted to mimic the moon.

One hovers in front of me for just a second
so close I feel its wings on my cheeks
and its shrunken face isn't strange
but a connection I suddenly remember.

Leaving through the heavy plastic drapes
one flits out behind me into the foyer,
madly rushing from corner to corner,
trying to escape the truth of daylight.

Walking Without Walter

Yesterday I killed my friend.
Rescued from a family at the end of their tether,
for three years I walked him daily:

his comical legs short but strong as ash trees,
pumping along his long dachshund body, stopping
to savour an abstract symphony of smells.

But he was bred for badger setts,
could calculate the jump from chair to cupboard
that would reach his toys on the highest shelf

and something still snapped when visitors knocked,
reduced him to just teeth and claws,
domesticity dropped like an old coat.

The vet said that, with kids on the street,
it would only take the door to not quite catch.
As he pushed in the needle, Walter's eyes

filmed over. Looking into them I wondered
at his full story, told myself he was gaining
a kind of peace, and other things I didn't believe.

I climb the stone stile and squeeze through
the gap to the open fell, weightless
without him tugging on his lead.

Up by the gorse a golden retriever
bounds along, relishing the dips in the slope,
pausing to check the distance from its owner.

An Allotment Handbook

(1) Site

It's on the border of town, where houses
have run out of breath, between fields
mainly left for sileage. It feels secret
though it hardly hidden, just across
from the golf course and sheep-cropped fell:
a patch of dead ground, given over
to self-sufficiency by government act,
separated from the fields by a broken wall.

It isn't good soil: clay, easier to make
pots with than grow food, but raking in
compost, leaf-mould, and fish, blood and bone,
little by little we will all stake our claim,
perhaps seeing shades of miners who worked
their own plots in the little light granted them.

(2) The Apple Tree

I still have to clear inherited litter:
flimsy fruit cage, ranks of rotting cabbage,
but I need to plant my own colours
in the wet clay of this allotment plot
so fleeced and gloved against February's chill
I find a space for a Keswick Conlin,
spread its roots in soil like silver wire.

The next day there's a ring of white wood
bitten in the bark a foot from the base,
cutting the feeding path like a fuse,
the tips of branches already brittle.
Rabbits! Getting through the crumbling stone wall.
I want this space to be marginal,
to work with nature but … little bastards!

(3) Digging Over

Spring soil yields softly to the spade’s cut
as I forget myself in this digging
and turning, hypnotic as a metronome,
airing soil, preparing for planting.

The robin is a shock, a small blaze
of burnished red and brown, dragging a worm
from turned soil then, with more hop than flight,
waiting on a branch for the next bounty.

Secure in its territory, brazen
even, entirely focused on the ground,
like a jazz musician soloing
it finds the spaces in my rhythm

and this is what matters, each of us giving
room to the other in an unspoken contract.

(4) Seeds

A handful of grit or a flattened pearl
so small and light a breath might banish it.
Little to suggest what they might become.
Even in March, nights here sharpen with frost
so I thumb seeds into squares of compost,
watered and kept by the window for light
until pale shoots push upwards, strange as moles,

then bigger pots, days in the early sun
but still sheltered at night. When leaves open
and there's faith in the season, I plant them
in the allotment beds. They seem so lost
in this stretch of earth, but individual
as children: a smirk in a curl of leaf
or coyness in a slight lean to the left.

(5) Creeping Buttercup

I pull handfuls of stalks, too young and thin
to hold the weight of leaves like small green moons,
gravel rubbing my knees through worn-out jeans.
It crowds the side of the path, and tunnels
beneath the rough wood borders of the beds.
Open Day tomorrow, each plot must look
dusted and hoovered, as if beans and peas
are made in a factory, not living earth.

Yes, it’s invasive, would strangle the plot,
and gives up its grip in friable soil
easy as lifting it out of water
but we need to make a deal with nature.
I’ll leave some to flower at the path’s edge,
yellow winking in the breeze, a token.

(6) Blight

Black spots on the leaves like melanomas.
I knew it immediately: a fungus, carried
on a warm wet wind, or over-wintered
on last year's potatoes rotting in soil.
Yesterday they were bright green, upright,
leaves curving out from stems like water
in a layered fountain. Now they lean
against each other like shocked survivors.

I lay the plants aside to be destroyed
but harvest what I can of the tubers:
kestrel, *violetta*, *pink fir apple*,
laid on paper on the cold hearth to dry
and for skins to toughen, muddy and wizened
like archaeological findings, or refugees.

(7) Drought

The mains pipes stop at the final house
so each plot has a water tank or butt
fed by a gutter and pipe rigged to a shed.
I love the freedom of this gift from the sky!
My neighbour said their tank was never less
than half-full, but a fortnight without rain
and my plastic tap releases only air.
The soil is already baked into a mosaic
of tiny ravines and the edges of leaves
on beans and corn are dry and yellow.

The only thing is to fill bottles at home,
make several trips up the hill in the car,
wake eager for the soft percussion of rain,
stare through the window at a flawless sky.

(8) Harvest

The pea-vine seemed to give up the ghost
before the season started, but one morning
sheathes of peas dangled down as if pinned there
overnight by a jack-in-the-green.
Husks of sweetcorn, the envy of the site,
built in the unshaded spot as if from light;
the odd potato is raked clear, courgettes
lie beneath leaves like long balloons.

These before dinner trips: a form, at least,
of seasonal eating. Not everything
has come up and there's not much of what has.
A few hours a week: poor attempt at self-
sufficiency, but locked into the life I lead
this small harvest tastes like possibility.

(9) Composting

A mound of peelings mottled as leather,
cauliflower leaves foxed like old paper,
mites and worms burrowing through heaped spoil.
Much of the mound is holding its form
but there are traces of it beginning
to transform into the soft dark loam
of something more than the sum of its parts.

I fork it over to circulate air
aid the process of decomposition.
I'll try to do this every few weeks
and in Autumn I'll dig it into the plot:
both gratitude and a kind of prayer
in the returning of scraps of harvest
to feed the depleted soil it came from.

A Local Farm

There's something generous in these fields
at the feet of Ashhurst's Hill, boundaries
of hawthorn stitching them into a patchwork:
corn, potatoes, young cabbages, sheep,
each with space to make their own shapes.
With no pesticides to silence them
bees and butterflies charge the green rows.
In the lakes of neat produce, islands
of oak, dog rose and nettle are oases
of wildness for buzzards and stoats.

This is the work of farmers who understand
their hold on land is only temporary.
By Dungeon Wood a bale of hay spills
onto the ground, a gift for passing horses
and there's a kind of love in the path that's left
at the field's edge, wide enough for dancing.

Sunday Evening: Late Summer

As dusk drains the blue from the cloudless day
I unlock the garage door and turn to look.
The early moon is a flat tyre. The sky
is polished to metal, with shadows sharpening.

No breath of sound on the terraced street
or from the aching climb of the road beyond,
everyone has hunkered down. A few parked cars
are the only sign of anyone home.

Pink traces of the sinking sun score the outline
of the Fell. In the field the single ash
I often imagine guarding the town,
bows its branches beneath the strain of leaves.

From here, the houses seem to have slipped
into place as if by accident, and sit
at odds with each other, as if
at any moment their fragile grip could loosen.

I always thought I would never leave here
but perhaps nothing should be static.
A flock of starlings arrows overhead
to a destination they carry within them.

Geese

The first of the season, and before we see
their dark wave roll through the sky, their sound
is felt as much as heard. There's something joyful
in the way it builds from a slow rip
in damp October air, like a brass band
resolving into music from a distant clamour:

Canada geese this time, necks thrust out
like black shafts, the slap of brown wings
propelling them in an unlikely arrowhead.
Watching them pass above is a reminder
of the weight of our feet on earth
and the lightness of what is possible.

The first I remember were in Aberlady,
flying in to winter on the saltmarsh,
their call running through me like new love
in a new home: barnacles, magical
as the folktale that they emerge from water
like a moth from a chrysalis.

Since then I haven't been aware of searching
until I found them: greylags, pinkfoots,
crowding the shores of the Solway
or gathered in a field in Grasmere after rain.
Different species, the same sound and pattern,
a sense of home in each new place.

Now, you and I pause to watch them here

in Lydiate, and I’m getting my bearings once again.

This was all once lake, drained for farmland,

and I wonder if geese flew here even then,

each one knowing their place in the formation,

with no doubt at all in their direction.

Campaign

We watch from the kitchen of the house
you grew up in, where I'm placing roots,
as lads hop off the tractor to plant seedlings
by hand, a far cry from grain drills like tanks,
and the old ways feel like a new start.
The High Court swept away the developer's plan
and your eyes shine like light on ploughed earth

as you tell me of dusk walks to the copse
to identify whiskered bats flitting through
the exposed nerves of sycamores,
and to estimate the ages of oak and ash;
public meetings where you handed out poems,
tiny lenses to change people's view of the land ;
all entered in a report with by-laws quoted.

It's not just about what we see from a window
but a making peace with space we've borrowed.
In the time the courts have taken, the back meadow
is a wood, beeches sprung from drifted seed.
In the field, the farmer launches a bird-scarer:
a hawk on a kite like a flag of celebration.
A buzzard glides above it, sensing no danger.

Sparrowhawk

In the annual RSPB birdwatching hour
the sudden shift in the mood of the garden
is as real as a change in the light.
Goldfinches flurry like blossom in a breeze,
and it's a shock to see the sparrowhawk
perching in the branches of the alder
as if it sprung from a bud like a leaf.

It's a presence far beyond itself,
a small living sculpture of muscled blue-grey,
wings tight as if keeping itself in check.
Turning from me its spotlight gaze moves
like a sniper over the wild grasses
beyond the boundary of this measured lawn,
casually processing any movement below.

I feel a pang for the dunnocks and great tits
who have left the garden to this weighty silence.
Cylinders of seed swinging from branches
offer them this space, but the truth of nature
waits in the alder. The hawk stretches time
and it feels like hours before it leaves the tree,
almost falling into the warm air.

The spread of wings seems an after-thought,
the hawk so sure of itself that each action
requires little effort, and only when it is gone
do I see the wood pigeon perched
a few branches below, deep in the leaves:
so still it seems emptied, petrified
by its sense of the sparrowhawk's instinct.

Barn Owl Over Plex Moss

Easy to see why they are taken for ghosts:
floating from lifeless houses at dusk,
silken wings almost silent as they brush through air.

I have never been this close for so long.
It glides at my height over the moss
so near I could almost reach and stroke it:

its face tilted like a radar dish,
feeding sound to uneven ears, to pin
the rustle of mice it could hear under snow.

You squeeze my hand and we try to quieten
our breathing. Timid, at the slightest noise
they seek refuge in trees, grieve themselves away.

To some, barn owls take the souls of the dead,
for others, *spirit guides* in uncertain times,
appearing to make us feel we can fly.

Can this be seen as other than a gift?
A new life with you, in another new place,
and our late November walk, on reclaimed ground,

the first chance I've had to get my bearings.
Bringing the owl close through your binoculars,
pale brown markings are a little like hearts.

A heron, stalking the brook below,
loses patience with the owl. With a sigh
of wings, it leaves this place to the three of us.

Rooks Nesting

They could be scraps of ash blown from a chimney
but purpose resolves their shapes as they pass
twigs to mates in the crooks of beeches,
beak to beak in a gesture like love.

As they work, the nest becomes part of the tree:
a dark patch of moss or dense growth of twigs,
deepening into a warm, protective cone.
When the week goes on their numbers grow.

I watch them in snatches from the station,
on my way to a city where I don't see birds.
They pay no mind to the heavy breath of trains,
their coarse calls refusing any questions,

and I envy their ease of making a home.
After shifts in jobs and shifts in love
I am looking for a place to plant trees
and watch them grow, where birds might come.

Bees on the Cheshire Lines

You notice it rolled up on my shoulder:
an early bumblebee, pulsing stripes of coal
and flame as if singing courage to itself.

Not wanting to startle it into stinging
you lift your walking pole, prise the bee
to perch on the tip. It looks lost or scared.

I feel faint to think that there are fewer now
and we don’t know why for sure, but I see
the golden cloth of oilseed rape beside us

and the chemicals the seeds are drenched in,
that don’t kill bees but act like static
on their homing signal. These creatures,

that travel miles on their daily forage,
can recognise a farmhouse they once passed
and read the earth’s magnetic pulse like a map,

can’t find their way back to the nest,
and a bee without family is without a soul.
We wonder about nudging it free

when its wings unfurl and, muscles buzzing,
it weaves punctured circles in the air
above these carefully-plotted paths.

Skylarks

So many this year: two on the Haul Road
at Marshside, both settled in slow dips
in the dry-flaked salt-rimed mud, remaining
long after our shadows crossed over them
and when they flew off it wasn't urgent
but in easy waves like a summer tide.

Even closer at Crosby Dunes: declaiming
from a post, crest-feather like a Cavalier,
it somehow managed to look amused
at our ordinary lives passing it by,
its beak closing around a song
that could easily be taken for laughter.

Out of the sea of grass at Parkgate
they rise as if balanced on geysers, wings
winding themselves up invisible poles,
then dropping, bouncing down cushions of air
casting out splinters of music
before landing like stones on the marsh, unharmed.

Why they do this is merely guesswork
but watching them, time freezes, like in the story
of the monk who sat on a stone to watch
a skylark's flight, then returned to the abbey
to discover himself a stranger, realising
a century had passed without him noticing.

Hares in a field near Newburgh

They are crouching in the stubble at the far side.
Little more at first than a thickening of air,
only the occasional shuffle
distinguishes them from dusty brown stalks

but then I count one, two, four, six!
So many together must be family, come
for the evening's lie, a chosen patch of earth
the nearest hares have to a home.

As one they jerk up then freeze, antennae
for ears, picking up the mewl of a buzzard
long before I can separate the sound
from the creak of branches in the wood beside me.

An older buck slides towards a leveret
as if he simply stretched himself out
rather than took an actual step.
I hardly breathe, not wanting to add to their fear.

With that same illusion of movement
without moving, the adults take control
guiding the youngsters to shelter in the woods
and when the last one fades into the soft dark

I'm released from a snare. Go well, hares!
Let the restless spotlight of the buzzard's stare
bring its necessary death to others.
Carry on being so much more than you are.

Sea Turtle

Survivor from another age
its dinosaur head breaks surface,
snatching air, then retreats;

mottled as an autumn oakleaf
it slides through sapphire water,
its shell no impediment to grace.

We track it around the harbour.
A few times we think it has gone
but it reappears by a moored cruiser.

Its rarity is cause enough to celebrate,
given oil spills and plastic bags
that they mistake for jellyfish and swallow.

As it bobs up for another breather,
flippers cut slow curves through waves
and it looks like it is taking a bow.

I swear there is joy in that turtle,
a joy that we hold inside us
when it heads out to the open sea.

Vultures

We first see them circling the hazy peaks
on a high plateau in the Amari Valley,
bringing dusk down with them. The wings,
square as balsa wood, and sawdust-pale chest,
mark one as a bearded vulture,
a lammergeier, a pair of griffons
circling it like supplicants around a priest.

A few days later there's another, up close,
near the throat of the Samaria Gorge,
its serpent-neck bending over a dead goat
as if performing a ritual. It senses us
and straightens, a shaman,
feathered head a mask, dark wings a cloak,
claws shuffling in a ceremonial dance.

Sensing the approach of death
like we foresee rain by scenting the wind
they belong to a realm we would rather not consider
but they are cleaners of sorts, sterilising
and purifying the left-behind dead,
animal and human alike, and they are in decline
from destroyed homes or poisoned prey.

We feel their shadow one last time

in the bright canyon of the Panormo Street:

six griffons, streamlined wings and rod-straight necks,

their high passage dragging silence with it,

muffling the quotidian hum

from the nearby road. I can’t quite resist

the strange urge to doff my hat.

Snorkelling in Kalami Bay

Damselfish, wrasse, annular seabream
hang in crevices between rocks, or swim

around me, their stripes fragments of coloured glass
on skin so clear it looks transparent.

In this world the tide remakes daily,
the weight of water pushes over schist and gneiss

and sand explodes from lichen.
Sea urchins cling to the floor like mines

but, buoyed by warm salt waves, I am
lighter than I thought possible.

How have I lived until now without feeling this?
Fronds of wrack and scraps of driftwood brush past

and everything here, including me,
is a small part of the sea's random memory.

Then we are all pitched off course, a shockwave
running around the bay, reflected by the cliffs.

My arms pump to keep balance, fish run
in shoals, strands of kelp spin through the water.

It passes quickly and things slide back
into equilibrium, but I am suddenly cold,

the nerves in my arms and legs tingling

with the sense of what could be lost.

Rivington Pike

(1) Vision

A stone arch in the middle of a clearing
and a staircase climbing nowhere, as if
we might pass into the world that he's created.

At every turn there is something that doesn't
belong on a wooded Lancashire hillside
above the frayed blue sheet of a reservoir:

broken mosaics now set only in grass;
towers, their voices stopped with plywood;
a crumbling chimney like a lightning-struck tree.

This estate was Lord Lever's rhapsody,
letting both the North and the rest of the world
hear the Northern landscape play a new tune,

but the bringing together of parts
proved too vast for his money and time
and the pages of the score are now torn and scattered.

Yes in the clarity of the Chinese Water Garden,
where a few volunteers caught snatches on the wind
the right notes still float like water lilies.

(2) Menagerie

At Rivington are traces of a zoo
that never was. Within the terrace
of stone cages, shadows flicker,

but pressing myself to the rusting bars,
in the play of light through beech leaves
are the rippling flames of lions and tigers

that Lord Lever tried to bring here,
or even unicorns and centaurs,
creatures from myth and folktales

that fed on rumour like this park once did
but as my senses probe the darkness
this menagerie of unfinished dreams

tells me to look around, not in cages,
for glimpses of otherness,
let imagination dance with what we find.

Skeleton of a Mastodon in the Natural History Museum, London

It is large as a security truck,
armour for bones, scimitars for tusks,
looking like it can step from the platform,
plough its way through the cavernous hall.

But the board beside it says they were gentle,
taking comfort from the warmth of the herd
grazing the sheltered forest floor, or
browsing leaves and fruits that few could reach.

Did the hunters who felled the last one know?
They must have seen numbers dwindle
from panicked stampedes over grassy plains
to the last few hiding in forests of pine.

From what's known of earlier versions of us
hunting is rarely just about food
and it is easy to hear celebration
as the last Mastodon's legs collapsed beneath it.

In the end, this is what extinction means:
staring at a skeleton in a museum foyer,
imagining the Giant Panda or even the Badger
exhibited beside it before too long.

Part Two

Chapter One

Entering the Wilderness: Poetry, the Environment, and the Critical Territory

This chapter introduces key ideas within ecocriticism and ecologically-aware nature poetry, and explores some of the complexities within the critical terms and their definitions. It points to differing perspectives on the extent to which ecologically-aware nature poetry should be politicised, and places my own work within the context of these ideas. It closes by introducing the work of the four key poets whose work will be addressed in this thesis: Ted Hughes, Gary Snyder, John Kinsella and Wendell Berry.

The development of poetry-related ecocriticism is complex, and Sam Solnick states that 'one cannot talk of ecocriticism (or indeed ecopoetry) in the singular anymore'.[36] A key difference in perspectives was apparent from early on. Leonard Scigaj talks about the 'sustainable poem', defining it as that which:

> presents nature as a separate, and at least equal, other; that offers exemplary models of biocentric perception and behaviour; that does not subordinate nature to a superior human consciousness or reduce nature to immanence. [37]

For Scigaj, ecopoetry involves an ideological stance. It attaches fundamental rights to nature rather than treating it as a resource to be exploited, it suggests appropriate ways to behave with regard to nature, and it relates to nature as we scientifically understand it to be rather than attaching religious significance to it. Jonathan Bate indicates a different approach to the extent to which ecopoetry should be ideologically-driven, focusing on poetry as tool for reconnection with nature. The difference is explored in this chapter.

Dwelling and Reconnection

Bate's principal argument is that writers in the Romantic tradition, which for Bate begins in the late 18th century, have been especially concerned with humanity's separation from

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[36] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.26.

[37] Leonard M. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), p.9.

nature.[38] Poetic language is 'a special kind of expression which may effect an imaginative reunification of mind and nature', helping us recover this lost connection.[39] He describes this broadly conceived Romanticism as an 'ecopoetic', a 'poeisis' (making) of the 'oikos' (home or dwelling place.)[40] Ecopoetry, for Bate then, is concerned primarily with re-enchantment and with an authentic experience of dwelling which reunites us with nature, drawing heavily on his interpretation of Martin Heidegger's concept. He discusses how, for Heidegger, dwelling is the authentic mode of being. He suggests that:

> We achieve being *not* when we represent the world but when we stand open to *it*s being. Poetry is the original admission of dwelling because it is a presencing not a representation, a form of being, not of mapping.[41]

Bate suggests that the poet immerses themselves in the experience of dwelling, without any preconceived notions, and reflects on this experience. He draws a distinction between 'experiencing' the world and 'describing' it. In his reading of poems such as Wordsworth's *Lines written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* the distinction seems to refer to the sensory nature of the description, the sounds and smells recreating the experience for the reader. This experience will then produce 'authentic' thought and feeling. Bate goes on to talk about Heidegger's idea of 'the open', the concept of a mode of being borrowed from Rainer Maria Rilke, where there is 'no division between nature and consciousness'.[42] The implication of this is that such work, in retuning a reader's senses to the world around them, will better enable them to care for it.

Heidegger's essay goes further than Bate's concept of dwelling suggests. Heidegger's idea of 'taking a measure' draws in heaven and earth to imply a philosophical understanding, and a corresponding ethical dimension, as well as a sensory one. Despite differences in readings of it, however, the concept of dwelling has been hugely influential on British ecopoetry, particularly the work of Kathleen Jamie and John Burnside, whose poetry includes three

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[38] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, (London: Picador, 2000), p.245.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid, p.76.
[41] Ibid, p.262.
[42] Ibid, p.263.

collections that Tom Bristow describes as 'the dwelling trilogy.'[43] Kathleen Jamie's *The Tree House* marked her conscious transformation into a nature poet. [44] The publicity for the book describes an alternative way of 'dwelling with the earth'. It suggests that the poems 'propose a way of living which recognises the earth as home to many different consciousnesses -- and a means of authentic engagement with "this, the only world."'[45] In practice the book is a series of encounters which pay close attention to nature, and there is a deliberate minimising of a narrative presence as she encounters trees, basking sharks and whales, suggesting that finding a way to privilege nature is a way forward.

John Burnside takes the concept further, exploring the ethical dimension in a way that is closer to Heidegger himself than Bate's interpretation of him. For Burnside, poetry is 'an attempt to understand and describe a meaningful way of dwelling' or 'a technique for reclaiming the authentic.' [46] Burnside appears to privilege the senses when he suggests that 'the song of the earth is not a metaphor, but an actual sound, one that can be listened to.' He takes this further though, his work often meditating on what an authentic dwelling place might look like. In his poem 'Bleik' in *The Light Trap* he considers a village and speculates that:

> everything is here
> that we could need:
> a main street with a sports club and a church;
> a cottage roofed with turf, its garden
> narrow and trim, with lilac[47]

Behind this description are ideas of community and the poem goes on to articulate the non-human aspects of this, the landscape and the animals that share it. Later, the poem concludes that this is 'a glimpse of something/not quite what we thought,/but just enough,

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[43] Bristow is referring to *The Asylum Dance*, *The Light Trap* and *The Good Neighbour*. Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.42.
[44] Kathleen Jamie *PBS Autumn Bulletin* (PBS, London, 2003).
[45] Back cover text in Kathleen Jamie, *The Tree House* (London: Picador, 2004).
[46]John Burnside 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology' in Robert Crawford, *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Also referenced in Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p.23.
[47] John Burnside,*The Light Trap* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), p.60.

that we can think of home.'[48] This is connection with the landscape in a contemporary context, not quite the ideal experience of dwelling that we might have in mind, but enough to suggest it to us.

Bate's terms do require further interrogation. The term 'ecopoetics' is itself problematic. The term 'oikos' has developed into 'eco' and broadened to include all aspects of dwelling, but in Greek drama the term was used in a reductive way to refer to the household, or the domestic. This often came into conflict with the needs of the 'polis' or the city, from which the word 'politics' is derived. [49] In modern terms the idea of poetry as the 'making of the home' seems extremely broad, not even confining poetry to *verse* (in its broadest sense), and we could argue for the majority of poetry to be the 'making of a dwelling-place' in some sense. For Bate the term still comes into conflict with politics too. Though he talks of poetry 'saving the earth', he sees a dilemma in the relationship between ecopoetry and environmentalism:

> A work of literary criticism would not be an appropriate place to spell out a practical programme for better environmental management. Ecopoetics should not begin with a set of assumptions or proposals about particular environmental issues, but as a way of reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth. The dilemma of Green reading is that it must, but cannot, separate ecopoetics from ecopolitics. [50]

He does not suggest how this dilemma might be resolved. David Knowles and Sharon Blackie, in the preface to their anthology *Entanglements: New Ecopoetry*, frame their selection of poems in similar terms to Bate, stating that:

> We ruled out poems that were largely political, or were straightforwardly 'environmental' because we were looking for something different: for a new wave of poetry …..that dramatizes a growing hunger for a meaningful connection with the earth. [42]

[48] Ibid, p.62.
[49] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth,* p.6.
[50] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth,* p.266.

This 'meaningful connection' is seen here as an end in itself, taking it for granted that it will have an effect on a reader's environmental behaviour, making what Sam Solnick calls an 'implicit connection between consciousness and conscience'.[51] There is also an implicit criticism here of poetry that is largely political or straightforwardly environmental, which ties in with some received perceptions of, particularly British lyric, poetry.

Activism in the Lyric Tradition

British ecologically-aware nature poetry is still to a large extent dominated by the lyric tradition and by Bate's call for a return to the values of Romanticism in *The Song of the Earth,* and, as we have seen, Bate is wary of ecopoetry being overtly politicised.[52] For Bate, an ecopoem works by 'transforming into language an experience of dwelling upon the earth.'[53] He is critical of poetry that: 'has been written as an expression of a set of opinions.' In Chapter Two we will explore this more fully when we look at alternative readings of Gary Snyder's poem 'Mother Earth: Her Whales', but Bate's emphasis on the resonances of language is an important aspect of lyric poetry.

The poet and critic Jay Parini underlines this by suggesting that language in poems is: 'A kind of echo chamber in which the origins of words ….. enhance their current connotations and denotations.'[54] The implication here is that poetry works through layers of meaning in language, and this is part of its richness, but a difficulty arises when this centrality of language seems to place the role of ideas in poetry into a secondary position. Parini goes on to say that 'Poetry is not sloganeering, and when poets directly confront a particular political crisis they need to do so carefully, even warily. They rarely put forward direct solutions to problems.'[55] This is further highlighted by Don Paterson. He is suspicious of ideas driving poetry: 'If you have a good idea for a poem, it isn't one. If I know what I want to write about then I know it is bad because there is no surprise to it'.[56] The implication here is that we should let the layers of possible meanings in

[51] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (London: Routledge 2017), p.25.
[52] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.99.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Jay Parini, *Why Poetry Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p.xvii.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Don Paterson, interviewed by Stephen Carruthers, *On poetry and Writing: An Interview with Don Paterson,* Dundee University Review of the Arts 2017 https://dura-dundee.org.uk/2017/02/03/on-poetry-and-writing-an-interview-with-don-paterson/

language lead the poem. All this seems to imply a qualitative judgement on poetry which sets out from an ideological stance.

These questions became important to me as my own writing developed in parallel, to a large extent, with the developments in British ecocriticism and the resurgence of interest in British nature poetry. As my awareness and understanding of the ecological crisis grew, I wanted to explore the ways that this reconnection or re-engagement was contributing to ecological understanding. Is there an explicit relationship between consciousness and conscience, and why should poets be wary of stating opinions? I wanted to push my poems to see if the essentially lyric poetry I was writing was able to accommodate environmental and ecological ideas and a more overtly political stance, while still being alert to the freshness, resonance and elements of surprise in language.

Ecocriticism and the Complexity of the Crisis

My sense of the limitations in Bate's approach has been addressed by other critics. Sam Solnick highlights how:

> particularly within early ecocriticism, resistance to *instrumentality* (my italics) led to critical approaches overly focused on landscape or renewed sensory engagement which were often inappropriate for addressing the complexity of contemporary ecology.[57]

Solnick appears to be suggesting here that the link between consciousness and conscience, between awareness and action, is not an automatic one and that the complexity of the environmental crisis required a more critical approach. He cites the work of Laurence Buell and Scott Slovic who have described subsequent, more theoretical, 'waves' of ecocriticism.[58] They categorise the 'first wave' of ecocriticism as being preoccupied with sensory engagement with place, or what they term 'wilderness writing'. Solnick also suggests however that the level of engagement with environmentalist ideas has consistently been contested within ecocriticism, with other early ecocritics such as Terry Gifford firmly

[57] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p.28.
[58] Ibid, p.25.

drawing on an ideological stance, so the unity implied by the analogy of the wave does not hold, as it isn't a question of one wave replacing another. [59]

Solnick does however acknowledge a major shift in emphasis in recent ecocriticism. [60] He draws on the work of Timothy Morton and Timothy Clark. Morton rejects what he calls 'ecomimesis' or writing that 'retunes our senses to the great outdoors' as failing to show the 'complexity of the ways humans are embedded in their environment.'[61] We can see this complexity by thinking of the ways such a seemingly simple task as shopping for food includes questions of transport, which have implication for carbon emissions, and how locally the food is produced, which brings in a whole range of other questions, before we even think of how we earned the money to pay for it. There is an implication here that if engagement with the environment is limited to the senses, then it is not going far enough in ecological terms. Morton's ideas are developed by Timothy Clark who suggests that ecocriticism has focused too much on individual choices and actions without considering the wider context of complex issues such as climate change.'[62]

Clark and Morton are right to highlight such complexity. There is little agreement, even among ecologists, over what the issues are, let alone agreed solutions. Solnick points to the way, within environmentalist thinking 'one …goal (like low-carbon energy generation) might stand in the way of another (such as the protection of species and habitats.)'[63] Climate change is only one aspect of the crisis but it has its roots in deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels, two activities whose influences reach into so many aspects of human life that it becomes baffling to consider alternatives. Braden Allenby and Daniel Sarewitz describe how issues arise due to the human inability to think beyond certain levels of complexity. [64] They describe how a tool such as a car, which they characterise as a 'level one system' becomes a 'level two system' when it becomes involved in complex social relations, such as getting people to work, and a 'level three system' when these relations have planetary effects.

[59] Ibid, p.29.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009), p.137, also cited in ibid, p.24.
[62] Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept,* p.8.
[63] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish poetry,* p.41.
[64] Braden R. Allenby and Daniel R. Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition* (London: The MIT Press, 2013) , p.6.

Timothy Clark discusses Allenby and Sarewitz's vision as a 'tipping point for an unimaginable complexity, beyond which there seems nothing but paralysis.' [65] He questions the role of individual agency where the scale effects of that agency are incalculable. For Clark, individual experience, particularly as it relates to art and literature, 'will therefore always struggle with the global problems of the Anthropocene.'[66]

My difficulty with this perspective is Clark's implication of 'paralysis', or what Greg Garrard calls 'paralysing pessimism.'[67] Clark appears to be suggesting that because we are not sure what to do, then all we can do as poets is reflect that complexity. In the context of my own practice, if poetry restricts itself to documenting complexity then it becomes another form of ecomimesis. In my work as a poet, individual action still holds relevance, even if that relevance is limited to trying to minimise the damage of our presence, or to 'do no harm', and lyric poetry can explore this, as discussed in Chapter Four. In my poetry I explore this by reflecting on initiatives that are trying to combat environmental damage, such as rewilding and species protection programmes, and on individual actions such as working plots of land.

Matthew Griffiths develops Clark's ideas to suggest that lyric poetry is limited in its ability to respond to climate change specifically. He develops his argument through a critical reading of Andrew Motion's five poem sequence 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', written to 'support the launch of the 10:10 campaign to reduce carbon emissions'. Griffiths questions the poem for what he describes as its 'pseudo-Romanticism', and the 'imaginative projection' required as Motion's poem shifts its reflections from his garden to the melting polar ice-caps. He frames his argument as 'Lyricism v Modernism' and goes on to say that 'conventional strategies such as Motion's demonstrate limited insight to the idea of climate change'. [68] Griffiths goes on to highlight 'the difficulty of bearing witness to a range of phenomena whose complexity is largely not amenable to sense experience'.[69] He suggests that this complexity can only be captured in a 'more disjunctive, ambiguous and associative' type of poetry. [70]

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[65] Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*, p.11.
[66] Ibid, p.5.
[67] Greg Garrard, quoted in Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p.42.
[68] Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World*, p.5.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

It may be true as Griffiths says that climate change as an overall concept is not amenable to sensory experience but we can root aspects of it in local changes, as we can with other elements of the environmental crisis. In my own poems I have addressed climate change through rising tides, in the poem sequence 'Formby Beach', and through flooding, in the poem 'Floods', which looks at the ways local action can attempt to ameliorate the effects of this.

Ironically, while ecocritics such as Matthew Griffiths are looking to modernism's use of form to reflect the global scale of the environmental crisis, other ecocritics are beginning to once again acknowledge the value of place-based nature writing. For Yvonne Reddick, Timothy Clark 'is too nihilistic in his appraisal of the capabilities of ecological art and literature. There is no doubt that poetry *is* capable of encouraging ecological awareness in individuals.'[71] The local need not be parochial. Neal Alexander and David Cooper, also referenced by Solnick, point out the continued importance for writers of being grounded in a specific location while also being aware of the web of global interconnections. [72] Locally-based place poetry can give us a stance from which to consider the wider implications of our actions and observations. For Greg Garrard:

> 'Ecomimesis' is already not what it used (or what Morton uses it) to be. Nature writing is capable of demonstrating a sophistication…and self-consciousness. New nature writing associated with figures such as Robert Macfarlane and Kathleen Jamie is attentive to the local but locates it within global networks[73]

We shall see from looking at other early ecocritics such as Terry Gifford, and looking across to the United States, that we may question whether 'ecomimesis' was ever what Garrard or Morton seem to think it used to be, but Garrard acknowledges here that a place-based nature poetry is capable of reflecting on global issues, though his later article co-written

[71] Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, p.27.
[72] Neal Alexander and David Cooper, 'Poetry & Geography : Space and Place in Post-War Poetry' (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2013), p.3.
[73] Greg Garrard 'The Unbearable Lightness of Green: Air Travel, Climate Change and Literature', Green Letters, 17(2) 2013. Also cited in Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene : Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p.25.

with Susanna Lidström makes the distinction, referred to in the introduction to this thesis, between 'ecophenomenological poetry' which 'focuses on descriptions and appreciation of non-human nature with roots in Romantic and deep ecology traditions', and 'environmental poetry' that 'recognises the historical, political and cultural dimensions of the relationship between human and non-human nature'.[74] The division is between individual experience on the one hand and social structures on the other, and Lidström and Garrard appear to follow Timothy Clark's ideas of individual action having little significance against the scale and complexity of the environmental crisis. As referred to in the introduction, this is problematic. Lidström and Garrard seem unaware that these two things can operate in a single poem at the same time, with a poem based on individual sensory experience of a particular locality making a connection to a wider political context, and this chapter has already pointed out to the potential nihilism in Clark's approach. As Bate states, despite what Solnick calls his 'resistance to instrumentation', 'to be at home in the world you have to begin with your own dwelling place: think globally, act locally.'[75] The following chapters of this thesis explore, through close reading of the key poets under discussion and through discussions of the processes of writing of my own poems, how poems can be both ecophenomenological and environmental.

Poetry and the Post-Pastoral

Terry Gifford is part of Buell's 'first-wave' of ecocriticism, but he goes further than Bate in his ideas of how poetry can engage with environmental issues. In *Green Voices*, a book that predates *Song of the Earth* by five years, Gifford argues that 'nature poetry' has become a pejorative term. [76] He cites a review by Hilary Llewellyn Williams in a *Green Issue* of *Poetry Wales* to suggest that there is a role for poetry beyond the picturesque. For Williams:

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[74] Greg Garrard and Susanna Lidström 'Images Adequate to our Predicament: Ecology, Environment and Ecopoetics', *Environmental Humanities,* Issue 5 (2014) p.50, also referenced in Ibid.

[75] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p.24; Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition,* p.190.

[76] Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.3. This is endorsed by Neil Astley in the introduction to his anthology *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems.* Astley suggests that, before increased awareness of the environmental crisis, nature poetry was largely regarded as irrelevant, with 80% of the UKs population (and 95% of the world's population) now living in urban areas. He cites Wordsworth's 'Daffodils' as being voted no 5 in the Nation's Favourite Poem but equally likely to be used as evidence by the 'less informed' of the irrelevance of not just nature but *any* poetry. He goes on to suggest that the popularity and the continued inclusion in anthologies of 'escapist and sentimental Georgian nature poetry' such as that by Rupert Brooke, Walter de la Mare and A.E. Houseman fuelled the view that nature poetry was old-fashioned. Neil Astley (ed) *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems* (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2007), p.9.

'Nature poetry is more than merely descriptive. It deals with the tensions between us and our environment, our intense and often destructive relationship with it.' [77] In his book Gifford adopts the term 'Green poetry' for poetry that engages directly with environmental issues, separating it from what he sees as increasingly outdated and unquestioning nature poetry.

In a later essay, in Bryson's anthology, Gifford develops the idea of the 'Post-Pastoral'. He proposes that this concept raises six questions for the reader, but not, as he puts it, 'in the way questions would be raised in philosophy, ecology or politics.'[78] He suggests that:

> There is a danger that I may appear programmatic in my analysis, demanding a series of ideas from poets. As a poet myself, the post-pastoral is not a manifesto but a series of challenges to my own creative work. It is important that these questions are not boxes to be ticked but implications embedded in the poetry to be pondered further.[79]

Gifford makes an interesting point here, and one for further consideration when we come to look at the way poems specifically address environmental issues. For me, different possible directions may open up in the process of writing. The issues I wish to address then become not a programme but possibilities for the poem. 'The Badger' for instance, began as an attempt to address the issue of badgers being seen as pests, but in the process of writing the badger began to be seen as a symbol of hope in a personal backstory that found its way in to some of the poems.[80] The issue of persecution of badgers is behind the poem, but is only addressed indirectly. At the same time, if the ideology is driving the writing of the poem, then it is important that these issues are addressed in some way. The environmental issues have become challenges to the poems. In the process of writing, I considered how the poem illuminates the issue and whether the method is appropriate.

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[77] Hilary Llewellyn-Williams, 'Poet of the Natural World', *Poetry Wales,* 26 (1990), cited in Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry*, p.3.

[78] Terry Gifford, 'Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral', in *Ecopoetry. A Critical Introduction,* ed. by J Scott-Bryson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 2002), p.58.

[79] Ibid.

[80] 'The Badger' is discussed more fully on page 191. See the poem on page 31.

It is worth outlining Gifford's questions as they show him looking for a level of engagement with nature that goes beyond the sensory. Essentially they are as follows:

1. Can we regain our humility to feel awe when we approach the subject of nature?
2. What are the implications for humanity of recognising the creative-destructive cycles of nature?
3. Is there a relationship between our inner lives and the natural world around us?
4. How can we use our culture and imagination, specifically our poetic imagination, as a tool of healing our alienation from nature?
5. How should we exercise our responsibilities toward our material home?
6. How can we address the issue that our exploitation of our environment has emerged from the same mindset as our exploitation of each other? [81]

Gifford is looking for poetry to explore reconnection with nature, but with his final two questions he is also placing responsibility for environmental damage firmly with humanity, and asking for poetry to take a political stance with regard to the environment.

The Growth of Ecopoetry

Bryson's critical anthology was an attempt to map out the new territory. In his introduction he recognises that any definition of 'ecopoetry' (as he terms it, following Scigaj), is fluid, as at the time of writing, it was still a relatively new area. Again, however, he goes some way beyond Bate to suggest that ecopoetry 'while adhering to certain conventions of Romanticism, also advances beyond that tradition and takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues.[82] He illustrates this by reference to Gary Snyder, a poet whom Bate is critical of for the occasional overtness of his political stance: [83]

> When we read Gary Snyder describe commercial land developers as rapists who say to the land "Spread your legs" …… we know we are encountering a poem essentially different from Tintern Abbey…… Although in many ways ecopoems fall

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[81] Terry Gifford 'Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral'. The outline here is paraphrased from Gifford's essay in J. Scott Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction,* pp.80-84.
[82] J. Scott Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction,* p.1.
[83] Bate's criticism of Snyder is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. Bate *The Song of the Earth*, pp199-200.

> in line with canonical lyrics such as 'Intimations of Immortality' and 'Ode to Autumn', they just as clearly take visible steps beyond that tradition.[84]

Bryson is still identifying ecopoetry with the lyric, but he is politicising it. He identifies three defining characteristics of ecopoetry, the first two of which may be equally applicable to Romanticism, but the third is distinctly contemporary. They are:

1. An ecocentric perspective that recognises the interdependent nature of the world, leading to devotion to specific places and the land itself, along with those creatures that share it with humankind.
2. An imperative towards humility in relationships with nature.
3. An intense scepticism concerning hyper-rationality, that usually leads to an indictment of an overly technologized modern world and the very real potential for ecological catastrophe.[85]

This 'indictment of the overly-technologised world and the potential for ecological catastrophe' places ecopoetics alongside ecopolitics in the way that Bate was critical of. Also significant here is Bryson's use of the word 'humility', a word also used in Gifford's exploration of the post-pastoral. Solnick levels a further criticism of the 'first wave' of ecocritics for their 'insistence on certain kinds of emotive response'.[86] He links this to the earlier criticism of the assumption that '"consciousness" necessarily engenders "conscience"'.[63] This thesis argues that the ability of a poem to engage emotionally with its subject, and to invite a reader to share that response, is one of the most convincing ways that poetry can contribute to understanding of the environmental crisis. This emotional engagement is considered in Tom Bristow's *The Anthropocene Lyric*.

The Anthropocene Lyric and a Sense of Place

Bate's idea of poetry as an 'experiencing' of the world is developed in Bristow's concept of the 'Anthropocene lyric' as a lyric poem that considers 'humanity within the context of the

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[84] J. Scott Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction,* p.3.
[85] Paraphrased from Ibid, pp.5-6.
[86] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p.27.

loss of biodiversity and the extinction of species', engendered by the Anthropocene.[87] For Bristow the way that the lyric registers 'personal, felt experience' and 'configures feelings and structures thought', makes it 'a perfect mode' for this task.' [88] He argues that the collections of poems he considers: 'invoke a fresh standpoint that creates a sense of place that is alert to the environmental minutiae and contingencies of particular locales, harnessed by an observational stance washed through with historical or ecological context.'[89]

Bristow's sense of the poems' alertness to their ecological and historical context takes Bate's ideas forward. When a poet is reflecting on the nuances of a place, as Bate suggests, they are not an empty vessel but a thinking, feeling person with memories and awareness of a wider world. They bring this into their consideration of their local habitat and it influences the poems written out of that experience, so the poems can be both ecophenomenological and environmental, in Lidström and Garrard's terms, both paying attention to their local, sensory experience and being aware of the global context of the relationship with the environment. Despite this, Bristow does not appear to see the poets he considers as politically engaged. He points out that:

> In these collections crisis is only implicitly evoked. It is for us to take the insight into the contradictions and ethical implications of the turns of consciousness in these poems, towards the question of the Anthropocene. Our poets have but placed us on the cusp of this move. [90]

Kinsella in particular, as we shall see in Chapter Two, would consider his work to be more politically engaged with the environmental crisis than Bristow seems to be suggesting, but Bristow does raise a question that refers back to Gifford and his sense that his 'post-pastoral questions' should be 'implications embedded in the work.' If the poet wishes the work to have an environmental purpose, how much work should we expect the reader to do in understanding that purpose? How clear should the environmental agenda of a poem be?

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[87] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric*, p.1.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid, p.3. The collections Bristow considers are John Kinsella's *Jam Tree Gully*, John Burnside's *Gift Songs* and Alice Oswald's *A Sleepwalk on the Severn*.
[90] Ibid, p.5.

These questions were very much present for me during the reading and writing of poetry that contributed to this thesis. Bristow goes on to say that: 'The observation of nature within 21st century "new nature writing" remains a political act that is challenged to resituate the human in a way that is mindful of planetary breakdown.' [91] Bristow is making the assumption that Solnick refers to, that there is an automatic relationship between 'consciousness' and 'conscience.' For Bristow, the observation of nature, in the context of the Anthropocene, in itself political, and can be enough to change the perception of a reader.

Bristow's ideas resonate with my poetic practice. My relationship with the sense of the local has an ethical stance, feeling that I want to make a contribution to the places I have lived, and my poetry is an important aspect of this. At the same time I wanted to explore whether my essentially lyric poetry could go further environmentally than the observation of nature, to incorporate and communicate environmentalist ideas while still working with the resonances of language. In order to facilitate this I began to explore differing traditions of ecopoetry.

Differing Strands of Ecopoetry

With the popularisation of the term following Scigaj and Bryson, a number of anthologies of ecopoetry have appeared on both sides of the Atlantic. [92] The introductions to the anthologies echo differences in approach, indicated by the differing developments within ecocriticism. To some extent this difference reflects different poetic and critical traditions between the Britain and the United States.

Knowles and Blackie's emphasis on reconnection and re-engagement, cited earlier, contrasts sharply with Astley's introduction to his anthology, where the emphasis is firmly on the environmental crisis. For Astley: 'Ecopoems dramatise the dangers and poverty of a modern world perilously cut off from nature and ruled by technology, self-interest and

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[91] Ibid, p.6.

[92] Major anthologies are: *Earth Songs: A Resurgence Anthology of Contemporary Anthology* edited by Peter Abbs (Dartington: Green Books, in association with Resurgence Magazine, 2002); *Wild Reckoning: An Anthology Provoked by Rachel Carson's Silent Spring* edited by John Burnside and Maurice Riordan (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2004); *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems* edited by Neil Astley (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2007); *The Ground Aslant: Radical Landscape Poetry* edited by Harriet Tarlo (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2011); *Entanglements: New Ecopoetry* edited by David Knowles and Sharon Blackie (Isle of Lewis: Two Ravens Press, 2012); and *The Ecopoetry Anthology* edited by Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street (New York: Trinity University Press, 2013).

economic power.'[93] Astley sees the roots of this approach in American poetry when he states:

> There are in fact numerous contemporary poets addressing the environmental crisis with perception and passion, but most are American. The fact that poets in this country know so little about American ecopoetry must have robbed them of inspiring role models. [94]

Astley highlights the separate traditions in Britain and the United States. As indicated earlier, the poets discussed in Bryson's anthology are all American apart from Yeats and a briefly-mentioned Ted Hughes in Gifford's essay on Snyder.[95] American poetry anthologies similarly have not tended to include British poets, and up to Astley's anthology, the reverse was also true. Astley rectifies this with a selection of poems by American poets and he also includes a number of Australian poets as well as poets of other nationalities, but interestingly he includes no poets from Canada, where there is a lively tradition of ecologically-aware nature poetry.[96] Astley also notes that there is little overlap between any of the ecopoetry anthologies in terms of their selection of poems, which seems to indicate either a huge amount of appropriate material or differing criteria for inclusion, showing differing understandings of what ecopoetry actually is.

Though not the first such anthology, Astley's book is notable both for the range of poets included and for the first coherent attempt to document the way poetry explores the scale, range and historical roots of the environmental crisis.[97] He develops a map of the territory by categorising poems into sections that explore themes, from our interconnections with nature, through exploitation and destruction of the natural world and indigenous peoples, to the imbalance of the ecosystem, as reflected by climate change, the melting of the polar

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[93] Neil Astley, *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems*, (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2007), p.15.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Hughes, who Scigaj has also written about, is often the only British poet to be considered by American ecocritics.
[96] To name just a few: Don McKay, Michael deBeyer, Karen Solie, Tim Lilburn and Patrick Lane all deal with environmental issues in interesting ways.
[97] Astley's book represents the first major British publication of a number of American poets, such as Robert Hass, Wendell Berry and Pattiann Rogers.

ice-caps and other aspects of the current crisis.[98] In the light of Timothy Clark and Matthew Griffiths suggesting that the environmental crisis is too complex to be grasped by place-based nature poetry, Astley gives us a useful framework for seeing the crisis in ways that are amenable to sensory experience.

Fisher-Wirth and Street's Preface to *The Ecopoetry Anthology* follows Astley's linking of ecopoetry to the environmental crisis, but they date poetry's interest in the subject to much earlier than the 1980s that was suggested by both Bate and Bryson. Their preface states that 'around 1960 … public attention turned to the burgeoning environmental crisis and nature poetry began to reflect this concern.'[99] For them 'the term "ecopoetry" has come into use to designate poetry that in some way is shaped by and responds specifically to that crisis.' [100] Fisher-Wirth and Street are reflecting the American tradition of ecopoetry, of which poets such as Snyder and Berry are a part, that is both longer than the British tradition and more ideas or opinion-driven, a difference that will be explored further in the next chapter.[101] For Fisher-Wirth, ecopoetry is an intrinsic part of the environmentalist movement. She calls for it to move readers, but expressly with the purpose of action:

> Each of (these poems) has the power to move the world – to break through our dulled disregard, our carelessness, our despair, reawakening our sense of the vitality and beauty of nature. With that awareness, let us pledge to take actions that will preserve it. [102]

This thesis explore ways in which poetry tries to do this by widening the narrative and imagery of the personal encounter with nature to make connections with the global environmental crisis. It also explores the connection between moving readers and encouraging them to take action, or, in Solnick's terms, between 'consciousness' and

[98] Astley's section titles are: 1. Rooted in nature; 2. Changing the Landscape 3.Killing the Wildlife 4. Unbalance of Nature 5. Loss and Persistence 6. The Great Web 7. Exploitation. Astley, *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems*.
[99] Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street, *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (New York: Trinity University Press, 2013), p.xxviii.
[100] Ibid.
[101] The tradition of American ecologically-aware nature poetry, in addition to Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder, includes, to name a few: Mary Oliver, Robert Hass, Linda Hogan, Joy Harjo, Charles Wright, Ted Kooser, W.S. Merwin, John Haines, Robert Wrigley, Pattiann Rogers and, more recently, Mark Doty.
[102] Ibid, p.XXXV.

'conscience', by examining the ways in which a poem can involve the reader in its thought processes.

Drawing on Activism: Hughes, Kinsella, Snyder and Berry

The field of ecologically-aware nature poetry is a vast one and this chapter has discussed some of the challenges for poets implicit in the critical debate. The challenge for my poetry was to incorporate an environmentalist agenda into the essentially lyric poetry I was writing: for my poems to hold the weight of environmentalist ideas and have a political charge. To do this I was initially drawn to the more direct American tradition of ecopoetry which allowed me to let the environmental issues drive my poems, in a way that Jonathan Bate in particular is critical of, and in a way that, as we have seen, the British lyric tradition is wary of.

Wendell Berry has a line of influence from American wilderness writing and the Transcendentalists, stretching back through Robinson Jeffers and Henry David Thoreau. His poetry is essentially lyrical but is politically engaged. Gary Snyder was part of the original group of Beat poets and draws on ancient Chinese poetry and on a range of indigenous poetries. I had anticipated that the thesis would centre exclusively on American ecopoetry, incorporating the more ideas-driven tradition into my poems, but my work has been forged in the more restrained tradition of the British lyric, with my poetic voice as a quiet one even within this tradition. My poems are still alert to the emphasis on the resonances of language within the lyric tradition and the relative understatement of my poetic voice, and to letting these work on the reader, holding back more than Berry and Snyder can sometimes do. For this reason I found myself increasingly drawn to John Kinsella. His poetry, as described above, draws on a range of styles but a substantial aspect of it is lyric poetry with an overtly environmentalist agenda. Ted Hughes is very much in the lyric tradition that I see myself as part of, but though familiar with his work I haven't previously considered it solely from an environmentalist perspective.[103]

[103] Hughes is a key figure in ecocriticism but Yvonne Reddick's *Ted Hughes Environmentalist and Ecopoet* is the first consideration of the influence of Hughes's environmentalism on the whole body of his work. Reddick's work on previously unpublished papers in the Hughes archive in the British Library has widened the scope of my readings of his poems.

The four poets discussed all have overt relationships with the land as a political act, from which their very different poetries are positioned, making their work a poetry of dwelling which has an awareness of a wider global context. This allows for a consideration of a range of ways in which poetry may contribute to understanding of the environmental crisis, and of a range of techniques for writing poetry that incorporates environmentalist ideas, and these are detailed in Chapters Two and Three. The four poets have also written extensively about their environmentalism and its relationship to their poems: Kinsella and Hughes have both written about the way environmentalism works in their poems, and Berry and Snyder have placed their poetry within the broader context of their environmentalist thought. This allows for a depth of conversation with their respective poetries. My resulting poetry bridges the gap between the American and British traditions of ecologically-aware nature poetry, working within the framework of the British lyric but being ideologically-driven by environmental issues.

Summary

This chapter has surveyed the development of ecocriticism, and introduced the concerns that early ecocriticism was limited both to and by poetry that focused on sensory engagement with particular places. More recent ecocriticism suggests that such poetry is unable to cope with the complexity of the environmental crisis. This criticism ties in with some perceptions of the inability of lyric poetry to openly express opinion.

The chapter suggests that although the environmental crisis is complex, aspects of the crisis manifest themselves in ways that individuals can experience directly, and a place-based lyric nature poetry can explore these manifestations, linking sensory engagement with the local environment to a wider political context. The chapter also draws on the work of Tom Bristow, and his concept of the Anthropocene Lyric, to suggest that the ability of the lyric poem to configure thought and feeling makes it an ideal vehicle to explore personal experience during a time of environmental crisis. The following chapter will explore more fully the ways that the poets under consideration in this thesis have approached these challenges.

Chapter Two

Surveys, Reports and Lawyers: Poetry and Environmental Activism

This chapter explores environmental activism in poetry. It examines opposing critical stances in the work of Jonathan Bate and Terry Gifford, and highlights differences in the explicit nature of activism in British and North American Poetry. It then explores the ways that environmental activism manifests itself in the poems of John Kinsella, Ted Hughes, Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder, through readings of their poetry and essays, and highlights aspects of their poetry that I have drawn on in my own poems. Common to their different approaches is the importance of the emotional connection that a poem makes with a reader. The chapter finishes by summarising key points from this discussion in a provisional manifesto for an ecologically-aware nature poetry.

Ted Hughes: Environmental Activism and Working as Poetry

The previous chapter introduced the perception of lyric poetry as being driven by the nuances of language rather than by explicit political ideas. Terry Gifford goes further than Jonathan Bate in this regard, suggesting that poets can directly address environmental issues, but even Gifford is careful to avoid his six 'post-pastoral' questions being seen as 'boxes to tick.' Central to Gifford's theory is his sense that poets should present their environmental concerns in their work in a way that works 'as poetry' rather than polemic.[104] Highlighted here, in the context of my own work, is my concern that my poems be ideologically driven while also maintaining the nuances of lyric language, involving the reader in a poem rather than telling them what to think. Gifford clarifies this idea by addressing it in relation to his correspondence with Ted Hughes.

Hughes's public interest in the environmental crisis began in 1970 with his review of *The Environmental Revolution* by Max Nicholson.[105] The book is a history of the conservation movement but Jonathan Bate, this time as Hughes's biographer, illustrates the way Hughes goes beyond the book to give a history of the environmental crisis. [106] In the review Hughes dates awareness of the crisis to the 1961 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* but places the

[104] Terry Gifford, 'Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral', in J. Scott Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (Utah: University of Utah, 2002), p.79.
[105]Published in *The Spectator* and later reprinted in his collection of essays *Winter Pollen*. Ted Hughes, edited by William Scammell, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp.128-p.133.
[106] Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (London: William Collins, 2015), p.297.

crisis in the context of humanity's increasing alienation from nature, in the way that Bate does in *The Song of the Earth*.[107]

Hughes went on to be a fervent environmental campaigner, especially in the area of river pollution, but he admitted in correspondence to Gifford that 'when he tried to address ecological issues directly in his poetry the poetry tended to suffer'.[108] Hughes and Gifford were discussing 'Lobby from under the Carpet', a poem making reference to toxic pollution and its effect on the human male sperm count in the west. Gifford had 'criticised the poem's quality as poetry.'[109] Hughes's poem states its point baldly:

> the cost of the World
> Chemical Industry taken as a whole over the last
> two decades
> is
> a 40% drop
> in the sperm count of all Western Males
> nor can God alone help the ozone layer or the ovum[110]

Hughes wrote to Gifford that 'I've tried to write sort of semi-protest pieces of verse about this sort of thing, but I don't think it works. It may work as propaganda for a little bit for some people, for some readers, but it can't ever be the real thing.'[111] The implication here, from both Gifford and Hughes, is that it is not enough for a poem merely to state its concern. Hughes's idea of 'the real thing' refers back to the aforementioned perception of British lyric poetry and its emphasis on the primacy of language.

This idea touches again on the broad difference in approach between the British and North American traditions of nature poetry. The difference is primarily in the prominence of the idea and the clarity of the opinion. The British lyric tradition, as we have seen, emphasises

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[107] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (London: Penguin Books, 2015); Ted Hughes edited by William Scammell, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, p.133.
[108] Ted Hughes, quoted in Terry Gifford, 'Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral', p.79.
[109] Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p.837; Terry Gifford, 'Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral', p.79.
[110] Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes*, p.837.
[111] Ted Hughes, quoted in Terry Gifford, 'Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral', p.79.

language over idea, but in the United States ecologically-aware nature poetry tends to be both more direct and more ideas- or opinion-driven. For Mary Oliver, it is not enough to let the language lead the poem, and the poem should set out with something to say. As she states: 'The idea must drive the words. When the words drive the idea, it's all floss and gloss, elaboration, air bubbles, dross, pomp, frump, strumpeting.'[112] These two differing critical approaches can be highlighted by examining opposing critical stances on the same poem.

Gary Snyder and Letting the Idea Drive the Poem

Gary Snyder's fourteen stanza poem, 'Mother Earth: Her Whales', works with a number of different linguistic registers, and ranges widely around its subject. In places Snyder states his concerns directly, as Hughes does in 'Lobby from Under the Carpet':

> Brazil says 'sovereign use of Natural Resources'
> Thirty thousand kinds of unknown plants.
> The living actual people of the jungle
>   sold and tortured -
> And a robot in a suit who peddles a delusion called 'Brazil'
>   can speak for *them*?"[113]

The anger in the poem is balanced by recurring, rhythmic images of the whale which recreate the experience of seeing it for the reader:

> The whales turn and glisten, plunge
>   and sound and rise again
> Hanging over subtly darkening deeps
> Flowing like breathing planets
>   in the sparkling whorls of
>   living light –

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[112] Mary Oliver, *Blue Pastures* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), p.89.
[113] Gary Snyder, *No Nature: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Pantheon Books 1993), p.236.

And Japan quibbles for words on
what kinds of whales they can kill?[114]

In *The Song of the Earth*, Bate's idea that an ecopoem should do more than 'express a set of opinions' is illustrated by his critical reading of Snyder's poem. Bate suggests that the poem is restricted by its initial impetus to draw attention to the plight of the whales, and that the language only works on a surface level. For Bate, Snyder's poem is 'not what I would call an ecopoem. The language itself is not being asked to do ecological work.'[115] He goes on to argue that, although 'poetic form adds a certain rhetorical force to the statements, there is no relationship between vehicle and tenor; the medium for the message could as well have been …a piece of journalistic prose.'[116] Gifford, however, in his essay on Snyder cited above, defends the poem against Bate's reading, suggesting that Bate is 'failing to notice the complex nature of this poem: the way the language and forms in the poem may be raising questions about its content.'[117] For Gifford, Snyder's poem 'deliberately moves across different discourses, including rhyming simplicity, English ballad, lyric imagism, open field form, a public chant and manifesto prose.' [118] The stanzas describing the whales quoted above are, for Gifford, 'working with all the resources of heightened language, doing nothing but "transforming into language an experience of dwelling upon the earth"'.[119]

The conflicting arguments here to some extent highlight the differing traditions but, in the context of my poetic practice, Snyder's poem suggests ways that sensory imagery can make an emotional connection with a reader and use this connection for activist purposes, earning the right to make a more direct political statement. 'And Japan quibbles for words on/what kinds of whales they can kill?', at the end of the stanza, is similar to the tone used by Hughes in 'Lobby from under the carpet', but Snyder shows us how this apparent didacticism can give a sudden jolt to the poem if it is earned by what precedes it. As a reader I feel wonder from the sensory experience of the whale, so I am shocked by the sudden knowledge that they are being killed legally. Repeating this image of the whales

[114] Ibid, p.237.
[115] Jonathan Bate, quoted in Gifford, 'Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral', p.79.
[116] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.200.
[117] Terry Gifford, 'Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral', p.80.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

throughout the poem creates a juxtaposition between Snyder's political anger, as represented by the first stanza quoted above, and the reader's direct experience of the whale. As readers we share Snyder's anger because we understand the reasons for it, having a direct sense of the whale through his images.

Experiencing a poem in this way can have a lasting effect on a reader's perceptions. My own poems aim to use the senses to make emotional connections with a reader in the way that Snyder's poem does, and this can be seen in the animal encounters such as 'The Badger', 'Skylarks' and 'Geese'. The poems in the collection often finish with a sensory image, returning the reader from reflection to the experience that has prompted the poem, but I have also taken Snyder's approach to the juxtaposition of different linguistic registers in the poem 'Looking for a Way up Black Combe.'[120]

The poem seeks to make a connection between the difficulties of climbing Black Combe in Cumbria, and the potential danger associated with Sellafield Power Station, which can be seen from the slopes. The first stanza looks down on Sellafield from the slopes and immerses the reader in a series of similes for the environmental threats that Sellafield represents, such as it containing 'enough powdered plutonium/to blow out Cumbria like a child's breath/extinguishes a birthday candle.'[121] The final stanza focuses on the difficulty of the climb and the relative plainness of the language contrasts with the previous images:

> There's no simple way up this mountain.
> We splash through bog that cakes our boots.
> Our feet heavy, we pause for a second
> both wondering what the hell we're doing.

The final line can be read as applying to both the climbers and to Sellafield. The directness of 'wondering what the hell we're doing' is a development on my usual voice and draws to some extent on Snyder. My poems continue to focus on the music of the lyric, but Snyder shows me that this kind of direct statement can be a powerful activist tool, if the reader is engaged enough

[120] See page 44.
[121] The similes are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, in relation to '1984 on "the Tarka Trail"' by Ted Hughes.

with what has come before. This relationship between lyric poetry and environmental activism, and the ways it can involve a reader, is developed by John Kinsella, who positions his poetry as expressly activist.

John Kinsella and Activist Poetry

As suggested earlier, despite Bristow's suggestion of his work linking to the Anthropocene 'only implicitly', Kinsella himself defines his poetry as Activist.[122] In his collection of essays *Activist Poetics: Anarchy in the Avon Valley* he positions his poetry as ideologically driven:

> I see myself as a poet activist. Every time I write a poem it is an act of resistance to the State, the myriad hierarchies of control, and the human urge to conquer our natural surroundings.[123]

He views activism in poetry, however, very much from the standpoint of the lyric tradition:

> For me poetry has no point unless it's a prompt or aid to political or ethical change. This is not to say that a poem should be political or ethical *instruction* but rather that it might engender a dialogue between the poem itself and the reader or listener [124]

This differentiation between a 'prompt for ethical change' and 'political instruction' relates to Bate's notion of the lyric poem recreating an experience for the reader. The suggestion here is that the poem should not instruct a reader how to behave. Kinsella differentiates between 'polemic and open-endedness, between rhetoric and, if one likes, the lyric impulse, the balance in favour of the open-ended lyric rather than propagandist rhetoric'. [125] This refers back to Hughes's idea that propaganda can 'never be the real thing' and implies a reader's active involvement in the issues at stake in the poem. Kinsella goes further, however, in exploring how the 'open-ended lyric' can work to prompt change. He suggests

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[122] John Kinsella, *Activist Poetics by John Kinsella: Anarchy in the Avon Valley* (Liverpool University Press, 2010), p.1.
[123] Ibid, p.16.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid, p.1.

that:

> If a reader has to work at the poem s/he is more likely to think about the issues being explored/struggled with. Language should still be the main generator of the poem and I try to undo my own sincerity and zeal with irony and/or figurative tugs of the carpet from beneath my own certainty.[126]

Kinsella is talking here of allowing a reader to draw their own conclusions from the experience they are presented with. His stance also positions poetry to deal with the complexities of the environmental crisis that we have referred to earlier, undercutting our certainties and asking questions. Kinsella discusses this process further, drawing parallels between the poetic method and scientific investigation:

> Science per se is a process of investigation/observation/patterning through to hypothesis, and rests in that which can be scrutinised and in systematic acquisition of knowledge. That's what a poem is to me too. This is why an activist poetics doesn't have to be subjective propaganda – the subjective has a part in it – but if a poem doesn't utilise knowledge and the processes of obtaining knowledge, then it does less work than it might towards resisting damage.[127]

The poem, for Kinsella, is a tool for exploration, beginning with the sensory and investigating its subject in the way a scientist does. In Kinsella's poems the impetus for this exploration often seems personal. The poems are rooted in real, lived experience. Kinsella states his thoughts and feelings directly, even matter-of-factly, inviting us to see his dilemmas as universal. As suggested above, this allows the reader to be actively engaged in the investigative process, and helps keep the poem away from polemic. The experience in the poem is a subjective one, but the poem opens up the thinking process. It may suggest solutions, but it also allows for doubts, and it is these that invite the reader to consider the issue for themselves.

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[126] Ibid, p.17.
[127] Ibid.

We can see this method at work in Kinsella's collection *Jam Tree Gully*. The collection explores the difficulties of ethically settling a piece of land in the fragile bioregion of western Australia, encompassing the idea of dwelling Heidegger's more reflective sense. Tom Bristow praises its 'diaristic precision' and the way it pays 'attention to the micro with an equal interest in the global cultural context.' [128] In the terms used by Lidström and Garrard the poems are both ecophenomenological and environmental, they explore the local while having a wider awareness of the world.[129] The dilemmas that arise from this play themselves out in the poems. In 'Extending the House at Jam Tree Gully', Kinsella is aware that:

> Extending the house on the hillside
> to cater for more of us and our more
> is a disturbance to the eagles who fly over
> and the kangaroos who come across
> from the reserve in the morning.[130]

There is clearly an ideological stance here but the unusual compression in the syntax in the second line serves to reinforce the 'more' that drives us while creating difficulties for the other species we share space with. The 'us' may be Kinsella and his family but can also be all of humanity, needing more and more space. Presenting the dilemma as a universal one invites the reader to consider their own solutions. Kinsella makes his ideological position clear while also accepting the ultimate impossibility of living without doing harm:

> No plants, no animals, will be
> cleared to make way for the add-ons,
> though even in hard ground things
> live unseen by us. It is nothing
> to do with nature, this act of living
> of ours [131]

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[128] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric ,* p.36.
[129] Greg Garrard and Susanna Lidström 'Images Adequate to our Predicament: Ecology, Environment and Ecopoetics', *Environmental Humanities,* Issue 5 (2014), p.50.
[130] John Kinsella, *Jam Tree Gully: Poems* (New York, US: W. W. Norton, 2013), p.42.
[131] Ibid.

This could be read as fatalistic but despite the difficulties Kinsella manages to find ways of making small differences. He grows food to repair the land and reduce his dependence on the wider economy, takes down fences to give more space for kangaroos, leaves dead trees as habitat for bees and, in ‘Sacred Kingfisher and Trough Filled with Water’ he records how:

> With the record heat I filled one of the three
> concrete troughs – mainly for kangaroos
> but also for birds and anything else that passes[132]

Clark, Morton and Griffiths would argue that Kinsella’s filling of a water trough is a very small gesture when measured against the global scale of the environmental crisis, but the is attentiveness to the less noticeable world in this poem here can connect a reader to wider issues. The ‘record heat’ connects with the wider issue of climate change, with summers likely to get hotter, and there is a generosity in the offering of water not just to kangaroos and birds but to ‘anything else that passes.’ Changes may need to be made at a global level, but they also need to be made by us as individuals. The poems are offered as models for environmental engagement. This engagement may be imperfect but it is this imperfection that draws the reader in, with its acknowledgment that the poet does not have all the answers.

This emphasis on small individual gestures is an important aspect of the poems in my collection, from leaving a space in a hedge for blackbird’s to nest, to trying to reduce my carbon footprint by growing my own food. The poems represent political action at an individual level. Clark and Morton suggest that individual action is meaningless in the face of issues as vast and complex as climate change, but such gestures are fundamental to grassroots environmental activism which has seen the conservation movement, in Britain and America particularly, develop from being the prerogative of the privileged few to being an international social movement.[133] The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in

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[132] Ibid, p.90. The other poems referred to here are ‘Beans and Jam Tree Gully’, ‘De-Fencing the Block’ and ‘Hive Liberty’, ibid p.68, p.25 and p.33.
[133] Mark Cocker discusses the development of the Conservation Movement in Britain, identifying how organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wildlife Trusts were created by

the 2018 'Summary for Policymakers', stresses the crucial importance of individual action and lifestyle changes to reducing global temperatures.[134]

Kinsella talks further about his approach to the inclusion of political ideas in his poems in his essay on the collection *Zoo,* a collaboration with the poet and artist Coral Hull. [135] The project was inspired by a visit to Taronga Park Zoo after Kinsella was invited by Hull to do a zoo watch. Kinsella is interesting on the differences in approach between the two poets:

> the majority of Hull's pieces are direct action in nature; most of mine work by allusion and circumlocution….. Where Hull will say something outright and then build layers of metaphorical allusion, I'll start with the metaphorical allusion and leave the reader to distil the politics. Of course there are exceptions, but this is a general principle.[136]

Kinsella's politics are often more at the forefront of his poems than he suggests here, but he is emphasising again the importance of involving the reader in the process of exploration in the poems, of allowing them to make the discoveries for themselves in a way that is not dissimilar to Bate. It is worth considering, though, the ways in which Kinsella's political anger manifests itself more overtly in his poetry. Bristow identifies it as 'an invitation to be angry with our failings' but also as anger at those who Kinsella sees as directly destroying the environment.[137]

The anger isn't always rooted in the local. 'Of', for example, is a list poem detailing the uses of dead animals and has something of Hull's direct approach. Such poems can shock but they raise awareness of issues and ask questions of our relationship with animals as we are asked to consider:

> feet covered in dead cow,

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wealthy philanthropists but developed as important lobbying organisations due to grassroots support. Mark Cocker, *Our Place: Can we save Britain's wildlife before it's too late?* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018).

[134] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 'Summary for Policy Makers' ipcc.ch accessed 10/10/18.

[135] John Kinsella, *Activist Poetics: Anarchy in the Avon Valley* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp.129-137

[136] Ibid, p.130.

[137] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric*, p.138.

kangaroo, crocodile …
the business of pig-skin briefcases……[138]

For me though Kinsella is at his most effective when he is at his most personal. The personal, the anecdotal, gives a poet somewhere to position themselves with regard to an issue. It roots the issue in both sensory and emotional experience, allowing a reader to grasp what could be an abstract idea. In 'Night Explosions' the narrator goes outside to find the source of the noise that has awoken him: 'On the hillside in the uncertain dark another explosion,/so massive I slip on the gravel and my tinnitus comes on'[139] Contacting the ranger he discovers the source of the explosions to be an army exercise:

It's ANZAC Day this weekend and they're celebrating
the vast casualties of past wars, ahead of schedule.
Let's not pretend it's anything more than a shindig
for guts and glory, the arch adrenalin of remembrance
projected forward, the young kept on the boil. Standing
here as these explosions go off, contorting the valley,
you'd know that shell-shock is the best case scenario.[140]

We have felt the explosions with Kinsella and are invited to share his feelings. The falling on the hillside and the tinnitus gives power to the poet's anger, and the explosions 'contorting the valley' widen the poem out from his immediate personal experience. He highlights the irony of 'celebrating/the vast casualties of past wars' and casts it as little more than a statement of machismo. The poems also benefit from the cumulative effect of their part in a coherent collection, an idea we shall return to later in this chapter, where, in the context of the collection, Kinsella is angry not just for the explosions but for all the environmental damage he encounters. We have shared Kinsella's experiences in trying to settle the valley, and considered his dilemmas with him, so we have some empathy with him in this situation. My poems tend to have more controlled emotion than we see in Snyder and Kinsella, due mainly to my much quieter voice, but as discussed earlier in this chapter, allowing emotion

[138] John Kinsella, *Drowning in Wheat: Selected Poems, 1980-2015*, p.37.
[139] John Kinsella, *Jam Tree Gully: Poems*, p.120.
[140] Ibid.

to express itself directly can be effective if it has been earned by the rest of the poem, if we have experienced enough to be able to empathise with the poet.

Kinsella's rooting of environmentalist ideas in personal experience in such a way that the idea is clear but that the poem's language works to involve the reader in the exploration of the idea, is a crucial aspect of the poems in my own collection, from the personal epiphanies of 'The Blackbird's Egg' and 'The Eel' to the relationship with working in the land in 'An Allotment Handbook' and the reflections on extinction, inspired by looking at the skeleton of a mastodon in the foyer of the Natural History Museum, that closes the collection.[141] It is useful here to look in particular at my poem 'Grey Squirrel at Hawthornden Castle'.[142] The poem was written to highlight the controversial issue of the plight of grey squirrels, but it is rooted in the personal, with two encounters with people who are culling squirrels: one a gardener, the other a warden working for a conservation organisation. The gardener who believes he has a 'solemn duty to shoot' grey squirrels is contrasted with the Ranger whose method is, on the surface at least, more humane, but the end result is the same. The poem then begins to list the reasons for their unpopularity, all largely ecologically accurate. The poem goes further though, and brings in an example of a rewilding policy from Ireland, where the pine marten has been re-introduced. The pine marten is the natural predator of the grey squirrel, but their relationship is such that grey squirrels will migrate away from locations where they are present, leaving the space for red squirrels to settle.[143] The poem tries to find a language for the role of the pine marten in this scenario, to work as a poem rather than feeling like imported rhetoric. The poem portrays them as they 'prowl like policeman, slinking through brush/and the canopies of trees'.

Crucial in this poem is the final image, which returns to the scene at the beginning. The gardener goes into the grounds and a shot is heard. A grey squirrel is described in close-up, seeking refuge on the windowsill, and the cook shoos it away saying 'hide or he'll shoot you.' The action in this poem prevents it becoming too discursive, and the character of the

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[141] See page 78.
[142] See page 37.
[143] This poem draws on information in an article by George Monbiot. George Monbiot, 'How to Eradicate Grey Squirrels without Firing a Shot' (The Guardian, 30 January 2015, www.theguardian.com, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jan/30/how-to-eradicate-grey-squirrels-without-firing-a-shot-pine-martens.) [accessed 1 Feb 2015)

cook allows the poem to move away from being a direct mouthpiece for the poet. The image of the squirrel with ‘fingers/clearly defined as a child’s, eyes watery’ portrays the squirrel as scared and vulnerable and invites the reader to collude with the cook, aiming to work in a similar way to Snyder’s image of the whales. The implication here is that ordinary people do not want to see grey squirrels shot, but the poem does not directly express a value here, merely presenting options, inviting the reader to share in the process of exploration, as Kinsella suggests.

Kinsella’s various approaches to environmental activism come together in his multi-part poem **‘**Forest Encomia of the South-West.’[144] Deforestation and logging are addressed as the poem switches between family history, a description of a political protest, and reflections on the global economic context. This poem takes a different approach from the journal-like, almost matter-fact style of the poems in *Jam Tree Gully*. There is still a personal narrative which allows Kinsella to engage the reader in the issue at hand, but he goes further to reflect on the wider context of the issues and admits ambiguity.

The first part of the poem sketches out his grandfather’s life as an old school forester trying to protect his ‘fiefdom’ from forest fires caused by thoughtless acts from gangs of youths. It’s a personal story that ties in to a wider context of our relationship with nature. In the second section the narrative moves on to the description of a protest against a logging company. Kinsella sums up the issues succinctly:

> I ring lawyers. If they go outside
> the allotted space ………indigenous rights,
> rare species, all are collated
> in the effort to resist.[145]

This kind of collecting of evidence for a legal challenge feels like positive action, but there is ambiguity in the poem too, fatalism about the value of his efforts. While the narrator ‘rings lawyers’: ‘the forest goes under, girls/in dungarees call on the moon goddess,/and they

[144] John Kinsella, *Shades of the Sublime & Beautiful* (London: Picador, 2008), pp.123-129.
[145] Ibid, p.125.

move on.'[146] This juxtaposition brings us face to face with the difficulties of political action. There is an implicit criticism here of what the narrator sees as the impracticalities of 'New Age' philosophy and its association with environmentalism, drawing attention to the challenges of achieving a consensus even among environmentalist groups, in the way that Solnick highlights earlier.

In the third part of the poem Kinsella draws on family reminiscence, with the poet's father enjoying a drive into the hills, connecting with his landscape, but there's another sudden juxtaposition in the fourth part, where we face the brutality of logging: the saws have an 'electric rip' and there is a 'taste not so unlike the taste we have ourselves/skin, flesh, chapels in a clearing.'[147] We make a leap from the tree to 'us', finding ourselves experiencing the cuts in a visceral way and being shocked into empathy.

The fifth part of the poem becomes more about the universal issues. Rooted in a very particular gesture of 'Giving the finger to a logging truck', Kinsella explores the meaning of the gesture in a way that becomes a meditation on the nature of protest. This continues into the seventh part, which is essentially a list poem, each line starting with the words 'Sustainability equals', which act as a refrain, such as 'Sustainability equals dispossession/ Sustainability equals clear-felling…./ Sustainability equals dieback.'[148] Kinsella returns to his earlier ambiguity when he goes on to talk about 'the environmentally-minded/eroding their privilege bit by bit'.[149] The poem here moves from being polemical to being challenging, and unsettling, questioning the ways that protests are conducted. He then falls back on sensory images for the final two sections that let us experience the horror of a forest fire.

'Forest Encomia of the South West' had a direct influence on my poem 'Campaign'.[150] I was struck by the detail of the protest that Kinsella's poem contains, particularly by his use of legal terminology such as 'indigenous rights', and by the juxtaposition of this with his family relationship with the land. I wanted to take these things and place them within the framework of a short lyric. My poem takes place at one remove, addressed in the second

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[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid, p.126.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid, p.128.
[150] See page 64.

person to someone who took part in a campaign to protect a greenbelt area from development. Where Kinsella's poem is recounting forms of protests that didn't work, the campaign in my poem appears, at least, to have been successful and the poem could seem smug if the details were of it were being attributed to a narrator, but this distance allows the reader to enter into the poem. The poem juxtaposes detail of the campaign with images of the field being farmed by traditional methods, modelling behaviour in a way suggested by Scigaj.[151] The descriptions of the farm being planted by hand work in a similar way to Kinsella's stanzas about his father and grandfather, but unlike Kinsella's poem they take place in the present, showing what the field has been saved for. The poem details the nature of the campaign in the way Kinsella does:

> dusk walks to the copse
> to identify whiskered bats flitting through
> the exposed nerves of sycamores,
> and to estimate the ages of oak and ash;
> public meetings where you handed out poems,
> tiny lenses to change people's view of the land ;
> all entered in a report with by-laws quoted.

There is a sense of celebration but the poem finishes with an image, a technique used by Snyder and Kinsella, leaving a reader to interpret it for themselves.:

> In the field, the farmer launches a bird-scarer:
> a hawk on a kite like a flag of celebration.
> A buzzard glides above it, sensing no danger.

Though placing his own poems within the British lyric tradition, Kinsella's activism could be argued to draw more from the more direct American tradition of ecologically-aware nature poetry. The grounding of political activism in poems of lived experience and everyday

[151] Poems arising from this kind of farming are an important part of the activism of Wendell Berry, as we shall see in the following section.
[151] The others are A.R. Ammons, Gary Snyder and W.S Merwin.

dilemmas is, to some extent, common to all four poets under major consideration in this thesis. Wendell Berry is one of the four poets discussed by Scigaj in *Sustainable Poetry,* and so is an important figure in mapping out the territory of ecopoetry.[152] In a similar way to Kinsella, Berry's activism is grounded in an ethical relationship with the land: environmentalism is what Berry does in life as well as work.

Wendell Berry: Making the Local Global

Wendell Berry gave up a post in the Literature Department of the University of New York to return to Port Royal in Kentucky and buy a dilapidated house and 'twelve acres more or less', close to the farm where he grew up. [153] Berry, and his family, have lived there ever since, developing and expanding their 'marginal farm' alongside his career as a writer and teacher. The poems, essays, novels and short stories which make up Berry's writing can be viewed as the separate parts of an overall project. He sums this up:

> Over the last twenty-five or thirty years I have been making and remaking different versions of the same argument …..We could call it 'the agrarian argument.'…One way to sum it up is to say that we humans can escape neither our dependence on nature nor our responsibility to nature[154]

For Berry, the relationship between human culture and nature is 'mutually-sustaining' and this is fundamental to his writing. We work with nature and it works with us, and his farming methods, such as his use of a team of horses for ploughing rather than tractors and his refusal to use chemicals, are designed to care for the earth as well as to make it productive. Berry's farming poems will be explored further in Chapter Three which looks specifically at land conservation, but this chapter will introduce the connections between the local and the wider political context in Berry's poetry.

Berry is clear about the importance he places on locality. Though he doesn't use the term, his relationship with both his farm and the wider community of Port Henry in Kentucky, as

[152] Wendell Berry 'The Making of a Marginal Farm' in *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry*, edited by Paul Kingsnorth (London: Allen Lane, 2017), p.39.
[153] Wendell Berry 'In Distrust of Movements' in Ibid, p.286.
[154] Wendell Berry 'The Making of a Marginal Farm' in Ibid, p.39.

portrayed in his life and his writing, reflects the deep commitment of 'dwelling'. He states that:

> The differences between knowing a place and living in it, between cherishing a place and living responsibly in it….are critical differences, and understanding them has been perhaps the chief necessity of my experience.[155]

Berry seems to be suggesting here that living in a place involves being open to its nuances, in the way that Bate suggests, but that it also involves a responsibility. For Berry this responsibility is both for the land and for the community that has built up around it. Despite its focus on a locality, however, Berry's poetry is a long way from ecomimesis. Wider global concerns and knowledge of the environmental crisis are present throughout his writing. Explaining his decision to return to Kentucky:

> I never doubted that the world was more important to me than the literary world; and the world would always be more fully and clearly present to me in the place I was fated by birth to know better than any other.[156]

For Berry, the local is a base from which to think globally and consider wider ecological concerns, in a way that would certainly fall within Garrard and Lidström's definition of environmental poetry. The ecological crisis, for Berry as for Kinsella, is a political crisis, inseparable from the workings of global capitalism. In his 1988 essay 'Economy and Pleasure' he talks of how:

> we now have in the United States many landscapes that have been defeated – temporarily or permanently – by strip mining, by clear-cutting, by poisoning, by bad farming, or by various styles of 'development' that have subjugated their sites entirely to human purposes.[157]

In Berry's 1968 collection *Openings*, his meditations on his immediate sensory environment are contrasted with reflections on a global context which includes the war in Vietnam and

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[155] Wendell Berry 'The making of a Marginal Farm' in Ibid, p.39.
[156] Wendell Berry 'A Native Hill' in Ibid, p.5.
[157] 'Economy and Pleasure' in Ibid, p.272.

increasing destruction of land to obtain resources.[158] We see this in the way we read a poem like 'The Sycamore', describing a tree on Berry's land, which 'has gathered all accidents into its purpose' in the way that its bark covers old wounds, alongside 'Against the War in Vietnam', where we see 'the vision of Jefferson served by the agony of children.'[159] For Berry, as for Gifford, the way we treat nature and the way we treat each other are facets of the same problem.

The relationship between poem and idea is one of the challenges to my portfolio of poems. For me, a poem like 'Against the War in Vietnam' refers back to Bate's criticism of 'Mother Earth: Her Whales.' It strikes a polemical tone, a stating of a case rather than the recreation of an experience that involves a reader. In the context of my own poetry, political ideas are at their most effective when they emerge naturally from, and feel justified by, the poem, and not when they feel like a departure. [160] The strongest example of this in *Openings* is the long sequence 'Window Poems'.[161] Most of Berry's writing has taken place in a cabin in woods on his land, and it is this sanctuary that is the starting point for this series of meditations. [162] The poem begins by considering the view from the window, reflecting on the cycles of nature, but then expands its vision, seeing not just what is there but 'the ghost of an old forest' which haunts 'the country where he lives'.[163] This gives rise to an almost apocalyptic vision:

> There will be
> a resurrection of the wild.
> Already it stands in wait
> at the pasture fences.
> It is rising up
> in the waste places of the cities.

[158] A contrast also highlighted by Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets,* p.279.
[159] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems* (Berkeley: Counterpoint 2012), p.73 and p.75.
[160] Scigaj makes a similar point when he claims that this collection is at its best when Berry is able to juxtapose the political and personal in one poem. Leonard M. Scigaj *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets*, p.148.
[161] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, pp.83-106.
[162] For Scigaj, 'Window Poems':"…is Berry's one great triumph in *Openings*, meshing…the delight with the moral instruction, precisely because he begins with natural processes and then houses the social criticism within an anguish of mind that instinctively turns to the cycles of nature for healing' Leonard M Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets,* p.149.
[163] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, p.94.

When the fools of the capitals
have devoured each other
in righteousness,
and the machines have eaten
the rest of us, then
there will be the second coming
of the trees.[164]

The context for this is made clearer in the subsequent section. Although the closeness of the poem to Berry's autobiography, with a character observing and reflecting on nature from the large window of a cabin in the woods, makes links unavoidable, the sequence is written in the third person, which gives Berry some distance from the reflections, as one would have with a character in a novel. As a poet, the advantage of this is that it can free one up to make direct observations that may feel heavy-handed in a lyric poem, and it works in a similar way to my second person address in the poem 'Campaigns' already discussed. In part 13 of the sequence, Berry tells us:

Sometimes he thinks the earth
might be better without humans.
He's ashamed of that.
It worries him,
him being a human, and needing
to think well of others.[165]

Berry makes the assertion but sows self-doubt at the same time, drawing a reader into the dilemma in the way that Kinsella does. Later in the same section, the reason for the shame is explored further and the narrator starts to sketch out the basis for a manifesto, of sorts:

He would like
a little assurance
that no one will destroy the world

[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid, p.94.

for some good cause.
Until he dies, he would like his life
to pertain to the earth.[166]

Where my poems are based on personal experience, they have largely favoured the first-person pronoun because it has felt artificial to, effectively, write about myself as a fictional character, though the use of persona can be very effective to widen a poet's range.[167] I have also felt that there is a directness to the first-person pronoun which can give an emotional charge to a poem, connecting with a reader in an immediate way. Those last two quoted lines of Berry's, for example, could arguably gain power from being more direct, but there's a quietness to the third person here that gives humility to it. Berry is not telling anyone what to do or think, he is allowing us into a chain of thought. This is further endorsed by the end of the section.

But there is something in him
that will wait, even
while he protests,
for things turn out as they will.
Out his window this morning
he saw nine ducks in flight
and a hawk dive at his mate
in delight.[168]

The poem again finishes with an image. The narrator returns to the natural world and takes consolation from its resilience. Despite its grounding in a particular place, the poem is clearly making wider connections in a way that Morton and Clark see as lacking in much of contemporary nature poetry. Making those links between subject and reflection, writing poems of dwelling that connect to the wider environmental crisis is, for me, the major

[166] Ibid. p.95.
[167] Alice Oswald uses this method very effectively in *Dart* to capture the voices of characters along the river, including other-than-human characters such as stones and the river itself. Alice Oswald *Dart* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).
[168] Ibid, p.95.

challenge of this thesis. An example from my collection is the poem 'Floods'.[169]

The poem is set in Cumbria during a day of flooding. Like Berry's poem, it begins with a narrator observing the world from a particular locality, but widens its scope to reflect on the wider environmental context. The narrator is trying to get somewhere and notes some of the damage caused by the rain. He notes the damage that he can see but he is also connected to the wider region through bulletins on the radio and in messages from friends, prompting the wider reflections. The poem's context develops when the narrator considers that:

> These fields have returned to wetlands,
> drainage channels unable to cope
> with rain like a tap turned on full.

The 'returned' is crucial here. The fields the narrator is driving through are natural wetlands which have been drained for farming. All the rain damage in the poem now takes place against the knowledge that flooding is the natural state of the fields. In the penultimate stanza the poem steps back from the immediate detail to take an overview, the narrator reflecting that 'It's flooding more often and there's no real plan.'

The poem then tries to go further by considering two ideas to combat flooding. The first of these, 'Oak on riverbanks can slow the flow' is fairly straightforward. Links between deforestation and flooding have been made for two hundred years and there are a number of projects to replant deciduous trees on riverbanks with a deliberate intention to build flood defences.[170] The next idea was more challenging poetically. There is a reference here to the nature reserve at Foulshaw Moss. Over three poems in the collection a picture is built up of this former peatbog that the council planned to turn into a landfill site but which was rescued by the Cumbria Wildlife Trust. The managers are trying to return to the site to its original wetland state, uprooting conifers which leach acid into soil and allowing water to build so the land can begin to create peat again, which retains carbon and in the long term

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[169] See page 42.

[170] Tree roots bind soil, preventing erosion, an assertion first made by Alexander von Humboldt in 1802. See Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature: The Adventures of Alexander Von Humboldt, the Lost Hero of Science*, (London: John Murray, 2016).

can reduce flooding.[171] The poem wanted to find a metaphorical language for the complex scientific idea that deliberate flooding of certain areas may reduce overall flooding. I settled on imagery from mechanics:

> at Foulshaw they're pulling out spruce
> like rusted springs so moss can grow,
> locking carbon in peat like petrol in a tank

The carbon here is fuelling the land rather than being dispersed into the atmosphere. The scale of this, however, is small and the poem explicitly states its political urgency by pointing out that the initiatives are 'a finger in a dam that's bursting.' The challenge in bringing outside knowledge into the poem is to allow such a digression while not straying too far from the root of the poem, from the experience of the moment. The poem here returns to its narrative. The outlook seems bleak:

> Water from the fields is meeting in the road
> like hands clasping. The sky is too full of rain
> to resolve. We're going nowhere

Again the poem finishes with a sensory image, placing the reader in the situation. The ending of this poem can be read as pessimistic but by raising awareness of ongoing initiatives to combat flooding, and indicating that they aren't yet enough, it is a call for further action.

Berry's work draws attention to a further challenge for ecologically-aware nature poetry that I became increasingly aware of during the writing of my collection of poems, particularly in relation to the issue of modelling behaviour. Making suggestions about the way people should behave in our time of ecological crisis can easily come across as pompous, and as we have seen the crisis is so vast and complex that it seems all we can effectively do is explore possibilities rather than put forward solutions. Scigaj draws attention to this in Berry's work through the poem 'To A Siberian Woodsman'. Making

[171] 'What we're doing to stop flooding', *Cumbrian Wildlife*, May 2016, p.3.

connections between his own life and that of the titular character, prompted by looking at photographs in a magazine, Berry describes his evening at home:

> In the house my daughter learns the womanhood
> of her mother. My son is at play, pretending to be
> the man he believes I am[172]

There is something too stereotypical about this scene, too infused with a particular set of values, and it is easy to have sympathy with Scigaj when he suggests that the poem 'chafes… with an undertone of self-righteousness'. He goes on:

> Though Berry's life is certainly exemplary, presenting it in such bald monotone causes the reader instinctively to stiffen rather than enjoy…..Berry is more successful juxtaposing political analysis with the world of nature when he does not tout his own or his family's life as exemplary.[173]

This relates to my earlier discussion of the ways in which a poem earns its right to make certain statements. The experience needs to be recreated for a reader in such a way that they feel involved in the poem. Scigaj makes a similar point when he says that 'poetry of simple declarative statement, though capable of candour and tenderness, will not convince unless it conveys intimacy', and that Berry is more effective when 'his humility rings true.' We shall see this in relation to Berry's farming poems in the following chapter, and Kinsella does this through openness about his doubts.[174] As referenced in Chapter One, humility in the face of the natural world is central to J. Scott Bryson's definition of ecopoetry. In my poems, my response to this challenge is to have the narrator as a quiet presence, making tentative suggestions but also using irony to, as Kinsella suggests, 'undercut my own certainty'. My narrator considers possibilities while being aware of the difficulties with them. The clearest example of this is the poem 'The Apple Tree' in 'An Allotment Handbook', where the narrator's anger at the rabbit for destroying the newly planted tree sits uneasily with the desire in the sequence to manage the plot in an environmentally-

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[172] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems,* pp.107-109.
[173] Leonard M Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets,* p.149.
[174] Ibid.

conscious way.[175]

Ted Hughes and Implicit Activism

At the beginning of the chapter we looked at Hughes's dissatisfaction with some of his attempts to write ideologically-driven poetry. In the light of the way that Berry and Kinsella incorporate ideas in their work it is useful to consider here the way that Hughes wrote out of his environmentalist ideas, rather than expressly stating them. In common with Berry, though perhaps in a less complete way, Hughes took what seemed like the radical step of aiming for a more self-sufficient lifestyle when he bought Moortown Farm in Devon in 1972. Farming wasn't ingrained in Hughes as it was in Berry, and his father-in-law Jack Orchard worked as farm manager, but Hughes's mother did come from a farming background and it was a move that paralleled his growing environmental interests.[176]

The 1970s, in both Britain and America, were a period of intensification in agriculture. Conor Mark Jameson's *Silent Spring Revisited* discusses the effects of the Common Agricultural Policy in the UK, where subsidies for productivity encouraged farmers to use all available space, thereby destroying habitats, and to use pesticides and other chemicals.[177] Yvonne Reddick argues that Hughes 'environmentally-conscious agricultural labour' where 'livestock were free range and the land free from damaging chemicals' was, as Berry's was in America, a reaction to this.[178]

Despite Ted Hughes's expressed difficulties with poems that attempt to directly confront environmental issues, as a British poet writing ecologically-aware nature poetry, Hughes is clearly an important figure. He is one of the most frequently addressed poets in ecocriticism and Solnick argues that Hughes's work 'doesn't just fit with certain ecocritical positions, it helps to constitute them'. [179] It is also interesting, in the light of the criticisms of the 'first

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[175] See page 52.

[176] Jonathan Bate's biography of Hughes suggests that the move to Devon was a retreat due to dissatisfaction with his writing career, but Reddick sees it as a much more positive act, giving Hughes the opportunity to put some of his environmental ideas into operation. Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, p.318; Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, p.190.

[177] Conor Mark Jameson, *Silent Spring Revisited*.

[178] Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet,* p.189.

[179] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p.26. Solnick is both pointing out how many of the major figures in ecocriticism, such as Gifford, Keith Sagar, Scigaj and most recently Bate, as author of the first major Hughes biography, are also Hughes scholars, and identifying how much of 'first wave' ecocriticism, at least, has arisen out of the study of Hughes.

wave' of ecocriticism for being too focused on the local, that Hughes continues to be a central figure for ecocritics, with two major studies appearing in the last two years.[180] Although the centrality of nature to Hughes work is considered by Keith Sagar, Gifford and Scigaj, Yvonne Reddick's recent *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet* draws on previously unavailable material to suggest for the first time that Hughes's environmentalism shaped the development of much of his poetry, not just the more obvious collections, such as *River* with its focus on water pollution. [181]

Hughes's poems address the environmental crisis both directly, as in the poems in *River* and a number of his animal encounter poems from *The Hawk in the Rain* to *Wolfwatching*, and more imaginatively, as in the rich metaphors in *Crow* which can be read as an attempt at reconnection with a lost nature.[182] These approaches are explored further in the next two chapters, but Hughes's move to Devon was a significant step for the environmental aspects his poetry, and this section looks at the way his environmentalism manifests itself in the poems arising from his hill-farming experience. These poems, in the collections *Season Songs* and *Moortown Diary*, are diary poems of a sort. Berry's *Farming: a Handbook*, Snyder's *Axe Handles* and Kinsella's *Jam Tree Gully* can be described similarly, but Hughes poems are formally much looser than much of his other work. We can see this in 'De-horning' which begins:

> Bad-tempered bullying bunch, the horned cows
> Among the unhorned. Feared, spoilt.
> Cantankerous at the hay, at assemblies[183]

Gifford's theory of the post-pastoral and Scigaj's defintions of ecopoetry, for instance, both followed major studies of Hughes's work and there are clear lines of development between them.

[180] In addition to Yvonne Reddick's study, discussed in the text, Susanna Lidström's *Nature, Environment and Poery: Ecocriticism and the poetics of Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes* applies new developments in ecocriticism, such as ecosemiotics, to readings of Hughes's work. Susanna Lidström, *Nature, Environment and Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Poetics of Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[181] Reddick also reveals the extent of Hughes's reading in environmental issues and his involvement in environmental organisations. She describes Hughes as: ' …a polymath who read avidly, he researched environmentally-conscious farming practices, pollution, climate change and species extinction. He was a prominent public intellectual who cofounded the West Country Rivers Trust and supported bodies such as the Torridge Action Group, the Countryside Commission and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.' Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet,* p.1.

[182] Reddick notes the polluted landscapes in Crow that reflect the Anthropocene. Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet,* p.4.

[183] Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes,* p.504.

Compared to the tight stanzas of 'Jaguar', discussed in Chapter Three, for example, this seems note-like and fragmentary. Discussing *Moortown Diary* on the *Poetry Archive* website, Hughes describes how his attempts to turn his farming diaries into poems seemed to lose some of their urgency, and he made the decision to leave them in what he regarded as a prose-like form. He gives the impression that he doesn't really consider them poems, though the note-like form has an urgent rhythm which seems to match the movement of the cattle, and Hughes always has a keen sense of the music of words.[184]

As originally noted by Gifford, Hughes's farming poems are in stark contrast to the pastoral genre. Their world, reflected by the looser form, is an un-idealised, unattractive, arguably anti-Romantic one, in contrast to Berry's sense of an archetypal connection with the land. In Hughes's poems, tasks such as trying to extricate a dead lamb out of its mother and setting a bull to service a cow are described in intricate detail. [185] In contrast to some of the later poems in *River,* the activism here is implicit rather than explicit. Hughes's farming practices are in opposition to more intensive practices but this goes unsaid (unlike in Berry's 'Window Poems' where there is a keen sense of a hostile outside world). Despite this the poems reflect a deep and affecting emotional bond with the land and the animals under Hughes's care, and taken as a whole they can be read as a type of manifesto.

The two-part 'Sheep', though depicting real incidents, goes beyond the incidents to explore the mother-child bond between ewes and their lambs. In the first part:

> On the lawn, she has been crying
> For her vanished lamb. Yesterday they came.
> Then her lamb could stand, in a fashion,
> And make some tiptoe-cringing steps.
> Now he has disappeared.
> He was only half the proper size.
> And his cry was wrong. [186]

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[184] www.poetryarchive.org/poem/February-17th, accessed 9th Feb 2017.
[185] 'February 17th' and 'While she chews sideways' in Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes,* p.518 and p.532.
[186] Ibid, p.531.

The lamb here died naturally and was taken away, and the distress of the sheep is seen as due to her inability to understand.

> It was not
> That he could not thrive, he was born
> With everything but the will –
> That can be deformed, just like a limb.
> Death was more interesting to him.

The accumulation of detail and the slowness created by the repetitions ('he could not thrive, he was born') serve to enhance the poem's emotional impact. There is empathy here too as Hughes puts himself into the ewe's situation:

> She knew
> he wasn't right, she couldn't
> Make him out. Then his rough-curl legs,
> So stoutly-built, and hooved
> With real quality tips,
> Just got in the way

Hughes is trying to understand the perspectives of both the ewe and the lamb. Our relationship with animals will be explored more fully in Chapter Three, and we will return to the complex issues around farming, but such a depiction of farm animals as feeling creatures can create an emotional bond with a reader that can carry forward into any encounter, but, in this context, particularly to an encounter with the battery farming that Hughes's poem can be read in opposition to.

The second part of 'Sheep' takes this model further, describing the response of lambs and their mothers to being separated during shearing. Hughes description of the chaotic scene when ewes are returned to the fold is distressing in its detail and once again full of empathy. He understands the reasons for this noisy and chaotic scene:

Mother Mother Mother the lambs
Are crying and the mothers are crying.
Nothing can resist that probe, that cry
Of a lamb for its mother, or a ewe's crying
For its lamb. The lambs cannot find
Their mothers among these shorn strangers.[187]

The repetition and lack of punctuation in the first two lines imitate the distress of the lambs, and Hughes is convincing when he says 'Nothing can resist that probe'. It is difficult to resist distress that is evoked in such a way. Again though there is an implication of necessity here in the action of shearing which the sheep are failing to understand: 'Only slowly their hurt dies, cry by cry/ As they fit themselves to what has happened.'[188] Even though the hurt dies only slowly, they will fit themselves to this action caused by the farmer, implicitly for a good reason although again this isn't overtly stated. The way that Hughes evokes his emotional bond with the animals in his farming poems is a powerful tool for connecting with a reader for activist purposes, and it is something I have tried to evoke in the poems in my collection.

There are complications here though. Attitudes to sheep farming have become more complex since Hughes wrote that poem. George Monbiot highlights the damage that sheep do to hill-landscapes through over-grazing.[189] There are also complex debates around our relationship to animals and our often implied superiority to them that come into play in any consideration of farming. The complexity of the environmental debate is revealed in such often contradictory stances. Small scale farming is more environmentally friendly than large scale agribusiness, but some environmentalists see ethical issues in animals being bred for produce. [190] In my poem 'Lambing Season' I wanted to take Hughes's empathic approach while also reflecting on these contradictions in our relationships with farm animals.[191]

[187] Ibid, p.532.
[188] Ibid.
[189] George Monbiot, *Feral: Searching for Enchantment on the Frontiers of Rewilding* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), pp.153-167.
[190] A strand of environmentalist thought sees breeding animals for produce as fundamentally oppressive, taking away the animals basic right to live. David Nibert places animal rights in the overall context of economic oppression. David Nibert, *Animal Rights, Human Rights: Entanglements of Oppression and Liberation* (Lanham, US: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).
[191] See page 36.

Over several days walking in the Yorkshire Dales during May I encountered numerous ewes with lambs. The sight always seems synonymous with spring and a sense of rebirth. I did my best to give them space, often walking in wide circles around them. Going down a lane into a village I found myself face-to-face with a ewe and lamb. I didn't have much room to move aside but gave them as much space as I could. The ewe walked safely past and I was touched by the encounter, which made me think more about the mother-child bond in animals. I tried to evoke this with some of Hughes's precision of observation:

> The ewe follows my movements and her eyes flare
> as if she is about to charge, but then
> she seems to search inside me, and her hoof
>
> edges forward to test the path.

The description tries to capture a moment of connection for a reader, but I was aware in writing this poem however of the contradiction there. The sheep were only on the hillside as part of the farming system and the bond is entirely controlled by the farmer. I wanted the poem to acknowledge this:

> Their freedom to roam is illusion of course:
> boundaries, however broad, fixed by the farmer
> and the mother-child bond is quickly curtailed.

I also wanted to avoid Scigaj's criticism of Berry often appearing to be 'holier-than-thou'.[192] I myself embody the contradictions. I am not vegetarian so I am contributing to the existence of the farm. Any moment of understanding is only fleeting. The poem takes Hughes's empathy for farm animals but invites a reader to explore the dilemma associated with farming livestock in the way that Kinsella does.

Gary Snyder and the Practice of the Wild

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[192] Leonard M. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets*, p.149.

Gary Snyder's 'Mother Earth: Her Whales' was explored earlier in the chapter. I want to build now on this discussion of how activist ideas work in poetry by considering the way the wider context of Snyder's activism manifests itself in his writing. Like Kinsella, whose work he predates, and Berry, Snyder is a poet whose activism is his life, and whose poetry is one part of that. He lives in *Kitkitdizze*, a farm on 'marginal land' in the Sierra Nevada, and as with Berry and Hughes, his work on the farm influences his poetry in poems such as 'Axe Handles' and 'Fence Posts'. Many of Snyder's poems emerge from what we might regard as quotidian detail as he models environmentally-appropriate behaviour:

> With sapwood fenceposts
> You ought to soak to make sure they won't rot
> […]
> I use old crankcase oil to dilute
> And that's a good thing to do with it but
> There's not really enough old crank to go round.
> The posts should be two feet in the ground.[193]

Like Kinsella's *Jam Tree Gully* poems, these are poems that arise from an activist life. Books such as *Jam Tree Gully*, *Axe Handles* and *Turtle Island* are almost handbooks, or field guides for an ecologically-aware way of life. There is a contemporary pragmatism to both Snyder and Kinsella's poems. They are poets who live in the modern world, but Snyder's activism also draws on the knowledge and belief systems of what he calls 'primary peoples', such as the Inuits and Native Americans.[194] For Snyder, these cultures have 'grandmother wisdom', a form of learning directly from the earth. Snyder draws on a time when:

> human populations were relatively small and travel took place on foot, by horse, or by sail. […] there were always nearby areas of forest, and wild animals, migratory wildfowl, seas full of fish and whales, and these were part of the experience of every active person.[195]

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[193] 'Fence Posts' in Gary Snyder, *No Nature: New and Selected Poems*. p.273.
[194] In addition to Snyder, the work of both Linda Hogan and Joy Harjo, both of Native American ancestry, draws on Native American belief systems.
[195] Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (Washington: Shoemaker and Hoard 1990), p.79.

This landscape gave its inhabitants a particular form of knowledge of ecological relationships and 'the inviolable processes of the natural world'.[196] He borrows the term 'tawny grammar', from Thoreau, to describe this knowledge. It represents an attempt to live in harmony with nature that for Snyder is still relevant and that informs much of his poetry. It is particularly vivid in his 'Cold Mountain Poems.' These are versions of the first-century Chinese 'wilderness poet' Han-Shan, but Snyder has taken the original poems and absorbed their spirit rather than translate them literally. The poems represent an idealised relationship with nature:

> I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,
> Already it seems like years and years.
> Freely drifting I prowl the woods and streams
> And linger watching things themselves. [197]

For Gifford these poems represent a 'deeply felt humility that is to be learnt from tuning in to the energies of nature.' [198] It is this humility that, when manifested in poetry, can enable a reader to connect with nature. The kind of rootless existence presented in Snyder's versions of Han-Shan may not be possible, or even desirable, in our age, but it represents an attunement to nature and 'things themselves' that continues to be important in poetry. My poems, like much of Snyder's work, are set in the contemporary world with contemporary pressures, but Snyder's ideal is behind many of the encounters with nature from which the poems arise.

My poem 'The Badger', mentioned earlier, places Snyder's idea of tawny grammar in the context of an encounter during a modern working day.[199] The narrator here is walking back to the office after lunch, 'heavy with thoughts of the afternoon ahead.' The poem is not

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[196]Snyder writes: 'Thoreau wrote of this "vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned from her breast to society." Is it possible that society might remain on better terms with nature, and not simply by being foragers? Thoreau replies: "The Spaniards have a good term to express this wild and dusky knowledge, *Gramatica parda*, tawny grammar, a kind of mother-wit derived from that same leopard to which I have referred." ' Ibid, p.69.

[196] Ibid, p.24.

[197] Ibid, p.24.

[198] Terry Gifford, 'Gary Snyder and the Post-Pastoral', p.81.

[199] See the poem on page 31. The poem is also referred to on page 91.

explicit here as it seemed enough to indicate that it is somewhere he doesn't wish to be. Into the rather claustrophobic landscape, with hills pressing in 'like locals forming a clique', a badger suddenly 'pads across my path.' The poem pays close attention to the badger as it 'stops to scratch with a stumpy leg, claws/rasping through coarse hair' but it appears to narrator as 'a sage,/ white-blazed head comfortable with wisdom'. The narrator expresses wonder at seeing the creature in daylight but also sees the sighting as an overwhelmingly positive sign. The badger disappears into the trees but the narrator 'can still see it nodding in perpetual affirmation.' The implication here is of a sense of awe at the natural world but also that the creature has a different kind of wisdom that can help us gain a new perspective on our quotidian pressures, to see the afternoon 'as if time were not a luxury.' In my poem this 'tawny grammar' is more metaphor than actuality: nature's processes continue and the evidence of this, through the badger sighting, makes the detail of our daily lives seem manageable, but the idea of a special kind of knowledge associated with nature encourages us to look closely at, and to learn from, the natural world.

Animal encounters are explored further in Chapters Three and Four, but 'tawny grammar' plays a prominent role in Snyder's activism, both as a poet and an educator. Snyder articulates this in his poem 'What you should know to be a poet'. This list poem could be read as an early manifesto for Snyder's activist nature poetry. A poet should know:

> all you can about animals as persons.
> the names of trees and flowers and weeds.
> names of stars and the movements of the planets
>   and the moon.
> your own six senses, with a watchful and elegant mind
> at least one kind of traditional magic:
> divination, astrology, the book of changes, the tarot.[200]

There is solidity here to the naming of things, but there are also references to different kinds of knowledge. Animals are 'persons', we have 'six senses' and traditional magic still holds usefulness. The relevance of this for me is that it can open us up to new ways of

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[200] Gary Snyder, *No Nature : New and Selected Poems*, p.184.

engaging with nature. If we think of animals as 'persons' and assume they possess a different kind of knowledge to us, then we relate to them in different ways. It is this that informs a number of my animal encounter poems such as 'The White Deer' and 'Vultures.' Snyder's ideas recur in a more contemporary form in his essay 'Unnatural Writing', in which he proposes a manifesto in the form of 'Some Points for a "New Nature Poetics"'.[201]

Snyder begins by proposing a 'nature literacy'. A poet should know 'who's who and what's what in the ecosystem even if this aspect is barely visible in the writing.'[202] This point is echoed by Kinsella when he talks about a poem 'utilising knowledge and the processes of knowledge'. An activist, environmentally-conscious nature poet needs a sound grasp of ecology and ecological processes but, crucially, Snyder suggests here that this aspect may not necessarily be visible in the writing. This idea of ecological crisis being evoked implicitly is echoed by Gifford and Bristow and illustrated by Hughes's farming poems. The implication is that poems are written out of knowledge, though Kinsella suggests that knowledge can also be utilised explicitly. In my poems, some of the knowledge remains implicit, but utilising knowledge explicitly in the poems in order to raise awareness of environmental issues, while still operating with regard to the resonance of language, is one of the challenges that my poems have set themselves. The question of the implicit versus the explicit recurs throughout this thesis. There's a further implication here that, as in Kinsella's *Jam Tree Gully*, the knowledge utilised in a poem becomes clearer due to the proximity that poems in a collection have to each other. They communicate their message cumulatively. This became an important principle in the ordering of poems in *Field Book*.

Snyder's second point proposes a 'place literacy.' A poet should be 'informed about local specifics on ecological-biotic and socio-political levels.'[203] We can see this in Wendell Berry's work as well as Snyder's own. Writing of his home territory in Henry County, Kentucky, Berry writes:

> When I have thought of the welfare of the earth, the problems of its health and preservation, the care of its life, I have had this place before me, the part

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[201] Gary Snyder, *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds: New and Selected Prose* (Berkeley: Counterpoint 1995), p.162.
[202] Ibid, p.171.
[203] Ibid, p.171.

> representing the whole more vividly and accurately, making clearer and more pressing demands, than any *idea* of the whole.[204]

The 'local' is a crucial base from which to observe the specifics of our relationship with the earth. This also ties in with Kinsella rooting his activism in personal experience. Berry's collection *Farming: A Handbook* stands with the previously discussed collections as a poetic diary of the experience of trying to live an environmentally conscious life in a particular place, an activist statement based on earned experience.

Snyder's next points all refer to totems, drawing again on 'tawny grammar', or the belief systems of 'primary peoples'. Particularly interesting here is his juxtaposition of the Coyote and the Bear. By suggesting the use of Coyote, the Trickster, he appears to be advocating the use of imagination, letting the poem lead the way, similar to Kinsella's advocacy of the use of language in a poem. It is a point Snyder echoes later when he says: 'Study mind and language – language as wild system.'[205] His invocation of the Bear, however, a symbol of power in North American folklore, suggests purpose, which can be argued to imply clarity. These two things can work together in poetry that is both fresh and surprising but also has a clear purpose.

After opening up the mysteries of nature, Snyder then draws on science, suggesting that poets should 'Go beyond nature literacy into the emergent new territories in science: landscape ecology, conservation biology, charming chaos, complicated systems theory.' There is an echo here of his first point, that poets should not only understand ecology but be up to date with it. The question of how nature poetry utilises scientific knowledge is key here, and it goes back to Gifford and Hughes discussion of 'working as poetry.' How can poetry carry ideas without them seeming imported from a textbook? It's a question referred to by Robert Hass and the scientist Edward O Wilson in a conversation facilitated by The Poets House in New York:

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[204] 'A Native Hill' in Wendell Berry, edited by Paul Kingsnorth, *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry*, p.3.
[205] Gary Snyder, *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds : New and Selected Prose*, p.172.

> Wilson: Do you foresee in literature…the possibility of an infusion of more biological knowledge having to do with the properties of the rest of life and nature – real nature? Do you see any trend or prospect of that? Or at least more than exists today?
> Hass: I think we have to work at it. Wonder is a good way to start.[206]

Wilson is asking if poetry can utilise scientific knowledge for activist educational purposes, and Hass suggests there may be difficulties with this, returning us to Hughes and Gifford once again, and to the discussion on ideas in the British lyric tradition. He falls back on the idea of 'wonder', of a sense of engagement with the natural world that is in line with Bate's arguments in *The Song of the Earth*, but the initial impetus for this project has always been that poetry can go further with this. Looking for ways to utilise scientific knowledge in my poems has been a further challenge.

Significant here is the role of metaphor as one way that poetry can import knowledge from other disciplines and make it accessible. Edward O Wilson has called humanity the 'poetic species' because of the way our cognitive processes depend on associations: metaphor is the way we grasp complex and abstract ideas. [207] As an important part of the language of poetry, this highlights another important contribution that poetry can make to the environmental debate. Science, though in reality extremely imaginative, is often perceived as being drily analytical. For us to fully understand the ecological crisis we need metaphor. This idea of metaphor being essential for understanding is partially picked up by Don McKay. Metaphor, for McKay, makes: 'a claim for sameness which is clearly, according to common linguistic sense, false. Except that it isn't.' There are usually enough common points of reference between the things described that the reader is able to make the leap required in order to make sense of the world. [208] The most effective metaphors are those we don't question. If we have to wonder about them then we tend to think of them 'not working,' but if they are working effectively there is immediacy to our understanding. Complex and abstract ideas are placed in terms that are familiar to us. My poem 'Floods', discussed earlier in this chapter, looked at the way I tried to use metaphor to find new ways of

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[206] Edward O. Wilson and Robert Hass, *The Poetic Species: A Conversation with Edward O. Wilson and Robert Hass*, (New York: Poet's House, 2014), p.55.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Don McKay, *Vis À Vis : Field Notes on Poetry & Wilderness* (Charlesbourg, Quebec: Braille Jymico Inc, 2004), p.68.

describing an ecological idea, deploying imagery from mechanics to evoke the idea of how a peat bog works. This will be explored further in the discussions of poems in the subsequent chapters.

McKay takes this a little further in a way that's rooted in the work of Snyder. He goes on to discuss metaphor working in the way that the 'trickster' works in various cultures. It 'invokes the wilderness outside language.'[209] This can be interpreted as the opening out of the poem to other possibilities, so the metaphor not only puts complex ideas in terms that are more generally understandable, it invites the reader's imagination into the poem, and it is this that enables the changing of perception.

The final point in Snyder's list is open to various interpretations. He exhorts that the work should 'be crafty and get the work *done*.'[210] 'Crafty' can be read as technically adept, that the poem uses language well and effectively, but there's also an implication of slyness, bringing in the coyote again to take the poem in surprising directions or, perhaps more intriguingly, make its point in unexpected ways. There's a suggestion here of a kind of 'guerrilla activism'. There is ambiguity too in 'getting the work *done.*' Snyder has given us an outline for the kind of nature poetics he would like to see, and he exhorts us to get on with it, but there's also an implication here that it must be meaningful, that the poems should work towards the wider goal of a more harmonious relationship with the environment.

Summary: Towards an Ecologically-aware lyric Nature Poetry

The work of Gary Snyder, John Kinsella, Ted Hughes and Wendell Berry suggests useful directions for an activist, ecologically-aware nature poetry. Drawing these strands together gives us a starting point for a manifesto which informs the discussion in the subsequent chapters.

1. The environmental issue at stake should be clearly identifiable in the poem. Tom Bristow suggests that it is up to the reader to apply poems to the questions of the Anthropocene, while Kinsella uses his poems as prompts for discussion with community groups. This leads us to the question of how much work a reader should

[209] Ibid.
[210] Gary Snyder, *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds : New and Selected Prose*, p.172.

have to do for the poem to be 'activist'. The poem has to, as Hughes and Gifford suggest, 'work as poetry', operating on levels of language and sound as well as political message. I want my poems to clearly relate to environmental issues but sometimes, as with Hughes's farming poems, the issue can be implicit as well as explicit, with the poem arising from the issue rather than necessarily stating it. Snyder talks of nature- and place- literacy not necessarily being in the poems, and Gifford talks of his post-pastoral questions being challenges for his own writing rather than boxes to tick.

2. Rooting a poem in personal, lived experience can help keep the poem away from polemic, using language and imagery to recreate the experience for the reader. For all four of these poets, the impetus for a poem is personal. They try to avoid telling a reader what to think, but instead invite the reader to join them as they reflect on things they've done or seen. This also allows for what Scigaj calls 'modelling exemplary behaviour', giving us a 'case study' of how an environmentally-conscious nature poet lives in the Anthropocene. The majority of the poems in my collection have arisen from personal experience, and most are written using the first- person pronoun.

3. Close attention to the local allows a perspective on a wider context. All four of these poets dwell locally, evoking a close relationship with a particular place, while making connections to the wider environmental and political context, managing to be, in Lidström and Garrard's terms, ecophenomenological and environmental at the same time. The way that a lyric poem makes these connections is one of the challenges for the poems in this thesis.

4. The poem should look for ways to harness ideas. As we have seen the Anthropocene is extremely complex and, despite the lack of agreed solutions, environmentalists are putting measures in place to tackle some environmental issues, such as 'rewilding' a local ecosystem to return it into balance. Snyder talks of not being 'afraid of science' and of 'going further with science.' Poetry as an art form can find imaginative ways, such as the use of metaphor, to put forward scientific knowledge in order to both

raise awareness of it and to challenge and test the scientific knowledge. Again, though, sometimes this knowledge is implicit in the poem rather than explicit.

5. Poems communicate through emotional engagement. Sam Solnick criticises 'first-wave' ecoocritics such as Bate and Gifford for their use of abstract emotional states such as awe and humility, but the poems by Snyder and Hughes in this chapter show us that poems that work hard with emotions can connect with a reader to affect their perspective. Bristow writes of the 'Anthropocene lyric', giving us 'emotionally-sensitive reports from the natural world' and 'mediating empathy'.[211] This is a particular contribution that poetry can make to understanding of the Anthropocene, allowing both poet and reader to explore feelings with regard to the Anthropocene, and I have tried to engage my emotions within the poems in this collection.

6. Poems can relate to and communicate with each other. The sequence or series of poems, or simply the ordering of poems in a collection, can aid with this, and this can be a useful tool for a poet in knowing how explicit an issue should be within a poem. A reader can carry assumptions from one poem to another, freeing up a poem to follow its own path, while adding to the cumulative effect of a group of poems. The ordering of the poems was an important part of the development of my collection.

The following chapter develops these ideas through an exploration of the way that Snyder, Kinsella, Hughes and Berry have approached the issue of conservation, as an example of the wider context of environmental activism.

[211] Tom Bristow *The Anthropocene Lyric*, p.5.

Chapter Three

Preserving Wildness: Poetry and Conservation

The previous chapter introduced the approach to environmental activism in the essays and poetry of Gary Snyder, John Kinsella, Ted Hughes and Wendell Berry. This chapter explores more specifically, through further discussion of the work of these four poets and of my own poems, the ways that poetry can engage with issues of conservation, and highlights the range of techniques that can be used to communicate the message, from narrative and imagery to modelling ecologically-aware behaviour and the personal epiphany.

Conservation can act as a focal point for the wider environmental concerns of this thesis as loss of species is often due to destruction of habitat related to a range of environmental issues, including the development of land, pollution, the use of natural resources, and climate change. The scale of species loss is indicated by the 2013 *State of Nature* report, a collaboration between 25 environmental organisations. It recorded that, in Britain alone, 60% of the 3148 species analysed (from fungi to mammals) ‘have declined over the last 50 years, and 31% have declined ‘strongly.’[212] More than 600 species are in danger of extinction.[213]

This chapter begins by looking at poems that explore issues around pollution and land conservation, and goes on to poems that engage with animal conservation, from raising awareness of the importance of animals to specific issues of species protection. Critically it draws on Gifford, Bristow and Solnick’s ideas of the value of a poem’s emotional engagement with the subject in order to make a connection with the reader, and Leonard Scigaj’s ideas of ecopoetry ‘modelling exemplary behaviour.’[214] It continues to show that ecologically-aware lyric nature poetry can go beyond ecomimesis, by focusing on the personal and the local while at the same time making connections to the wider global context in a way that, in the terms used by Lidström and Garrard, can be both ecophenomenological and environmental.

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[212] Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, ‘State of Nature’ (Norfolk: RSPB, 2013), p.6.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Leonard M Sc*igaj, Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets,* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1999*)* p.37.

Throughout this chapter I will place my own poems in the context of this discussion, showing the ways my own work has adapted and developed the ideas discussed.

Caring for the Land

1. Wendell Berry: Activism in Action

The earlier chapter addressed the way Berry connected his poems of place to the global political world. This section looks specifically at the relation of farming to conservation in Berry's poetry, and how his poems 'model exemplary behaviour', an aspect of activism that my own poetry explores. His *Farming: A Handbook*, like Hughes's *Moortown Diary*, comes across as a farming journal (as with Hughes, a number of poems have dates as their titles), chronicling Berry's work on his farm while making connections to both a wider ecosystem and a wider political world. [215] His farm is both sanctuary and possible solution. If Hughes's nature is 'red in tooth and claw', Berry's is grubby with soil.[216] They are nature poems from a life lived within it, but the connection to a wider ecosystem is made with the opening poem 'The Man Born To Farming':

> The grower of trees, the gardener, the man born to farming,
> whose hands reach into the ground and sprout,
> to him the soil is the divine drug. He enters into death
> yearly, and comes back rejoicing. He has seen the light lie down
> in the dung heap, and rise again in the corn.

Berry speaks here of himself as an archetype, placing his actions within a tradition, a recurring theme in his work. As discussed in the previous chapter, the sense of wonder and awe, in the light fading into a dung heap to 'rise again in the corn', is key here. It is through this that the poem asks the reader to care about the issue at hand, and creates a sense of empathy within them. Berry addresses his emotional response to working with the land directly in the poem 'Enriching the Earth':

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[215] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, pp.113-161.

[216] The phrase was first used of Ted Hughes by Keith Sagar but has become a common description of Hughes's work. It is originally from the poem 'In Memoriam' by Alfred Lord Tennyson.

I have stirred into the ground the offal
and the decay of the growth of past seasons
and so mended the earth and made its yield increase.
All this serves the dark. I am slowly falling
into the fund of things. And yet to serve the earth,
not knowing what I serve, gives a wideness
and a delight to the air, and my days
do not wholly pass. [217]

Berry is drawing here on the idea of the ecosystem, maintaining the earth by digging in the rotted growth of earlier seasons, but he also sees the human place within this: he himself is ageing and will one day return to the earth nurturing it in turn by becoming part of 'the fund of things.' He has found a purpose, though, in maintaining this cycle of harvest and rebirth, and this makes his days meaningful so they 'do not wholly pass', and gives him pleasure, giving 'a wideness and delight to the air'.

Interestingly, not all the poems in *Farming: A Handbook* take the form of the quiet lyric. Throughout the book a series of poems recur that relate to a character Berry calls the 'Mad Farmer'. The persona is laid out in 'The Contrariness of the Mad Farmer':

I am done with apologies. If contrariness is my
inheritance and destiny, so be it. If it is my mission
to go in at exits and come out at entrances, so be it.
I have planted by the stars in defiance of the experts,
and tilled somewhat by incantation and by singing,
and reaped, as I knew, by luck and heaven's favour,
in spite of the best advice.[218]

Berry places himself here in opposition to received wisdom. Scigaj suggests that 'The creation of a "mad" or "contrary" central persona allows Berry the distance and narrative line to satirize agribusiness and the conformity of many to weak, self-serving institutional

[217] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, p.125.
[218] Ibid, p.139.

solutions.' For me, the 'Mad Farmer' poems attempt to clarify the wider context of the collection, outlining the philosophy behind his approach to the tasks detailed in the other poems. It is as if Berry doesn't quite have faith in his lyrics to make the leap from the local to the global on their own. In 'Prayers and Sayings of the Mad Farmer', for example, he gives us a series of epigraphs relating to good practice in farming, but his anger at the wider socio-political system shows through in statements such as: 'If a man finds it necessary to eat garbage he should resist the temptation to call it a delicacy.'[219] The risk here is that such direct statements, freed from context, don't have the humility of the poems where Berry is engaged with tasks. They are not allowing the reader to share in the exploration and reach the conclusion for themselves. As with Snyder's 'Mother Earth: Her Whales', anger can be effective but it needs to be earned by building a relationship with the reader. As suggested in the previous chapter, Berry's work is making a more important contribution to the environmental crisis when he is simply, quietly, being exemplary.

Two ideas in this are key in relation to my own poetry. The first is that the poem should have enough clarity that it can be trusted to include its own context, without a reader requiring more exposition, and the second, introduced in the previous chapter, is that a quiet persona can invite a reader to share the reflections in the poem without seeming superior. *Farming: A Handbook* provided the impetus for my series of unrhymed sonnets 'An Allotment Handbook', and this is reflected in the title.[220] The context of my poems is very different from Berry's. I do not own a farm but working an allotment plot was a way, for me, of making a connection to nature, albeit on a small scale, and of attempting to reduce my carbon footprint in a minor way. It gave my poetry somewhere to position itself in relation to the environmental debate. The poems are discussed more fully in the final chapter of this thesis, but each of the poems emerges from a task, exploring possibilities for improving the land while touching on the ironies and contradictions inherent in attempts to grow your own food when you are also part of the wider economic context and therefore contributing to the environmental crisis. Like Berry's collection, the title uses an indefinite article to indicate that the handbook is not definitive but just one person's way of dwelling in the Anthropocene while quietly trying to take it one step further.

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[219] Ibid, p.148.
[220] For a fuller discussion of this sequence see page 192.

2. Ted Hughes: Imagery and River Pollution

Unlike Berry, the connection to wider environmental issues in Ted Hughes's farming poems is implicit rather than explicit, and a question central to this thesis and to my own work as a poet, is whether a poem can tackle an environmental issue directly while still working as a poem in the sense that Gifford and Hughes discuss. In the light of Hughes's earlier reservations, it is interesting to see the direct way he tackles the question of river-pollution. Hughes's environmental interests came to a creative head with his collection *River*.[221]

The two-part poem '1984 on "the Tarka Trail"' relentlessly details the nature of river pollution and the way it works into the food-chain. The title refers to an area of then 'unspoilt' nature featured in Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter*, a children's novel that had a profound impact on Hughes.[222] The poem's work begins immediately with a contrast between the idyllic scene conjured by the idea of the 'Tarka Trail', and the imagery the poet uses:

> The river is suddenly green – dense bottle-green.
> Hard in the sun, dark as spinach.
> Drought pools bleach their craters.
> The river's floor is a fleece -
> Tresses of some vile stuff
> That disintegrates to a slime as you touch it [223]

The clarity and visceral nature of the description here puts the polluted river right in front of the reader. The unnatural green is not only 'green' but 'dense bottle-green' and 'dark as spinach'. The reader is then given the 'fleece' on the riverbed to touch, and to feel the revulsion when it 'disintegrates to a slime'. The narrator's objective description slips to reveal his emotions as the 'fleece' is described as 'some vile stuff'. This could be seen as an intrusion but Hughes works to

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[221] *River* was originally published in 1983 to accompany photographs by Peter Keen of rivers in the south-west, but republished ten years later in a revised, expanded and reordered version, without the photographs, as part of *Three Books*. Yvonne Reddick describes 'River' as 'the summit of Hughes's ecopoetic achievement.' She describes the book has having: 'a wholeness that equals the thematic unity of *Lupercal* and *Birthday Letters*—but with the critical difference that *River*'s cyclical structure is mimetic of natural processes and the disruptions to them that human beings can cause'. She also points to the usefulness of photographs to help Hughes channel his environmental activism. Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, p.213.
[222] Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, p.26.
[223] Ted Hughes, *Three Books* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993, p.118.

convey what he sees and touches, to earn the opportunity to share his revulsion, and it adds to the emotional impact of the poem. The narrator enters the poem more directly in the fourth stanza:

> Charlie found a stranded mussel. He brought it
> Up the fishing ladder.
> The lips gaped. We peered in, and pried wider,
> parted her pearly gates to get a peek
> ……
> A yawn of putrid phlegm.
> Then the stench hit us.[224]

The previous stanzas give us some idea of what to expect and it is hard not to tense at the opening of the mussel shell. The 'putrid phlegm' repulses us and such is the power of the earlier descriptions that Hughes doesn't need to describe the 'stench', the expression both evokes it and, again, invites us to share his revulsion. A river is a source of life which has been corrupted to the point where it can no longer sustain life.

Later in the poem Hughes not only lays blame for the destruction of the river on 'Peter, the good corn farmer', but directly addresses us as readers, telling us that Peter, or others like him 'Heaps the poisons into you too.'[225] Hughes has already included us in his discoveries through the conversational tone of parts of the poem, so it is not a shock to find ourselves directly implicated. The poem has paved the way. This kind of shift in register can be a useful device in achieving an emotional impact, and it widens the context of the poem from the local to the global. Hughes may be writing about a river in Devon but he could write a similar poem about many rivers.

I am interested in the way Hughes creates this sense of revulsion through his imagery, and I I use similar techniques in my poem 'Looking for a Way Up Black Combe', referred to in the previous chapter.[226] The previous chapter explored the different linguistic registers in the poem, but I now want to focus on simile and metaphor in the poem. Sellafield, in Cumbria,

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[224] Ibid.
[225] Jonathan Bate *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, p.26.
[226] See the discussion on page 105. The poem appears on page 44.

where I was then living, was developed to process nuclear waste. Highly radioactive waste is kept in bunkers in states of disrepair, and high levels of radiation have been recorded on the beaches around it. I wanted to draw attention to this but unlike Hughes I do not have firsthand access to the site in the way he has to the river, so my way in to the subject is a walk up the nearby hill of Black Combe, from which Sellafield can be seen. Black Combe is also the subject of a poem by Wordsworth which stresses the scale of the view from the summit, so the location provides a strong resonance.[227] As discussed earlier, the walk was a difficult one with no clear path and this was reflected in the title. The poem uses the walk as a metaphor for the difficulty of finding a way forward as regards Sellafield as well. I made this connection through the image of the Sellafield site as 'a geometric puzzle, not yet resolved.' The image of the geometric puzzle, while being a visual one, also contains an implicit reference to a triangulation station, used for surveying purposes, on the top of Black Combe. The real challenge in this poem, however, was to recreate the danger represented by Sellafield itself. Hughes relies on firsthand description, and the image of the mussel represents the effects of the pollution. I describe parts of Sellafield visually:

> The charred bones of a reactor,
> sealed remains of the 1957 fire, locked in time
> like a room reconstructed in a museum

I take this further, however, regarding the potential for danger from Sellafield, by finding a metaphorical language for this, a challenge made more complex by the invisible nature of radiation. Each of the actual threats in the poem is elucidated with a simile. The sealed remains of a burnt-out reactor are 'a dormant volcano that might erupt again/if the door is opened'; there's 'enough powdered plutonium to blow out Cumbria like a child's breath/extinguishes a birthday candle' and radiation is a 'secret' that 'spreads north through shoreline mud/picked up by the gossip of Geiger counters.' There is something of Hughes's conversational tone in my description of the site as 'the world's most dangerous bin', and I implicate the reader by suggesting 'we try not think of leaking pools of waste/that pass diseases through our children.' These images take a complex idea and make it more immediate and visceral for a reader.

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[227] 'The View from the Top of Black Combe' in *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, edited by Stephen Gill ' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.375.

Like Hughes I involve the reader in the poem through the form of address. The 'we' refers to a walking companion but it can also be taken to refer to the narrator and the reader. The poem uses the imaginative conceit of Black Combe itself trying to prevent us from climbing it because of what it has seen happen at Sellafield. The 'us' in the last line is intended to widen out not only from the narrator and the reader but to 'us' as humans. As Hughes's poem is for him, 'Looking for a Way Up Black Combe' is one of the most explicitly activist poems in my collection in the way it states its political stance so clearly.

3. Gary Snyder: Narrative and Deforestation

Gary Snyder uses imagery for environmentalist purposes too but in a different way to Hughes. The previous chapter shows the way he juxtaposes imagery and polemic in 'Mother Earth: Her Whales'. This section will explore the way Snyder continues to juxtapose imagery with text in different speech registers, but also combines it with narrative, in poems based on his experiences of logging and deforestation.[228]

For Bate, the roots of the environmental crisis can be found in the beginnings of deforestation. Snyder describes the beginnings of his relationship with forests in his essay 'Ancient Forests of the Far West':

> I realised I had grown-up in the aftermath of a clearcut….. I know now that the area had been home to some of the largest and finest trees the world has ever seen…I joined the Wilderness Society at seventeen ….and wrote letters to Congress about forestry issues [229]

Snyder however embodies some of the contradictions inherent in environmentalism, working as a logger despite his love of forests. His sequence of poems 'Logging', in his 1960 collection *Myths and Texts,* gives a diaristic account of his experiences as a choker-setter at Warm Springs Indian Reservation. Snyder is sensitive to the bonds created between people

[228] Deforestation is a recurrent theme in Kinsella's work too and his poem 'Forest Encomia of the South-West' is discussed in the previous chapter.
[229] Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p.126.

by manual labour, but the work is also shown to be claustrophobic, exploitative of its labourers and environmentally devastating:

> The D8 tears through piss-fir
> Scrapes the seed-pine
>   chipmunks flee,
> a black ant carries an egg
> Aimlessly from the battered ground.
> Yellowjackets swarm and circle
> Above the crushed dead log, their home.
> Pitch oozes from barked
>   trees still standing,
> Mashed buses makes strange smells.

The images pile on top of each other in a similar way to Hughes's '1984 on the "Tarka Trail"', placing a reader in the centre of the destruction. Like Hughes this is not objective reporting. The D8 'tears', the log is 'crushed', the bush is 'mashed.' We are left in no doubt of the narrator's opinion of this. The brief aside of 'their home', after the description of the buzzing yellowjackets, emphasises the ecological effects of the timber industry. Elsewhere in the sequence Snyder focuses in on his own actions, juxtaposing them with an unreferenced quote about lodgepole pines that could have been taken from an encyclopaedia:

> Lodgepole Pine: the wonderful reproductive
> power of this species on areas over which its
> stand has been killed by fire is dependent upon
> the ability of the closed cones to endure a fire
> which kills the trees without injuring its seed.
> After fire, the cones open and shed their seeds
> on the bared ground and a new growth springs up.
>
> Stood straight
>   holding the choker high

As the Cat swung back the arch
piss-firs falling
Limbs snapping on the tin-hat….[230]

There is a stark contrast here, with the change in tone and rhythm emphasising the contrast in subject. The longer lines pull us into the sense of wonder evoked in the first passage, before the short bursts of activity in the logging camp put an end to both the trees and to our reflections. Again we see the way poetry uses an emotional charge. The brutality of the activity is underlined by a sense of the remarkable ability of the trees to reproduce despite other forms of destruction. Logging is more devastating than fire.

The environmental issue that Snyder is concerned with is very clear here, as is his view on the logging. We can think of Bate's criticism of 'Mother Earth: Her Whales', or Parini's reticence in directly addressing an issue, but this is a deeply personal account, rooted in Snyder's lived experiences. It is detailed enough for a reader to share these experiences with him, and the authenticity of the observations make this a powerful condemnation of logging. Towards the end of the sequence Snyder, like Kinsella in 'Forest Encomia of the South-West' gives us a widescreen interpretation, drawing back to make connections, in Snyder's case, with the global-historical perspective.

Cut down by the prophets of Israel
the fairies of Athens
the thugs of Rome
both ancient and modern;
Cut down to make room for the suburbs
Bulldozed by Luther and Weyerhauser
Crosscut and chainsaw [231]

If we look past the pejorative language here the implication is clear: this is something that is happening all over the world, and that has happened throughout history. The local has once again become global and historical, in the way that Morton and Griffiths challenge the lyric

[230] Gary Snyder, *No Nature: New and Selected Poems*, p.36.
[231] Ibid.

poem to do.

Snyder's influence on my poems is through his juxtaposition of images, which I use to create an emotional charge in a reader in poems such as 'Grouse Moor' and 'Looking for a Way Up Black Combe', and through the way he views animals which, along with Hughes's animals encounters, has influenced the use of myth in my animal encounter poems. His experiences as a forester, however, moved me, and my poem 'Gary Snyder in the Forest' draws directly on his story.[232] In his essay referenced above, he recounted how he had initially worked for the state as a lookout in the forests but was unable to find further work due to being blacklisted during the McCarthy era. [233] Working for a logging company was the only way he could find work that allowed him to be close to nature. The poem is one of the few poems in my collection that does not arise from personal experience, but the use of narrative allowed me to explore an issue that I do not have direct experience of. The language in the poem is mine but I imaginatively reconstruct elements of Snyder's story to emotionally engage a reader. [234] The narrative allows me to discuss some of the issues around logging – we do all need wood and paper as well as space to live, so some deforestation is unavoidable – without it seeming artificial. I do this through the use of images, letting the reader see what I imagine Snyder saw. The following stanza recreates an incident where he was involved in felling what he feels must have been one of the biggest trees in the United States:

> There was one Pine they could barely see
> the top of. It fell for what seemed like minutes
> and took three cables to get it moving. Not quite
> having the words back then, he made an altar
> - a broken bird's egg, a bit of bark –
> a kind of record, or a quiet apology.

The altar, drawn from Snyder's story, provides a moment of emotional connection with nature amid the brutality of earlier stanzas. In the first line of the third stanza I make the

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[232] See page 45.
[233] 'Ancient Forests of the Far West' in Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p.124.
[234] This poem is also influenced by Ruth Padel's biographical poems about the conservationist Edmund McIlhenny: 'The Jungle Gardens' and 'McIlhenny's *Life History of the Alligator*' in Ruth Padel, *The Soho Leopard* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2004), p.40 and p.41.

leap from third person to the first person plural, broadening the reach of the poem so it is not just about Snyder but has global and historical consequences:

> As logging goes we would all see worse.
> Back then the harvest was quietly measured
> with a good old-growth left standing, and the Cats
> would weave around saplings without crushing
> but deer still trembled into deeper woods
> and a High Rigger shot a bear for the sport.

There is a suggestion here of a more ethical form of logging, where trees are taken according to what the forest can spare and a significant number of older trees are left standing, but even this has environmental consequences, particularly for the animals for whom the forest is home. The first part of this chapter has looked at how poetry can help us explore issues around logging, farming, and pollution, all of which provide habitat for a range of species. The second part of this chapter looks at poetry and the conservation of animals.

Encountering Animals

Animal encounters have been a significant feature of my poetry since *Territory*. John Burnside writes of his joy in seeing a wild creature and links this to a sense of bereavement, a sense that we are living with 'the near absence of living things'. [235] It is this sense, not always conscious, to which he attributes the steady growth of animal encounters in poetry in the last century. Burnside, developing an idea from the ecologist Paul Shepard, talks of us being 'coarsened' by the loss of animals, suggesting that the loss of diversity makes it harder for us to relate to each other.[236]

The question behind many of my early animal encounters was about negotiating boundaries with nature. Animals, in my poetry at this time, represented the questioning of the borders of our territories. Ambiguities are recognised in the poem 'Mouse', where the question is

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[235] Ibid.

[236] John Burnside 'Call of the Wild: John Burnside Celebrates the Animal Encounter in Poetry', New Statesman: London, (2012).

asked of whether we should begrudge the sharing of domestic space in winter with a field mouse, and the more brutal 'Sheep', where a sheep is crushed between two fences as the rest of the flock followed it into the confined space. [237]

The animal encounters in the collection included as part of this thesis can be viewed in three loose groups, though these are not mutually exclusive: praise poems, poems which model behaviour in relation to animals, and poems which aim to protect animals by raising awareness of threats against them. The final part of this chapter will explore each of these groups of poems, again drawing on the work of John Kinsella, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Ted Hughes

1. In Praise of Wild Things

The first group of poems try to both celebrate the animal encounter and reach beneath the skin of it to look at why animals hold significance for us. As humans we seem to respond to animals in ways that can't be explained by science alone, and my poems try to explore this: they draw on natural history but they also incorporate history, myth and literature. The creature at the heart of them remains a living creature in a fully-functioning ecosystem, and the encounter is a real encounter, but the poems also explore the creature of our imaginations. My poems are not pure metaphor, but rather they acknowledge the importance of metaphor for us as humans in the Anthropocene by giving us reasons for wanting to protect and preserve species. As John Burnside writes, 'to sing the praises of anything….is to remind others of its value – and this, in itself, is a political act'.[238] It lifts the poem away from ecomimesis to being environmental. My encounters aim to remind readers of the value of animals, both practically, in terms of their contribution to the ecosystem, and imaginatively.

(i) Wendell Berry and John Kinsella: Peace and Affirmation in Animal Encounters

Both Berry and Kinsella explore the positive feelings that animals can engender within us in poems which have a deep connection to place, experiencing humility and awe in the way Gifford suggests. Berry's sense of a harmony with animals is perhaps best expressed in his

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[237] Andrew Forster, *Territory* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Flambard, 2010), p.24 and p.31.

[238] John Burnside, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology" in Robert Crawford, *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science*, p.105.

poem 'The Peace of Wild Things.' In this poem Berry describes a deliberate encounter with animals, going down to the river in the middle of a sleepless night: 'I go and lie down where the wood drake/ rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.'[239] Berry pushes this encounter to try to explain what it means to live beside animals in this way: **'**I come into the peace of wild things/who do not tax their lives with forethought/of grief'.[240]

The implication here is that animals behave instinctively, in the moment, rather than worrying about things they are yet to do, and that there is a 'grace' in this. The idea of feeling we can learn a better way to be from animals could be argued as being overly Romantic, as appropriating other-than-human intelligence for our own purposes, but if this is done with respect and a sense of authenticity, of accuracy to the behaviour of the real creature, then the poem becomes not appropriation but praise. There are elements of Snyder's 'tawny grammar' here, a special form of knowledge that can come from nature. The wood drake and the heron in Berry's poem, like the badger in my poem, are almost totemic in their effects on us, but they are real creatures.

Kinsella experiences joy at an encounter with a pair of eagles in 'Eagle Affirmation', but he locates it more specifically in the context of the Anthropocene when he explores his response:

> You've got to understand that sighting the pair
> of eagles over the block, right over our house,
> not more than twenty feet above the roof,
> so massive their wings pull at the corrugated
> tin sheeting even with gentlest tilt, counteracts
> bitterness against all the damage I see and hear[241]

Kinsella feels pain, not only from the loss of the wattle tree he goes on to describe in the poem, but from the constant wrangling with neighbours who do not share his environmental beliefs, and all the hunting and logging described throughout the collection

[239] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, p.79. Such encounters with animals can also be found in the work of Mary Oliver.
[240] Ibid, p.79
[241] John Kinsella, *Jam Tree Gully: Poems*, p.48.

Jam Tree Gully, but the sight of two eagles large enough, and close enough, that their wings lift the edges of the tin roof, provides consolation to lift him above the daily grind.

The idea of taking consolation from an animal encounter recurs in a number of my poems. 'Sea Turtle' explores the joy that the narrator experiences on seeing the creature, a joy that seems in part to come from the turtle itself, like the peace that Berry takes from the creatures he observes. In other poems I have tried to develop Berry's approach to place it in a personal context in a similar way to Kinsella. 'The Badger', discussed in the previous chapter, gives the narrator the wisdom and lightness to face his afternoon. In 'Rooks Nesting' the narrator, watching the birds making a home, envies their ease and compares it to his own difficulties in finding somewhere to settle.[242] In 'The Blackbird's Nest', the sighting of the nest by the space where the narrator parks his car at work becomes an anchor during a difficult period, a symbol of resilience and hope.[243] The sighting of the owl in 'Barn Owl over Plex Moss' is taken as a symbol of hope in a new place with a new relationship.[244] Taken together, these and other poems form part of a personal backstory which creates a context for many of the encounters in the collection, and gives them an emotional charge which helps connect the reader to the experience. They are poems of dwelling which are trying to make deep connections with their landscapes by paying close attention, arising from humility in relation to the natural world in the way Gifford suggests as 'post-pastoral', while at the same time registering the thoughts and feelings that the narrator is carrying in the way Bristow suggests typifies the Anthropocene Lyric.

(ii) Imagery in Ted Hughes and Gary Snyder: Ecosystems, Myth and the Enchanted Crossing-Over

Hughes and Snyder, like Berry and Kinsella, write about real animals in a way that reminds us of their importance, but they also write about animals as spirits. The previous chapter introduced Snyder's ideas of 'tawny grammar', a way of relating to animals through the myths and stories of primary peoples. Hughes takes a similar stance, seeing animals, at least in part, as mythical creatures. Chen Hong suggests that Hughes finds in animals a 'deeper connection with the divine world, a world that animals have always been living in and

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[242] See page 67.
[243] See page 23.
[244] See page 66.

humans are separated from, a world that is sometimes termed "the animal/spiritual consciousness"'.[245] Chen ties this in with Alan Bleakley's view that Hughes practises a 'modern animal-centered shamanism.' In this world, 'biological, psychological and conceptual animals come to overlap, to fuse'.[246] Hughes's animals are more than physical creatures.

This approach finds its apotheosis in *Crow* and *Cave Birds*, where the protagonists are trickster spirits, and we see some of this in Snyder's poetry, but in both earlier and later poems Hughes's animals are real creatures that he mythologises through his imagery. It is this aspect of Hughes's poems which has influenced my own animal encounters as a way of praising animals and recognising their contribution to our lives.[247] The boldness of his imagery makes his creatures archetypal, referencing pre-history. His hawks are presented as the apotheosis of creation. In 'The Hawk in the Rain', its 'wings hold all creation in a weightless quiet', hanging at the 'fulcrum of violence', while, in 'Hawk Roosting', 'it took the whole of creation/to produce my foot, my each feather.'[248] His otter 'brings the legend of himself/from before wars and burials'; thrushes are 'more coiled steel than living'; his horses become ancient megaliths and his pike are 'killers from the egg'.[249]

Despite this they remain real creatures of flesh and blood, tied in to a functioning ecosystem which Hughes's poetry articulates. Once again we see this in *River*. The river is a crucible where each creature has its purpose and its links to other creatures. The moorhen is 'policing the water-bugs', the cormorant gorges on fish in a way that is both quicker and more natural than the fisherman Hughes, and the journey of a salmon is traced from egg to breeding in a series of poems. By September the salmon has 'become a god' but it has also undertaken a remarkably detailed real journey upstream and up weirs according to its genetic programming.[250]

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[245] Chen Hong 'Hughes and Animals' in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes,* edited by Terry Gifford(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.40.
[246] Alan Bleakley, quoted in ibid, p.40.
[247] This thesis draws on poems from *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Wolfwatching* (1989).
[248] 'Hawk in the Rain' and 'Hawk Roosting' in Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes*, p.19 and p.68.
[249] 'An Otter', 'The Horses' and 'Pike' in Ibid, p.79, p.22, and p.84.
[250] 'September Salmon' in Ibid, p.673. The other poems in this series, also included in 'River' are 'Salmon Eggs', 'Salmon-Taking Times', 'An August Salmon', and 'An October Salmon'. 'Collected Poems' reorders the series so 'Salmon Eggs' comes at the end rather than the beginning, as it does in the original publication of 'River'.

Influenced by Hughes, I have tried to explore the mythological aspect of animals while also exploring their role within a functioning ecosystem. Two poems can serve as examples of this. 'The Stag' is, like all my animal poems, based on an actual encounter, in this case a sighting from a bus window.[251] The poem deliberately sets the scene to show that this is not an ordinary encounter. The bus is a replacement for a train service and the road is not one the narrator of the poem has been on before. My aim with this is to pave the way for the reader to travel from the real world into a Hughesian, more enchanted one where, for a moment, the narrator does not realise what he is seeing when they pass the stag lapping water from a pond. I tried to describe the stag almost as an archetype, a creature of ceremony. The antlers are 'sceptered', it looks like 'a wicker sculpture'. In the following stanza however it is a real creature in a functioning ecosystem, during the rutting season, being teased by children, but it becomes mythic again with a Celtic story about a shapeshifting woman who escapes from invaders by turning herself into a stag. Implicit in this story, for me, is praise for a beautiful creature escaping from hunters and resting at the end of the day. The final stanza emphasises the other-worldly nature of the encounter but there is also an invitation to look at the world differently: to accept the diversions we are offered and to look closely to see what we might not otherwise see with a: 'leaving/of the expected track leading/to a brief enchanted crossing over.' It is, of course, the world that we live in and it is always there but sometimes, if we look, we can see other dimensions in it. A similar idea is expressed in Berry's poem 'The Heron' where, in a moment of communion with a heron he states: 'Suddenly I know I have passed across/ to a shore where I do not live.'[252]

One difference between my animal poems and Hughes's is that he himself is usually a detached observer, not ostensibly present in the poem. The focus of *Field Book* is on the human experience of the Anthropocene, and our relationship with animals is a crucial aspect of this, so my narrator is usually present to some extent, creating a context for the encounter.

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[251] See page 32.
[252] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, p.157.

The second poem of mine I want to look at here is ‘Sparrowhawk’.[253] Hughes ‘A Sparrow Hawk’ in *Wolfwatching* is an archetype, larger than life, while still taking a real part in the foodchain:

> Those eyes in their helmet
> Still wired direct to
> To the nuclear core – they alone
>
> Laser the lark-shaped hole
> in the lark’s song.
>
> You find the fallen spurs, among soft ashes.[254]

Again, Hughes’s imagery mythologises the creature. It is a ‘warrior’ wearing a ‘helmet’, albeit a modern one with a ‘nuclear core’ whose eyes are ‘lasers’. Hughes’s description perfectly captures the sense of this relatively diminutive hawk and what seems to us the ruthless efficiency of its hunting.

In my poem ‘Sparrowhawk’, the context of the Anthropocene is created in the first line of the poem, referencing the annual ‘RSPB birdwatching hour’. This reference to the annual informal census of garden birds places the poem in the context of species loss, while also undercutting the poem in the way Kinsella refers to earlier. The poem places the narrator as someone who is concerned about the issues, with birdfeeders swinging from branches, but the poem also questions the real use of such a gesture as the census, especially as the garden is largely cleared of birds by the arrival of the sparrowhawk.

My descriptions of the sparrowhawk use similar terms to Hughes. It is a ‘sniper’, a ‘small living sculpture’ whose power is so great it can be barely be contained. Hughes focuses on the sparrow hawk (to use the name he uses) itself, the only reference to other birds being about the hawk’s abilities to ‘laser a lark-shaped hole/ in the lark’s song.’ My own sparrowhawk is responsible for a ‘sudden shift of mood in the garden.’ ‘Goldfinches flurry’,

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[253] See page 65.
[254] Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes*, p.747.

dunnocks and great tits have 'left a silence'. The solitary pigeon, frozen by fear, is an after-image of the hawk's power, there all the time but only noticed when the hawk casually departs. The sparrowhawk is a real predator, playing a role in the ecosystem, but it also represents the wilderness on the edge of domesticity, an idea that recurs throughout the work of Gary Snyder.

Animals in Snyder's poems can be both real and totemic, in a slightly different way to those in Hughes's poems, but although Snyder's work mainly predates the term, his animals are placed within the context of threats against them that places them within the Anthropocene. The coyote regularly recurs in Snyder's work. 'The Call of the Wild' in *Turtle Island*, begins with the local and steadily widens its context. The old man is wakened by the coyote's singing. Tomorrow:

> He will call the Government
> Trapper
> Who uses leg irons on Coyotes.
> My sons will lose this
> Music they have just started to love.[255]

Snyder's coyote is a real creature that both represents a threat and is under threat. The poem draws a neat juxtaposition between attitudes when, in the second section, even those living alternative lifestyles, the 'ex-acid heads from the cities/converted to Guru and Swami', who 'quit eating meat' and take refuge in the forests, 'the land of Coyote and Eagle', shut away the coyote singing due to 'fear'. The poem widens its context further still by referencing the American bombing of Vietnam, and then other bombing all over the world ('next/North America'), destroying bugs, sparrows, owls, and ultimately leaving nowhere 'a Coyote could hide'. The poem finishes with an envoy:

> I would like to say
> Coyote is forever

[255] Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island*, (New York: New Directions, 2008), p.22.

Inside you.

But it's not true.[256]

The one-line stanza at the end has a finality to it, but in this envoy 'Coyote' has become a totem rather than a living creature represented by a definite article. Something represented by Coyote is no longer with us. We have destroyed it because we fear it. The nature of Coyote is not explicit, but we can infer it by drawing on the remainder of the collection of poems of which it is a part, and on Snyder's work as a whole, which gives the poem context. Coyote can be seen as representing wilderness, or 'tawny grammar', the primary knowledge which comes from living as part of nature with which, Snyder's poem suggests, there would be no wars.

My earlier animal encounters often tend to finish with an undefined sense of the 'numinous' similar to Snyder's poem here, the feeling of something being greater than itself.[257] In the poems in this thesis, the animals are totems to some extent, representing something archetypal, larger than themselves, but I try to explicate that sense of something else, to pin down why the animal is important to us. Sometimes, this is an ecological importance, while at other times the importance can be symbolic, as in the poems 'The Stag' and 'The White Deer.' As with Snyder, they are totems but they are also real creatures facing real threats, and understanding the importance of those creatures to us, both ecologically and metaphorically is, in the context of my poetry, a fundamental requirement of any activism.

Pinning down the ecological importance of a creature is evidence in the poem 'Vultures.'[258] The lammergeier, a rare, threatened species of vulture, is itself painted as a shaman in the poem, its scavenging lifted to the status of a mystical ritual. 'They belong to a realm we would rather not consider', but they both act as warnings, heralding impending death, and perform a vital ecological function, preventing disease by stripping corpses of flesh before bacteria-carrying pests can settle.

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[256] Ibid.

[257] The idea of the numinous is discussed by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[258] See page 72.

2. Living with Wild Things

Developing the exploration of the nature of our relationship with animals, a second grouping of animal encounters in my collection are those that consider ways we might live alongside animals, 'modelling' behaviour and testing ideas.

(i) Partnership with Nature: Wendell Berry and Modelling Behaviour

The interaction between human culture and nature, in its broader sense, is a key theme of Wendell Berry's agrarian philosophy. Berry's work is 'instrumental', suggesting action in a way that Solnick suggests Bate is resistant to. In his essay 'Getting along with Nature', Berry illustrates the 'mutual benefits' of an encounter with a hawk while ploughing a field with his horses:

> the horses live from the pasture and maintain it with their work, grazing and manure; the team and I together furnish hunting ground to the hawk; the hawk serves us by controlling the field-mouse population.[259]

Berry goes on to say: 'If balance is the ruling principle and a stable balance the goal, then, for humans, attaining this goal requires a conscious and deliberate partnership with nature.'[260] This idea of a partnership with nature can be seen in my poems. As discussed in Chapter Two, the poems contain a number of small gestures towards nature, such as the space made in the hedge for a nest in 'The Blackbird's Egg', and the symbiotic relationship with the robin who eats the worms while the narrator is digging over the soil in 'Digging Over', in the sequence 'An Allotment Handbook'. Perhaps the most detailed references to partnership with nature, however, are those which refer to ideas of rewilding, of returning the landscape to an earlier state where the ecosystem is more in balance. The focus is on deliberately reintroducing, or modelling the landscape to attract the return of, species who were once present. This is based on the idea that particular species, whether animals or plants, are key in the balance of ecosystems, and if they are no longer present then the

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[259] 'Getting Along with Nature' in Wendell Berry, edited by Paul Kingsnorth, *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry*, p.168.

[260] Ibid.

environment can become degraded. [261] There are references to rewilding in the poems 'Grey Squirrels at Hawthornden Castle' and 'Floods', discussed in the previous chapter.

'Ospreys at Foulshaw Moss' gives a further example.[262] The poem describes a protected 'reintroduction' of ospreys. The ospreys were not deliberately reintroduced, as beavers were in Perthshire, but encouraged, as part of a larger rewilding programme, by 'building a nesting platform when ospreys flew over.' The poem aims to raise awareness of this process while also suggesting what the regular encounter with a previously rare creature means to us ecologically. As the poem suggests, we 'take these things as signs of an easing/ back to health'. The nature writer Mark Cocker has questioned the ecological and conservation value of such schemes, given the relative proliferation of such birds in the current time, but he suggests that the actual importance of such schemes is in in binding imaginations to, and emotionally involving people in, the lives of the birds. The regular sightings of the osprey in my poem are fulfilling that function, while also promoting such schemes and exploring their importance.

(ii) John Kinsella and the Poetry of Fact[263]

In *Jam Tree Gully,* Kinsella's poems model behaviour in a similar way to Berry's farming poems, but I am also interested in the way he incorporates information into the poems. The presence of animals is a casual given during the daily task in Kinsella's poems. A kingfisher is perched by a stream, cicadas are a constant chorus, kangaroos come closer during dusk. During the day it is harder to see the kangaroos but the narrator knows where they are and he creates spaces for them, again being 'instrumental'. In 'De-fencing the block' he takes down a fence, opening the area up to the kangaroos who 'favour the sand/ of the old horse arena, making hollows/ to stretch out in under the peripheral shade.[264] This information is presented casually, an explanation for the task, but Kinsella's poems take place in a world

[261] For a much fuller discussion of rewilding, see George Monbiot's *Feral (*George Monbiot*, Feral: Searching for Enchantment on the Frontiers of Rewilding)*. As an example, Monbiot shows how the reintroduction of the beaver into particular landscapes, with their practice of building dams, can both create new habitat for other species and help prevent flooding. Returning land to wetland, as another example of rewilding, is discussed in Chapter Two.

[262] See page 41.

[263] This term is borrowed from the nature writer Mark Cocker who uses it to describe his prose writing, but it seems an appropriate one for the discussion in this section. See Mark Cocker, *Our Place: Can We Save British Nature before It Is Too Late?*, p.3.

[264] John Kinsella, *Jam Tree Gully: Poems*, p.25.

where his actions are not the norm, and the narrator is also aware of disapproval from neighbours who, concerned that his actions are discouraging sheep who used to graze there, 'will ask who or what will keep the grass down?! I say,/kangaroos eat! Some shoot them for eating crops.'[265]

The tone throughout the poem is matter-of fact but the exclamation marks here show the frustration of conflicting belief systems and reveals emotion hard at work behind the writing. It is a device I have come to use more in recent poems to control the tone of voice. An exclamation mark emphasises the astonishment at seeing 'The White Deer', and signals empathy with the blackbird in her nest when the narrator says: 'Don't let them disturb you, blackbird!'[266]

Kinsella's almost incidental inclusion of information, or sudden statements, within a lyric context, is significant here and I've tried to draw on it in my poems, to create a context for the animal encounters. Most of my animal encounters are written against a background of the animals being endangered in some way and knowledge of this gives significance to the sighting, raising awareness and adding political urgency. 'Vultures', discussed above, are 'in decline/from destroyed homes or poisoned prey', bees are fewer now '…and we don't know why/ for sure', the sea turtle's rarity is 'cause enough to celebrate,/ given oil spills and plastic bags/ they mistake for jellyfish and swallow.' The risk with such statements is that they can seem imported from another source, and the final chapter will look at the different ways I have approached this. In Kinsella's poems his narrator is a real presence and the reflections on kangaroo habits seem a natural consequence of the action.

3. Protecting Wild Things

The final grouping of animal encounters are those that draw attention to species under threat. Many of the animal encounters in *Field Book* make specific references to threatened species, linking personal lyrics to the Anthropocene. Some of these threats, and the question of how explicit to make the references to them, are addressed in the final chapter. The final section of this chapter looks at the threat to animals from hunting, and at the

[265] Ibid, p.26.
[266] See the discussion on 'The White Deer' in the final chapter.

ambiguous role of zoos as conservation centres, in the work of Hughes, Kinsella and Snyder.[267]

(i) Narratives of Hunting in Ted Hughes and John Kinsella

Hunting is a complicated issue. For many farmers and landowners, killing species they regard as pests is an essential part of land management, and hunting is a legitimate form of pest control, and even environmentalists do not always agree on which species should be defined as pests.[268] I have chosen to consider hunting in this chapter as it is a deliberate threat to particular species, and certain kinds of hunting, such as grouse shooting, often have further environmental repercussions.

Yvonne Reddick's chapter 'Hunting, Shooting, Fishing – and Conservation', in her study of Ted Hughes, gives a detailed discussion of some of the complexities and contradictions of killing animals from Ted Hughes's perspective.[269] Brought up in a world where hunting and shooting were acceptable pursuits, Hughes took part in formally organised hunts and shoots periodically throughout his life. Reddick shows that, as Hughes's knowledge of environmental issues grew, his feelings about blood sports became more ambiguous, and his public statements and private correspondence on the issues are often contradictory. In *Poetry in the Making*, based on his series of radio programmes for children, he suggests he no longer takes pleasure in killing animals and prefers to 'capture them with his pen'.[270] Hughes, though, continued to defend bloodsports and 'managed populations' of animals, both in terms of tradition and, increasingly, on conservation grounds, arguing that if populations of animals are hunted they are protected and managed.[271]

The obvious empathy for animals shown in his poems must have made it very difficult for Hughes to sustain his pro-blood sports arguments, and this comes out in some of his poems. In 'The Stag' in *Season Songs,* Hughes describes the gathering of observers at a deer hunt in

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[267] Other threats to species are explored in poems discussed elsewhere, such as 'Bees on the Cheshire Lines' discussed on page 199.

[268] As seen in the discussion of my poem 'Grey Squirrel at Hawthornden Castle' on page 112.

[269] Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet,* p.289 -p.308.

[270] Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making : An Anthology of Poems and Programmes from Listening and Writing*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p.7.

[271] Reddick references 'the poet, Hughes scholar and hunter' Steve Ely, who expresses a similar view, portraying the hunter as having a deep empathy with his quarry that results in a love of animals and a wish to conserve them. Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, p.295.

a detached way:

> While the rain fell on the November woodland shoulder of Exmoor
> While the traffic jam along the road honked and shouted
> Because the farmers were parking wherever they could
> And scrambling to the bank-top to stare through the tree fringe[272]

There is a holiday atmosphere to this which seems in stark contrast to the hunting of a living creature, and the 'scrambling' for a view challenges any dignity that the occasion might lay claim to. The hunters too have their dignity challenged:

> While the blue horsemen down in the boggy meadow
> Sodden nearly black, on sodden horses,
> Spaced as at a military parade
> Moved a few paces to the right and a few to the left and felt rather foolish[273]

The heavy stress and repetition of 'sodden' takes away any sense of glamour suggested by the 'military parade', and dignity is lost further with the long line which perfectly captures the aimlessness of the scene. While all this is going on, we are given brief glimpses of the stag, loping or running through his 'private forest' or 'his favourite valley'. The description of this is not particularly vivid, as Hughes's animal poems often are, but matter-of-fact, and the succinctness and fluency of the movement is in contrast to the confusion at the start of the hunt. It is the stag that owns the land here, not the hunters and farmers.

All this comes together in the fourth stanza, when the stag 'turned at the river/Hearing the hound-pack smash the undergrowth'. The focus is now on the stag, who is described much more vividly.

> …the stag doubled back weeping and looking for home up a valley and down a
> valley
> While the strange trees struck at him and brambles lashed him,

[272] Ted Hughes *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes,* p.333.
[273] Ibid, p.334.

And the strange earth came galloping after him carrying the loll-tongued hounds to fling all over him
And his heart became just a club beating his ribs and his own hooves shouted with hounds' voices[274]

The long sentence delivered in long lines switches back and forth like the stag has to. The reader can feel the heartbeat, and there is the extraordinarily emotive image here of the stag 'weeping'. It becomes difficult to separate anything from anything else as the hooves become the sounds of the hounds. The reader is placed firmly within the scene. Any empathy is firmly with the hunted animal. This stanza influenced the close-up of the squirrel in my poem discussed earlier. The approach to the narrative allows Hughes to control how the reader sees the situation, and it is very easy to read the poem as politically-motivated, which is made more remarkable by Hughes's own participation in bloodsports.

Hughes's poem influenced the way I approached the issue of the persecution of hen harriers as it relates to the management of upland moors for grouse shooting, in my poem 'Grouse Moor.'[275] The poem is a narrative from a gamekeeper's perspective, and is one of only two poems written in the third person in the collection. I considered various ways of approaching the subject, including a fictional encounter with a gamekeeper, and a monologue from a gamekeeper's perspective, but settled on the third person narrative because it gave me the option of showing a reader things that the gamekeeper may not have told them, such as the pause before shooting in the final stanza. The poem aims to raise awareness not only of the relationship of grouse shooting to hen harrier persecution, but of other methods used to control predators, such as a 'stink pit', a trap baited with rotting prey designed to attract predators which, as the poem suggests, often attracts domestic animals.

In the last stanza the pause occurs when a hen harrier, prompted by the sudden appearance of a grouse, 'swoops in low,/ fast as a comet, its wings lighting up/the pale canvas of early

[274] Ibid.
[275] See page 22. For a full discussion of the environmental and political issues around grouse shooting see Mark Avery, *Inglorious: Conflict in the Uplands*. Kathleen Jamie's 'Wings Over Scotland' also tackles the subject of raptor persecution in a found poem which lists a number of dead raptors followed by the refrain 'no prosecution'. Kathleen Jamie, *The Bonniest Companie* (London: Picador, 2015), p.51.

morning. The imagery was an attempt to heighten the sense of the hen harrier. It reminds the gamekeeper of seeing a 'food pass', a remarkable aspect of hen harrier behaviour. He remembers:

> seeing the male drop a mouse over a nest
> and its mate and chick rise to catch it, wings blurring,
> like flying acrobats or small spirits of the sky.

Again, as with Hughes's stag, I wanted a resonant image of the animal to call into question the rest of the poem. The gamekeeper 'blinks away the memory, squeezes the trigger' but the reader is left with the image.[276] The poem approaches its subject in a similar way to Hughes but it makes use of research to draw attention to an aspect of hunting which is not currently widely known.

John Kinsella also uses the narrative to address hunting in 'Write-Off'.[277] The issue here is addressed through a first person narrator trying to make sense of the issues which he encounters, something which I have settled on as the primary vehicle for my own poems. Kinsella describes, in long loose free verse lines, a night drive where he hits a kangaroo. Immediately prior to the accident, driving with care on a difficult road, the poet is reflecting on the casual damage we cause to living creatures when he considers that: 'I've avoided striking anything large on this road,/though the car grille has choked on insects, has glutted/ with plague-season locusts.[278] It's easy to be blasé about such common damage, but Kinsella gives us this in close-up:

> Picking wrecked bodies
> from filaments of radiator, even mangled into one body
> with many more legs than genetically encoded, you realise
> how large each death will always be.[279]

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[276] Gary Snyder's 'Mother Earth: Her Whales', discussed in Chapter Two, uses the recurring image of the whales in a similar way, as a counterpoint to the narrative of exploitation.
[277] John Kinsella, *Drowning in Wheat: Selected Poems, 1980-2015,* p.298.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.

The guilt at insect deaths positions the narrator for the reader, helping us to understand his perspective on the events which follow. The collision with the kangaroo, described in minute, horrifying detail, is a shock, but it is even more powerful when we learn the reason for the sudden appearance of the kangaroo:

> And then out
> Of silence, shots fired in the forest, roos driven out
> to escape hunters. Spotlights and dogs that chase
> glimmers of eye-light in darkest dark.[280]

The image of eyes disembodied in a chaotic darkness is a chilling one. In this poem, Kinsella doesn't directly say anything about hunting, he lets the narrative speak in a similar way to Hughes, but the hunters, to the man and child in the damaged car, are figures of fear, to be hidden from. The poem closes as the hunters:

> rev engines
> In triumph, ignoring roo hearts – small, medium-
> Sized and large – beating rapidly about us, about them;
> Louder and brighter than engines, than spotlights.[281]

This juxtaposition of the revving engines with the 'roo hearts' is stark, with a similar technique to that used by Snyder in 'Mother Earth: Her Whales.' The poem is a personal narrative but the issue at its heart widens its context, as a poem about an accident becomes a poem about kangaroo hunting, raising awareness of the brutality of the practice.

(ii) Hunting and Epiphany in Gary Snyder and Ted Hughes

Snyder's poems on hunting carry complications and contradictions in a similar way to Hughes's poems, and they both appear troubled by moments of conscience that lead to small epiphanies. Snyder's collection *Myths and Texts* includes a sequence of poems called 'Hunting' where anecdotes of hunting are inter-leaved with animal myths.[282] Unlike Hughes

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[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Gary Snyder, *No Nature: New and Selected Poems,* pp.44 -54.

(and in stark contrast to Kinsella's veganism), Snyder's views on killing animals appear to be linked in with sustenance. One section of the poem lists the food 'we lived on then', including 'yucca fruit, pinyon, acorns' but also 'wild cattle, mule deer, antelopes.'[283] We are all part of a web of life that sustains each other. This also ties in with Snyder's shamanism, the idea of spirits passing from one creature to another. Despite this there is unease in Snyder's poems about hunting. 'this poem is for bear', in the sequence mentioned above, draws on a Native American myth where a young girl marries a bear. The girl 'gave birth to slick dark children/ With sharp teeth, and lived in the hollow/Mountain many years'.[284] Despite this, her hunting brothers 'Chased her husband up the gorge/Cornered him on the rocks'.[285] The bear in Snyder's poem is humanised in a way that could be criticised as being anthropocentric, but locating this myth in a sequence of poems about hunting does shift the perspective. The brothers have not killed an animal, they have killed her 'husband.'

Snyder's ambiguity about hunting occurs throughout the sequence. In 'this poem is for deer', the descriptions of watching one of his co-hunters 'pull out the hot guts with his bare hands', and the smell of 'warm blood in the carpark', are followed by an unexpected coda:

> Deer don't want to die for me.
>   I'll drink sea-water
> Sleep on beach pebbles in the rain
> until the deer come down to die
>   in pity for my pain.[286]

Killing deer here is necessary but Snyder takes no pleasure in it, and there is an implicit epiphany in the actions of him and his comrades. The experience has changed the way Snyder views hunting. This kind of epiphany is a powerful device in ecologically-aware nature poetry. The recreation of a moment in such a way that the reader experiences what the poet experiences can be a powerful political tool, particularly if that moment is one that affects the narrator's future behaviour. It can help the poem reach beyond the personal anecdote into the wider context of the issue at hand. It can also enable the poet to neatly

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[283] Ibid, p.53.
[284] Ibid, p.47.
[285] Ibid, p.48.
[286] Ibid, p.50.

sidestep accusations of dogmatism because the poem is not telling the reader what to think but simply recounting the poet's experience. As Kinsella describes in Chapter Two, it encourages the reader to rethink actions in the way the poet does.

One of Hughes's most remarkable epiphanies is explicit, and takes place in an unfinished poem from his notebooks, quoted and discussed in Yvonne Reddick's book on Hughes.[287] 'The Grouse' is one of a number of elegies for Sylvia Plath.[288] Through quotes from Hughes's letters and interviews, Reddick discusses the way Plath challenged Hughes's views on killing animals. Many of the elegies for Plath actually respond to poems she'd written on the same subject, such as 'The Rabbit Catcher' where Hughes defends 'sacred/Ancient custom' in the face of Plath seeing 'strangled innocents.'[289]

In contrast to this, Hughes's killing of a sick grouse in front of Plath prompted a moment of epiphany in him. Hughes saw a 'dead grouse, too thin to eat' and a 'speckled unfortunate' but Plath saw 'Something incredible, something inconceivable'.[290] For Plath the bird 'died like the Rosenbergs'.[291] Hughes's invocation of the executed political prisoners highlights the gulf between their respective positions. In contrast to 'The Rabbit Catcher', however, Plath's reaction prompts a change of heart in Hughes. The poem ends with Hughes reflecting that 'Something/in me rose up and flew up/ From the grim thing I had been.'[292] Reddick quotes an interview with Hughes on this poem where he states: 'I realised I didn't want to kill any bird or animal, ever again. And I didn't.'[293] Hughes's subsequent writings give ample evidence that this isn't true, but the poem remains a powerful recreation of a moment that changed Hughes's perspective.[294]

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[287] 'The Grouse' (unpublished draft) in Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, p.304.
[288] The majority of Hughes's elegies for Plath were collected in *Birthday Letters (*Ted Hughes*, Collected Poems of Ted Hughes,* pp.1034 -p.1169) but 'The Grouse' remains unpublished outwith Reddick's monograph.
[289] Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes*, p.1138
[290] Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, p.305
[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Thomas R Pero, 'Wild Steelhead and Salmon', quoted in Ibid.
[294] Reddick's discussion shows that Hughes's views on killing animals tended to change depending on the expressed values of the people he was talking to, and the moment in the poem remains a key one in terms of his own questioning. Another interesting poem that uses a form of epiphany to look at issues around hunting is Kill-Site by Tim Lilburn. Tim Lilburn, *Kill-Site* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2003), pp.7-11.

This technique is used in a number of my poems in my portfolio, notably 'The Blackbird's Egg.'[295] The poem recalls a memory from childhood of being with an older friend who takes a blackbird's egg from its nest. The poem tries to capture the fascination of the egg:

> it looked like a whisper might shatter it.
> The sprinkling of gold on the turquoise shell
> made it glitter like treasure in the dull lane.

The fascination, though, is an uneasy one as the narrator goes to reflect: 'I didn't know then that it was a crime/but how could taking something so precious/be right?' The image of the friend emptying the egg of its contents is graphic enough to confirm the narrator's youthful uneasiness, and again draws on Hughes's description of the polluted river in '1984 on "the Tarka Trail"':

> Breaking off a hawthorn twig
> he poked a hole at either end, blew out
> a clear yolk with a ribbon of scarlet.

The poem, as with other poems discussed, aims to do its activist work through the image. The poem required more though, to make more of the epiphany, and I wanted to show this childhood incident continuing to have an effect into adulthood. The poem, then, jumps to a final stanza where the narrator expresses an undefined sense of loss. He can 'still feel the stickiness of the shell' and is trying to make space in his limited ground 'that something might come and nest here.' In this poem, at least, nothing does come and nest here, and the tone is melancholy, a feeling of irreparable damage done in a youthful action.

(iii) Ted Hughes, John Kinsella and Zoos

Field Book includes two poems arising from time spent in zoos and my ambivalent feelings towards them. Many zoos have redesigned themselves as conservation centres and only keep animals that are under threat in the wild, but there is still, for me, an uneasiness about seeing animals in captivity. The final section of this chapter will look at two poems arising

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[295] See page 19. 'The Eel', on page 20, is another example of this.

from observations in zoos, by Hughes and Kinsella. Both poems use narrative again, but in slightly different ways.

Many of Hughes's early animal poems arose from a period when he worked at Regent's Park Zoo as a dishwasher.[296] One of the most striking of these is 'The Jaguar'. Interestingly the jaguar itself does not appear until the third quatrain of a five stanza poem, the first two stanzas given over to descriptions of other creatures in the zoo, providing a context for the jaguar. They are, to some extent, parodies:

> The apes yawn and adore their fleas in the sun.
> The parrots shriek as if they were on fire, or strut
> like cheap tarts to attract the stroller with the nut[297]

The 'boa constrictor's coil is a fossil' and, perhaps oddly, even the lion and tiger 'lie still as the sun.'[298] The implications of all this, for me, is that none of these creatures seem wild, even the lion and tiger, as if their wildness has been lost in captivity. This is so much the case that 'cage after cage seems empty', as if the zoo 'might be painted on a nursery wall.' In contrast to this, the jaguar hurries 'enraged/through prison darkness.'[299]

There is ambiguity in this poem. The jaguar 'spins from the bars, but there's no cage to him/More than to the visionary his cell.' The jaguar's cage gathers the largest audience because here is wildness, a wildness that fascinates Hughes. Hughes once again mythologises a living creature. It is a real animal but it is also a 'visionary'. For the jaguar 'Over the cage floor the horizons come.' Except of course in reality the horizons do not come. The creature has to 'spin from the bars' because they restrict its movement. The darkness is a 'prison' and even the choice of the word 'cell' for the home of the visionary has a double-meaning. The creature might, for the moment, be behaving as if it is free, but it is not actually free. The jaguar may in time become like the creatures in the first two stanzas. Once again Hughes's imagery unsettles the reader.

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[296] Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, p.7.
[297] Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes*, p.19.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.

Despite the conservation role taken on by many zoos, keeping animals, especially non-native animals, in captivity, does not sit well with many conservationists, even if the animals are relatively well-treated. Kinsella, describes zoos as 'concentration camps…not places of preservation.'[300] His poem 'Charlie' explores the nature of zoos in a similar way to Hughes's poem. 'Charlie' begins by fascinating the reader as the cockatoo is 'Getting his mouth around the vowels/ in "hello Charlie".'[301] The vocalisations are 'in a stream that might almost be poetry' and there's a slight shock at the realisation of captivity, with the bird 'testing himself outside the grip/of its cage'. [302] The poem then shifts the focus, moves widescreen, as the bird becomes an 'object in its setting':

> a child with a stick amusing itself
> as the sulphur-crested cockatoo peels
> the bark off in strips, fencing the sharpened foil,
> taking each electric jolt.[303]

The thoughtless cruelty of the child encouraging the cockatoo to shock itself against the electric fence is reported objectively, but Kinsella then delves deeper into the significance of it, making the politics clear:

> Cruelty
> and excitement entangle themselves
> and a new generation instantly understands
> the craft of encagement. The backyard zoo
> is how you're allowed to love animals.[304]

The child here is not being malicious, but simply behaving in a way that the system encourages him to. Zoos tell us how we should respond to animals, but perhaps most remarkable here is the sudden shift in the poem when Kinsella tells us that 'Charlie prefers

[300]John Kinsella, *Activist Poetics: Anarchy in the Avon Valley*, p.129.
[301] John Kinsella, *Drowning in Wheat: Selected Poems, 1980-2015*, p168.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.

old people and hangs/around with them for years. They share a cage.'[305] The poem here makes a connection between the way we treat animals and the way we treat our older people who spend time 'Talking to a bird./ To themselves'.[306] Kinsella's poem begins with observation, drawing us in to the wonder of the cockatoo before showing us the cruelty and placing it into a broader context. It finishes with the context being broader than we might have imagined, and we are left with an uneasiness, not just about zoos, but about the way they reflect on how our society treats people too. In this regard it echoes Berry, earlier in the chapter, who suggests that the way we behave in regard to nature is a reflection of the way we behave towards each other.

Both Hughes and Kinsella show the reader the afternoon at the zoo while exploring the wider environmental significance, in Hughes's case through his imagery and in Kinsella's poem through reflection on the narrative. My poem 'The Serval', based on an animal observation in Chester Zoo, relies primarily on the imagery and carries much of the ambiguity of Hughes's 'The Jaguar', while also trying to carry some of the broader context of Kinsella's poem, in my case the threats to the serval in the wild.[307] The serval is a wildcat native to Africa. The serval in Chester Zoo was not ferocious like Hughes's jaguar but it seemed to have lots of misplaced energy, running around the borders of its compound without pausing. Like Kinsella's 'Charlie', my poem begins by capturing my awe at the serval. Its ears are 'sharp enough to hear moles tunnelling beneath it' and its legs, in contrast to the rest of its body are 'long, long', using a Hughesian repetition for emphasis. There is also a 'marvellous symmetry of black spots on tawny fur' but the poem here brings in the threats against the serval as it continues: 'for which it is hunted, its pelt stitched into robes.' It goes on to say that its native African savannah is disappearing, but despite the 'spreading branches of trees and the wild grass/in this zoo compound', which try to mimic its native environment, it is still fenced in. The poem shows my ambivalence:

> It isn't scrabbling at the fence for a way out
> but if the barriers suddenly vanished
> it would run and run and never stop.

[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid.
[307] See page 48. See also 'In The Fruit Bat Forest' on page 49.

The poem is praising the animal, reminding us of its importance to us which as Burnside says is a political act, but it moves beyond this to a wider context, asking us to consider the way we are treating it, both in and outside the zoo.

Summary

This chapter takes the approaches to activist poetry discussed in Chapter Two and explores them further in relation to issues around conservation, as a focus for the wider environmental concerns of this thesis. In doing this it further highlights techniques for communicating environmental activism to a reader, which I have adapted in my own poems. These include:

1. modelling ecologically-aware behaviour in the farming poems of Wendell Berry and John Kinsella,
2. the use of imagery to convey feeling in the anti-pollution poems of Ted Hughes and in Gary Snyder's animal poems,
3. praising nature as a way of reminding others of its value in the poems of John Kinsella and Wendell Berry,
4. raising awareness through the inclusion of information in the work of John Kinsella,
5. narrative and reflection in the work of Ted Hughes and John Kinsella, and
6. the personal epiphany in the work of Ted Hughes and Gary Snyder.

The poems considered here are largely lyrics drawn on personal experience. They 'dwell' authentically in the world and recreate this experience for a reader in a way Morton may dismiss as ecomimesis, but the poems, through the language and imagery used, make connections with wider environmental issues, becoming environmental as well as ecophenomenological, and this connection has a political urgency. Sometimes this is implicit, as in some of Berry's farming poems, and other times more explicit, such Hughes poems about pollution and Kinsella's poems about zoos.

As the discussion of my own poems indicates, from this I have tried to write an ecologically-aware nature poetry, in the tradition of the British lyric, that draws on personal experience to make an emotional connection with its subjects, while also linking to the wider political

context: raising awareness of, and considering the complexities of, ecological issues. The poems aim to make their issues clear, while using images to resonate with a reader. The final chapter will look at my collection of poems as whole, exploring its themes and techniques and the connections between them.

Chapter Four

Field Book: Themes and Techniques for an Ecologically-Aware Nature Poetry

This chapter discusses the collection of poems, *Field Book*, with which this thesis opens. It places my poetry within the critical context outlined in the previous chapters, and opens up ways of reading the poems by discussing their themes and techniques along with their influences, antecedents, and critical positions. The first section summarises the background to the collection, drawing on the earlier critical exploration and highlighting the main techniques drawn from the discussion in the previous chapters. The second section outlines the themes of the collection and the ways the poems incorporate activism. The subsequent sections consider poems in the collection under three main headings, arising from the discussion in the previous chapters: 'Anthropocene Lyrics', 'Modelling Behaviour' and 'Raising Awareness', while being conscious that many of the poems operate on a number of different levels and could be equally placed in more than one section. Each section close-reads poems in the collection, discusses the processes of writing them and places them within the overall context of the thesis.

Background to *Field Book*: A Summary

As discussed in Chapter One, my previous books of poetry found a retrospective critical context in the early ecocriticism of Jonathan Bate, with its emphasis on dwelling, or engaging with a locality. More recent ecocritics have challenged the first wave of ecocriticism for the perceived inability of the poetry they focused on to go beyond immediate sensory perceptions and tackle the complexity of the environmental crisis. Timothy Morton uses the phrase 'ecomimesis' to suggest that such poetry is merely imitating nature rather than addressing its complexities, and Matthew Griffiths points to the limitations of what he describes as 'post-Romantic nature poetry' in tackling the complex issues associated with climate change.[308] These arguments are complicated by an emphasis within British lyric poetry on what Sam Solnick refers to as a 'resistance to instrumentation', on the primacy of language over political ideas.[309] More recently Susanna Lidström and Greg Garrard, while recognising that lyric nature poetry is capable of reaching beyond the local to

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[308] Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Re-thinking Environmental Aesthetics*, p.137; Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World*, p.5.

[309] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p.24.

explore the wider environmental context, still distinguish between what they term the 'ecophenomenological', with its emphasis on the immediate sensory environment, and the 'environmental', which considers the wider global context.[310]

Field Book grew out of my increasing awareness of the environmental crisis and a desire to push the essentially lyric poetry I was writing to incorporate a more direct environmentalist agenda, while continuing to be attentive to the resonances of language and imagery associated with lyric poetry. The resulting collection continues to be influenced, as my earlier work was, by the British ecologically-aware nature poetry of writers such as Kathleen Jamie, Alice Oswald and John Burnside, but draws on the more explicitly activist work of John Kinsella, on the American tradition as represented by Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder, and on the environmentalist work of Ted Hughes. The poems argue that, though the environmental crisis is, as Morton, Griffiths and Clark suggest, extremely complex, aspects of it can be experienced on a personal, local level. While it is difficult to pin down a concept as abstract as climate change, it is possible to have direct experience of some of the ways climate change manifests itself, such as rising sea levels, and to explore them in a sensory way. It is also possible to make connections between the local situation and the global-historical forces that contribute to climate change. Lyric poetry, with its emphasis on thoughts and feelings and immediate experience, is well-placed to address these aspects of the crisis, to engage a readership through emotional connection with its subject, and to consider the complexities and ambiguities directly. This view is supported by Tom Bristow's concept of the 'Anthropocene lyric' as lyric poetry written against a background of environmental crisis. My poems aim to be ecophenomenological and environmental within the same poem. I would also argue that, while my work is rooted in the lyric tradition, the separation between lyricism, modernism, and other traditions is no longer as rigid as it may have been, with each tradition able to draw on others.[311]

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[310] Lidström, Susanna and Garrard, Greg, 'Images Adequate to our Predicament: Ecology, Environment and Ecopoetics', *Environmental Humanities*, Issue 5, (2013). Also referenced in Ibid.

[310] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p.24.

[311] This point is also made by Solnick, arguing that Alice Oswald's *Dart*, published by Faber and regarded by critics as 'mainstream', has strong affinities with site-specific and performance poetry, drawing on both Ted Hughes 'River' and the work in Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden at Little Sparta, where Oswald worked. Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p.28. Kinsella's work, also, can be seen as bridging traditions, as he is often associated with the experimental Cambridge School, and his poetry has elements that may be considered modernist but places himself within the lyric tradition.

The previous chapters have concluded, from considerations of the work of Snyder, Berry, Kinsella and Hughes, a number of techniques that allow a poem to be activist. Key points here are:

1. A personal narrative can investigate an environmental issue in such a way that the reader shares the exploration, making connections between the personal, local story and the wider environmental context and coming to their own conclusions in ways that John Kinsella suggests in Chapter Two.
2. The use of imagery can raise awareness of environmental issues and initiatives in new ways, such as the deployment of metaphor which can open up complex scientific ideas to a reader, as suggested by the work of Don McKay in Chapter Two.
3. A poem can model environmentally-appropriate behaviours, suggesting possible ways to live in the Anthropocene by finding more harmonious ways to reduce our footprint and exist as part of nature, as discussed through the work of Wendell Berry, particularly, in Chapter Three.
4. Sensory imagery associated with the Anthropocene can connect with a reader on an emotional level to involve them in wider consideration of the issue at hand, as shown in the work of Ted Hughes and Gary Snyder.

Field Book uses these techniques in poems that act as a bridge between the British lyric tradition of nature poetry and the more activist poetry of Kinsella, Berry and Snyder.

Mapping the Anthropocene: A Personal Guide

The major environmental theme of the poems in *Field Book* is conservation, of both land and animals. Using the techniques highlighted in the previous section, the poems aim to:

1. have clear, identifiable environmental issues at their heart
2. connect emotionally with the environment in a way that encourages readers to engage with the subject of the poem in new ways,
3. make connections between the local environment and the wider global context,
4. raise awareness of the threats against the primary subject of the poem,
5. raise awareness of initiatives to combat the threats against the primary subject of the poem, and

6. suggest possible ways to move forward.

With a few exceptions, which are discussed, the poems are lyrics arising from personal experience. The immediacy of this experience enables the poems to use the senses to focus on sensory aspects of the environmental crisis as they relate to us as humans. The poems purposely explore the complexities and ambiguities involved in the issues, and basing the poems in personal experience enables them to open up their thought processes in a way that invites a reader to share the explorations of the poems without telling them what to think. The role of the narrator, and the relationship of these poems to each other, is central. The narrative voice is a quiet, reflective one that aims for a commonality of experience. The narrator doesn't have access to a farm or a large tract of land, and is bound in to the world of work. Yet the poems engage with the natural environment and are aware of the threats against it, trying to alleviate them in small ways, while also being tied into the routines of the everyday world and limited in what they are able to achieve.

As Timothy Clark identifies, the scale effects of any behaviour, which has to operate on a planetary level, limit individual attempts to combat the environmental crisis.[312] In the process of collating these poems, a line from John Burnside's poem 'History' was in the background: 'But this is the problem: how to be alive/in all this gazed-upon and cherished world/and do no harm.'[313] Morton would argue that we are all so embroiled in the ecological crisis that it is not possible to 'do no harm', but it is a question that the narrator of these poems is aware of and is trying to work towards an answer. In a practical sense the poems try to answer this question by making small gestures, like working an allotment plot using organic methods, and trying to make space for wildlife, while in a broader sense they are trying to minimise their disruption, being a quiet presence in the landscape and showing respect to the animals they encounter. Writing the poems is another way to 'do no harm', to raise awareness of the issues at hand through the writing.

The title *Field Book* refers to a naturalist's notebook. It is a book that records information and impressions from the natural world and as such it both emerges from the poems, which all arise from personal experience of being in the natural world to some extent (though

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[312] Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*, p.5.
[313] John Burnside, *The Light Trap* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), p.42.

sometimes the narrator is on the periphery of it), and gives context to them: they are poems as research in the field. Taken together they act as a map to one person's experience of the Anthropocene, aiming to engage a reader with the issues by the sharing of ordinary experience. They also play out the arguments of this thesis.

In some of these poems the activism is implicit rather than explicit. Central to this idea was the idea of the relationship of the poems to each other. Much of the poetry read for this thesis is written as book-length sequences or themed collections.[314] Presenting poems together allows for themes to develop from poem to poem without the theme being explicit in every instance. Each of the poets I have considered in this thesis create a context for activism in their collections, such as Berry and Hughes with their small scale farming as a protest against industrial agriculture, so that individual poems are considered within that context. In some of my poems the environmental threats are spelled out while in others it seemed sufficient to let the poem speak for itself, but the context is clear within the collection: the narrator is taking a stand in an environment that is under threat.

The Anthropocene Lyric: Unease and Re-Enchantment

The original aim of this thesis was to explore ways that poetry might contribute to the understanding of the range of issues that we have labelled the environmental crisis but I initially came up against the complexity of the crisis, as discussed by Morton and Clark. I wanted to write explicitly activist poetry, for my poems to directly address issues I was concerned about, but where does one start, and how can one protest in a way that feels meaningful?

Earlier chapters refer briefly to a personal backstory to some of the poems. The start of this project followed my redundancy from a job I had held for seven years, which came at the end of a long period of uncertainty and difficult work conditions. Then in the early days of the project my long-term relationship ended and I began a new one, resulting in moving to a new part of the country, in what has become a series of moves to new places over the last few decades, dictated by circumstance rather than choice. Though my poems draw on personal experience, I wanted them to be about more than my personal circumstances. As

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[314] As discussed in previous chapters, I am particularly considering here Ted Hughes' *Moortown Diary*, John Kinsella's *Jam Tree Gully,* Wendell Berry's *Farming: A Handbook* and Gary Snyder's *Turtle Island.*

the poems developed, however, my thoughts and feelings about these experiences became a lens through which I viewed the various encounters in the poems. Parts of this personal story began to find their way into the poems, giving them an emotional charge beyond the political charge that I also aimed for.

A further complication is the quietness of my own poetic voice. Even within the lyric tradition my voice is much closer to Kathleen Jamie, for example, than it is to John Kinsella. Tom Bristow's *The Anthropocene Lyric* gave me a way in to using my political and personal uncertainty, showing me that rooting a poem in my personal experience of a place could reflect aspects of the Anthropocene. Some of my poems express a sense of unease in the environment rather than being explicitly activist, but Bristow's concept enabled me to connect that unease to a wider environmental context, to bear witness to the 'fragility, beauty and indifference' of the natural world. [315] This section of the chapter begins by looking at the ways that some of the poems in this collection reflect this uncertainty of living during the Anthropocene period. It moves on to look at poems that use personal moments of epiphany as watersheds for moving forward, before looking at poems that arose from moments of enchantment, of re-connection with nature, as a starting point for any kind of environmental activism.

1. Shifting Landscapes: 'Formby Beach', 'Silverdale Shore', 'Benllech Bay', and 'Snorkelling in Kalami Bay'

This first group of poems is concerned with shifting landscapes as reflections of the Anthropocene, both literally in relation to rising tides, and metaphorically in terms of an uncertain future. They engage with place, in Bristow's words, 'as it is encountered as being lived out by more than ourselves, by our situatedness in history and ecology'.[316]

'Formby Beach' is one of two sequences in the collection.[317] A sequence, or specifically themed group, of poems, provides a useful framework for in-depth exploration of aspects of environmentalism. Chapter Two considered how Hughes, Berry and Kinsella have all written sequences arising from their farming and land-management work, and Snyder has often

[315] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric*, p.15.
[316] Ibid.
[317] See page 27.

resorted to the sequence, particularly in his ‘Cold Mountain Poems’ and ‘Logging’ sequences. It gives each of these poets space to consider their relationship with a particular environment in detail.

This sequence reflects Anthropocene unease while also explicitly highlighting environmental issues. It began as a single poem, arising from observations. The dunes at Formby Beach are eroding, and initiatives to prevent the erosion, such as planting sedges and marram grasses which will bind the dunes in roots, have themselves collapsed, along with fences to keep people off the dunes. The result of this is that the tide will gradually come further inland. The poem initially arose out of a wish to raise awareness of this issue, focusing on the image of a child leaping up and down on a dune and sliding down to the beach on the sand that he shifted with his weight, an image that now occurs in the sixth part of the sequence. As I wrote the poem, however, it occurred to me that the landscape at Formby Beach epitomises the idea of flux, and its corresponding uncertainty. As the sands have shifted different periods of time have become visible. Walking along the beach one can see patterns of neolithic footprints, the brick of an old army barracks, strange brown ‘rocks’ that are actually old tobacco waste from when there was a factory there, and pieces of sea-coal. The ongoing nature of this flux is indicated by ships travelling up the Mersey Estuary that need to be guided in by pilot boats due to sand bars in the estuary. All this seems to reflect both the human damage to the environment and a broader uncertainty, what Bristow refers to as ‘Anthropocene unease,’ the constantly shifting landscape as an image for the broader, more abstract environmental concerns that are difficult to pinpoint such as climate change.[318] Both the specific damage and the wider concerns are linked in what became the sixth poem in the sequence, where the image of the pilot boat guiding the ship through the dunes is juxtaposed with the image of the boy jumping on the dune, the juxtaposition making an implicit connection between the uncertainty of the landscape and our own actions.

The poem started to find a form in ten-line stanzas. My approach to form is a combination of the organic and the crafted: I let early drafts suggest a form and then work towards it. Each stanza here dealt with a related idea, but as the poem developed into a whole the

[318] Ibid, p.10.

stanzas, although inter-connected, seemed to separate, and I started to view it not as one poem but as a sequence of seven poems. It read to me as Gary Snyder's 'Logging' sequence does, where each part of the poem explores a different aspect of the whole.[319] Formally, each of the ten-line stanzas seemed to suggest a different shape for themselves, so although the ten line form gave them a unity, each further divided into stanzas of different sizes, emphasizing differences within the overall shape. At this stage, it struck me that the themes of the sequence provided the context for the whole collection. I considered placing the separate parts throughout the collection, rather than together. This would act as a guide to the way that I want the whole collection to be read, the more personal lyrics and animal encounters all taking place against a world in flux as a result of human action.[320] Having split up the sequence, however, it diluted the overall effect of it, and I returned it to its original form as one multi-part poem where it occupies a central place in the collection. As one of two sequences within the collection, the way it relates the sense of flux to erosion and industrial waste creates a context for poems in which environmentalism is more implicit.

The uncertainty in this sequence, and the shifting nature of the landscape that shadows the collection, is explored more implicitly in the poems 'Silverdale Shore' and 'Benllech Beach'.[321] Both these poems arose, like 'Formby Beach' from walks on beaches, but the poems were approached in different ways. 'Silverdale Shore' began as a gathering of moments, alert to the 'more-than-human' in the way Bristow suggests. It draws on the immediacy of the imagist tradition, as represented in Gary Snyder's 'Cold Mountain Poems':

> Clambering up the Cold Mountain path,
> The cold mountain trail goes on and on:
> The long gorge choked with scree and boulders,
> The wide creek, the most-blurred grass.
> The moss is slippery though there's been no rain

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[319] Gary Snyder, *No Nature: New and Selected Poems,* p.34.
[320] The idea for this came from two collections by Michael Symmons Roberts, *Corpus* and *The Half-Healed* where the sequences 'Food for Risen Bodies' and 'Last Words', respectively, appeared throughout the collections. Michael Symmons Roberts, *Corpus* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004); Michael Symmons Roberts, *The Half-Healed* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008).
[321] See pages 25 and 26.

The pine sings but there's no wind.[322]

Elsewhere in the sequence Snyder's narrator is more reflective but I was struck by the description here, and I wanted to see if I could describe a landscape in such a way that the images would get beyond Morton's 'ecomimesis' to carry ideas and a sense of unease.[323] The narrator's presence is kept to a minimum. Although the narrator is 'disembodied' in 'Formby Beach' too, the voice does interpret the observations and provide background to them. In 'Silverdale Shore' the images alone do most of that work. The description aims to capture the state of flux:

> Up the beach a sandstone wall, crumbling
> to pinkish powder, is reclaimed by tide
> and weather. Steps climb towards a garden.
> Limestone shards, shunted by the sea,
> cover the first step and litter higher ones
> like signs left by a careless intruder.

The sandstone of the wall is being 'reclaimed by tide and weather', the sea is intruding on the steps. The pieces of sandstone 'carried by waves', described as 'migrants' from elsewhere, extends the reach of the poem beyond the local. When even dandelions are 'out of place, already starting to mark time,' there is a question here of how long the trees, the flowers, and the house on the shore can hold on, and the question broadens out in the context of the collection: how long can any of us hold on?

'Benllech Bay' has a similar setting and atmosphere to 'Silverdale Shore', and aims to reflect the same Anthropocene unease. It uses description in a similar way, but is more in the lyric tradition and expresses emotion more directly. The narrator is still quiet, but the poem owes more to Kinsella's lyrics. There is an embodied narrator here walking on the beach, reflecting that 'walking is easy/on the soft sand but the breeze sharpens/as the sun eases

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[322] Snyder's re-workings of Han-Shan are discussed in Chapter Two. Gary Snyder, *No Nature: New and Selected Poems*, p.24

[323] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, p.237. Morton's idea is also referred to by Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*.

down'. Here, again 'even the wall/is returning to sand.' The narrator enters the poem explicitly, as Kinsella does in 'Eagle Affirmation', in the final section of the poem, reflecting that a ship seen along the coast is something that he no longer sees at home, in 'the silted Morecambe Bay.' This specific comparison again widens the reach of the poem. We are not talking of one locality but of a wider environmental context. The way that a reflection on the changing season here, with 'summer hanging by its fingertips', is linked to wider changes, has an echo of Wendell Berry's 'Window Poems'. [324] Interesting in Berry's sequence is the way that his observations from his hut in the woods create a sense of unease:

> Rising, the river
> is wild. There is no end
> to what one may imagine
> whose lands and buildings
> lie in its reach.[325]

The river here is real, and flooding creates a problem, but as the poem develops the reflection on the world immediately outside the narrator's window merges into consideration of the broader world, particularly the war in Vietnam, which was ongoing at the time of Berry's writing. My sense of the shifting landscape of the beach is a metaphor for a broader unease in a similar way. At the end of my poem there is a yearning that is abstract but related to the imagery of the poem. The world is in a state of flux. There is a reference to the 'closed horizons of home', an image grounded in the literal fact that Morecambe Bay is an estuary but with an implication that there is no way of going forward. Even in the Benllech Bay of the poem, the caves only 'hint at secrets but are washed clean' and on the horizon 'sea meets sky in a fiery line' in an image that speaks of impending disaster as much as beauty. Looking out at the ship heading towards the fiery horizon, the narrator is 'called by the chain of decklights/and steady course to somewhere out of sight.' The poem stands alone as a poem of longing, but the imagery of the beach and the proximity in the collection to the Formby Beach poems locates the yearning within a sense of unease in a shifting landscape.

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[324] This sequence is discussed more fully in Chapter Two.
[325] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, p.89.

'Snorkelling in Kalami Bay' expresses emotion at the Anthropocene directly, in a way that we have seen in the poems of Snyder, Berry and Kinsella.[326] The unease here was created by the very real incident of a large boat sailing past and sending a shockwave around the bay while I was snorkelling. Like Hughes and Kinsella, the poem seemed to suggest a narrative as the best way of approaching the idea. Early drafts of the poem described the boat but, taking the source of the shockwave away and leaving it as a sudden unexplained incident worked as a metaphor to widen out the context of the poem.

In this poem the sense of unease is grounded in the sense of wonder at the natural world described earlier in relation to animal encounters. Sharing a space with an exotic species of fish with stripes like 'fragments of coloured glass/on skin so clear it looks transparent,' in a world that 'tide remakes daily', the narrator is 'lighter than I thought possible' and the experience touches him so much that he exclaims 'How have I lived until now without feeling this?' The poem uses the imagery to connect with a reader in the same way as Snyder's images of whales, earning the direct exclamation. The focus then widens to take in the connections between everything that's in the sea, reflecting that 'everything here, including me, /is a small part of the sea's random memory.' Everything is inter-connected so when the shockwave is felt and 'we are all pitched off course', there's a sense that it is not just the narrator and the plants and creatures immediately around him, but the whole of balance of the ecosystem that is being threatened, again moving away from the purely personal experience. The shockwave passes quickly and things return to normal but the narrator no longer feels natural in the water. This time the poem tries to pin down the sense of unease. The narrator is left with nerves 'tingling/with the sense of what could be lost.' The shockwave is unexplained but the poem tells us that the magic of the natural world can be taken away from us suddenly. In the last line of the poem there's another echo of John Burnside's poem 'History' when his narrator says: 'Sometimes I am dizzy with the fear/of losing everything – the sea, the sky,/all living creatures, forests, estuaries'.[327] These lines were also in the background during the writing of 'Benllech Bay' but this poem expresses it more directly.

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[326] See page 74.
[327] John Burnside, *The Light Trap*, p.41.

2. Moments of re-enchantment: 'Hutton Roof Crags', 'The White Deer', 'The Badger', 'Skylarks', and 'Sea Turtle'

The Anthropocene unease in *Field Book* is balanced by moments of re-engagement with the wonders of nature that, for Bate, can translate consciousness into conscience. The most prominent examples of re-engagement are the animal encounters.[328] The final part of this section considers animal encounters as moments of re-enchantment. The narrator of 'Hutton Roof Crags', trying to find their way across a limestone pavement, puts 'faith in patterns/of limestone' rather than look for 'a fixed path', and the final image of the common blue butterfly, 'briefly charging the air', suggests that if we do this then nature will guide us.[329]

The poem 'The White Deer' explores a moment of re-engagement with nature but by placing it in the context of an environmental initiative it also suggests a possible way forward environmentally, connecting to wider issues of rewilding.[330] In the poem the wonder is expressed at the rare sighting of a white deer through an exclamation where similes for its colour accumulate. The deer is 'White as snowdrops, as paint, as clouds!' The narrator admits that he had heard of the white deer but 'didn't really believe it.' The wonder here is given a different kind of charge from that in 'The Stag', by being seen through the lens of the personal backstory referred to earlier. The narrator is driving home 'redundancy letter beside me: wondering// what this landscape still offers.' The deer here represents what the landscape offers, the poem detailing a moment of re-engagement. The animal is mythologised in the way 'The Stag' is, drawing on both Celtic mythology and Arthurian legend. The narrator starts to question the possible meanings of the sighting and it becomes more than just a rare creature to see:

> A Celt would have seen a messenger
> from the otherworld, a warning to turn back
> from whatever path they were following
> but like Arthur and his knights I prefer
> to see this deer as the start of a quest

[328] These are considered in detail in Chapter Three.
[329] See page 34.
[330] See page 38.

for whatever Holy Grail I seek.

The reflection here is not solely an imaginative projection. Connections are made between the myths and the narrator's story. The white deer becomes a symbol of a new start despite the current difficulty. Even so, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is very much a real animal in a real place, and the final line, with the deer 'knowing safety/in the legends that it can never be caught' aims for both a metaphorical and environmental resonance. The narrator's quest may be an ongoing one, but as a real animal the deer can be caught, so the poem ends in a question.

The previous chapter discussed the idea of rewilding and Foulshaw Moss, a former peat bog that is being allowed to return to its original state as a wetland.[331] This poem also suggests the idea that features in 'Ospreys at Foulshaw Moss', that when an ecosystem starts to return to equilibrium, other wildlife begins to return, or gathers there. The poem suggests the deer has been 'drawn to the Moss as it slips back/to the wild wetland that it used to be', suggesting a similar occurrence to that of the ospreys. This poem is a moment of re-enchantment but it is intended to both raise awareness of, and call for support for, such initiatives.

These moments of re-engagement with nature take place in the Anthropocene, against a background of environmental damage and threats to species, and as such they once again raise the issue of implicit versus explicit activism, returning to the question highlighted by my reading of Tom Bristow in the first chapter. How clearly do the threats of the Anthropocene need to be expressed? How instrumental should the poem be?

These questions can be explored by the poems 'The Badger', discussed earlier, 'Skylarks' and 'Sea Turtle'. Badgers are regularly the object of discussion around controversial 'culls'. An earlier draft of my poem made explicit reference to this, including the line 'how could anyone think such a creature a pest' but as my description of the badger built, with its positive nature exemplified by its nodding gait, the poem seemed more and more to ask this question implicitly. Given that the poem already had to carry the personal backstory, the

[331] The poem 'Ospreys at Foulshaw Moss', on page 41, is discussed on page 160. The poem 'Floods' is on page 42 and discussed on pages 120 and 121. Foulshaw Moss is managed by the Cumbria Wildlife Trust.

additional line cluttered it. A similar process happened with my poem 'Skylarks'.[332] This poem, like 'Vultures' also discussed earlier, recounts a number of encounters with the same species. Skylarks are seen settled on a path at a nature reserve, perched on a fencepost, and flying up from the 'sea of grass.' Skylarks are redlisted by the RSPB as a species in need of conservation, and part of the motivation for writing the poem was to highlight this, but as the encounters mounted, observation of the skylarks captured a sense of joy. The one on the post with a 'crest-feather like a Cavalier' seems to be laughing; when they embark on their unique flight straight upwards they:

> ….rise as if balanced on geysers, wings
> winding themselves up invisible poles,
> then dropping, bouncing down cushions of air
> casting out splinters of music
> before landing like stones on the marsh, unharmed.

The poem accumulated a collection of moments of re-engagement with nature, paying close attention to a fascinating species of bird. With the inclusion in the final stanza of the story of the monk, who was so fascinated by the flight of a skylark that a hundred years passed, the poem was complete without the inclusion of additional information. [333] It asks the question implicitly of how we can harm these amazing birds.

The poem 'Sea Turtle' is another moment of re-engagement with nature but this poem contains a more explicit raising of awareness.[334] It arose from a rare sighting of a loggerhead sea turtle in a harbour on Crete. The poem looks closely at the turtle, and captures something of its fascination for the narrator by describing it as a 'survivor from another age' with a 'dinosaur head.' As 'we track it round the harbour' the poem tries to dig more deeply into the hold the turtle has on the narrator. Consideration of the threat to the species arose as a natural consequence of this, almost as an aside:

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[332] See page 69.
[333] The story of the monk in my poem 'Skylarks' is 'an old chinese story' recounted by the Scottish nature writer Jim Crumley. Jim Crumley, *Skylark* (Glasgow: Saraband, 2016), p.45.
[334] See page 71.

> Its rarity is cause enough to celebrate,
> given oil spills and plastic bags
> they mistake for jellyfish and swallow.

The poem then returns to the creature:

> As it bobs up for another breather,
> flippers cut slow curves through waves
> and it looks like it is taking a bow.

Juxtaposing the information about pollution and its effect on the sea-turtle it with the image of the creature looking like 'it is taking a bow' creates a resonance. This is a poem first and foremost about the wonder of seeing a sea-turtle, and the awareness of its rarity serves to enhance that, but the awareness can also translate into action on a reader's part.

The danger in not including the background of threats against a species is that readers may not be aware of it, but as with Hughes's *Moortown Diary*, Berry's *Farming: A Handbook* and *Clearing*, Kinsella's *Jam Tree Gully* and Snyder's *Turtle Island*, the collection creates a context for the individual poems. On balance, there is enough in my collection about a changing world, and about species under threat, for poems which do not explicitly refer to such things to be read in the light of those that do. The activism in these poems comes from both the emotional engagement with the creatures, and the context within the collection.

Modelling Behaviour: 'How to Do No Harm'

This, from the John Burnside poem cited earlier in the chapter, is a central question in my collection of poems and it is explored in two kinds of poem. The first looks in broad terms at 'minimising your footprint', and the second at the possibilities and contradictions of working the land.

(i) Keeping my Presence Tiny: Mare and Foal

The poem 'Mare and Foal' is the most explicit articulation in my poems of the narrator

trying to minimise their presence in the landscape.[335] It details a similar encounter to that in the poem 'Lambing Season', discussed in Chapter Two and there is a similar level of attention to the creatures who are sharing the hillside. The narrator is walking onto the moors and finds his path blocked by a mare with a young foal. The narrator almost falls over them at the beginning of the poem, but his attention immediately goes to the foal. The poem tries to capture a sense of the foal's vulnerability. While writing this I was aware of Hughes's calf in 'Moortown Diary'. The calf:

> ….tried to get up,
> Tried to get his cantilever frontlegs
> In operation, lifted his shoulders, hoisted to his knees,
> Then hoisted his back-end and lurched forward
> on his knees and crumpling ankles, sliding in the mud
> And collapsing plastered. She went on licking him.[336]

I wanted the vividness of Hughes's description while also going beyond the immediate moment to explore the idea of the relationship between the mare and the foal. In my poem, the foal:

> can't be more than a day old
> and seems provisional, a sketch
> for its later self, each twitch of its legs
> loose as water, startling itself
> with hoof-beats on the hard earth.

The perspective then widens to include the mother, seen not only helping the foal in the moment but as a force that will help it become itself, the mare 'pushing it back to standing,/ firming its presence into something real.' The mare then detects the narrator's presence and not only blocks the route but challenges it. It is only now that the poem starts to directly express the narrator's thoughts and feelings. The 'purpose of the walk is to give myself/ briefly to the moor'. The linebreak here accentuates the minimising of a human

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[335] See page 35.
[336] 'Birth of Rainbow' in Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes*, p.522.

presence. It is their 'self' that they are giving, escaping 'briefly' from quotidian pressures and opening up to what the landscape is offering. This is in opposition to causing distress to animals so the narrator backs away. There is a need, however, to try and explain this to the horses, and as the narrator moves away, there is:

> some strange need pushing out my empty palms.
> Once I'm gone they'll forget I was here
> but I want them to know I mean no harm.

The 'they' in this stanza can be taken to be broader than the foal and its mother. Ultimately we will all be forgotten once we are gone but it is important to the poem that not only the horses but future generations will know that the narrator meant no harm. There is a further echo of Kinsella's 'Eagle Affirmation' here as his poem reflects 'that's as much sense/or nonsense as I can make in this blue light.'[337] We do not have the answers but the poems attempt to express emotion, as Bristow suggests, against a background of environmental damage and loss of species extinction.

(ii) Working the Land: 'An Allotment Handbook' and 'A Local Farm'

This section explores working the land as a platform from which to reflect on model behaviour during the Anthropocene. The poems draw on all four of the key poets in this thesis, but develop their ideas by placing elements of their work in the context of a contemporary British working life, and exploring some of the ambiguities and complexities that this creates.

'An Allotment Handbook' was briefly introduced in Chapter Three.[338] Like the earlier 'Formby Beach' sequence, it developed from an initial poem but in a different way. The earlier sequence grew into a long poem which I realised in the drafting process was a number of shorter poems. 'An Allotment Handbook' began as one poem (the first in the sequence, initially called 'Allotment' but later retitled 'Site' as the sequence grew). I realised when drafting this that the idea seemed bigger than one poem, but unlike 'Formby Beach', which was separated into individual poems so always existed as a seven-poem sequence,

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[337] John Kinsella, *Jam Tree Gully: Poems*, p.49.
[338] See the poems on pages 51 to 59.

'An Allotment Handbook' was written almost as a journal, over a period of time, with poems suggesting other poems. I had no initial idea of the shape of the whole. Both these sequences linked their poems formally as well as thematically, with each poem in 'An Allotment Handbook' being a loose, unrhymed sonnet. The poems did not need the additional rigour of end-rhyme, but the fourteen line frame with a turn at a particular point worked for this theme, the form allowing for reflection or a new perspective on each subject, with each poem taking its end-shape fairly quickly.

As the poems grew I realised that the sequence was central to the collection as a whole. Like Hughes, Kinsella, Snyder and especially Berry, this was my opportunity to document my relationship to the land, to explore ways I tried to 'do no harm' by practicing elements of self-sufficiency using organic methods that aim to improve the soil. The poems detail tasks in the way that Berry in particular does, but they reflect on the broader relationship with the environment in a similar way to John Kinsella in *Jam Tree Gully.*[339]

The poems each take one of the ordinary tasks on an allotment as their starting point, such as clearing the ground, growing and planting seedlings, watering plants, weeding, composting and harvesting. The way the tasks are documented models good environmental practice, in the way that takes its cue from Berry in 'The Satisfactions of the Mad Farmer', itemising 'the work of feeding, clothing and housing,/done with more than enough knowledge/ and more than enough love.'[340] In my poems the narrator 'thumb seeds into squares of compost' and keeps them 'by the window for light' until the time is right for planting; they use rainwater for watering them, weed the plot by hand and, after the harvest is done, compost the waste, 'returning left-over scraps of harvest to feed the clay soil it came from'. Each of these tasks raises a wider environmental issue: 'Drought' references climate change and the increasing problem of watering plants in a self-sufficient way during increasingly dry summers; 'Creeping Buttercup' explores our relationship to weeds and tidiness in gardens and allotment plots, particularly if we refuse to use chemicals; 'The Apple Tree' looks at our relationship with animals that gardeners consider pests.

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[339] See 'Beans and Jam Tree Gully' as a particular example, where Kinsella talks of planting beans as 'grand impact.' (John Kinsella*, Jam Tree Gully: Poems,* p.68). Kinsella's poem is itself in conversation with a passage in Thoreau's *Walden*.

[340] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems,* p.152

My attempts at self-sufficiency however were clearly on a much smaller scale than Berry or any of the other poets discussed. Having an allotment that is separate from a home is part of a historical tradition of entitlement to land, as referenced in 'Site' where the land is 'given over/to self-sufficiency by government act' and where we will all 'stake our claim,/perhaps seeing shades of miners who worked/their own plots in the little light granted them', but it also has a separation from quotidian life from which all kinds of ambiguities may arise. I may be trying to manage an allotment plot in a sustainable way, but I am still living within an economy rooted in environmentally-damaging practices, such as driving to work and buying some products from supermarkets, where many products have travelled substantial distances to reach the shelves. For Morton and Clark, even if we can completely remove ourselves from this system, the scale effects are such that individuals cannot make a difference. I wanted to deliberately explore and raise awareness of these ambiguities as a way of opening up the debate. Consequently there are a number of ironies in the poems. In 'The Apple Tree', the poem leaves the reader asking why the narrator did not go to greater lengths to protect the tree from the rabbits with mesh.[341] It is as if eagerness to do the right thing by planting the tree led to not thinking it through properly. The reader may do the job more effectively. In 'Drought' the allotment site has no access to a mains supply of water and each of the plots harvest rainwater in 'a water tank or butt/fed by gutter and pipe rigged to a shed.' The advice is that a standard water butt is more than adequate 'but a fortnight without rain/ and my plastic tap releases only air.' The irony here is spelled out. The ground is parched and: 'The only thing is to fill bottles at home/ make several trips up the hill in the car.'

It is beginning to appear that the contribution an allotment can make to the environmental crisis is limited but as the poems progress the narrator feels a connection with nature, most clearly articulated in the poem 'Digging Over'. While preparing the soil for planting, the narrator realises that a robin is delving into the newly-turned earth and 'dragging out worms':

> like a jazz musician soloing
> it finds the spaces in my rhythm

[341] Discussed on page 123.

and this is what matters, each of us giving
room to the other in an unspoken contract.

The sequence moves towards an environmentally-conscious producing of food that works alongside nature, in the way that Berry's poems and essays propose that his farming does, but it does this from a perspective that is tied in to the contradictions of the Anthropocene. These contradictions are further illustrated in the poem 'Creeping Buttercup.' There is emphasis on tidiness in the allotment site, particularly when it is 'Open Day tomorrow, each plot must look/dusted and hoovered', and the narrator is pulling up an invasive weed, clearing by the site by hand to avoid the use of chemicals.[342] The second half of the poem, reflects on these actions:

Yes, it's invasive, would strangle the plot,
and gives up its grip in friable soil
easy as lifting it out of water
but we need to make a deal with nature.

There are wider questions here. A decision has been made that certain plants will be considered inappropriate in an allotment site. The narrator is also aware that there are reasons for this that go beyond the aesthetic, that left unchecked the whole plot will succumb to weeds and it would be difficult to grow food. At the end of the poem there is a small compromise: 'I'll leave some to flower at the path's edge,/yellow winking in the breeze, a token.'

As suggested at the beginning of the chapter, these poems would most likely be categorised by Lidström and Garrard as 'ecophenomological'. They are poems arising from one person's experience of working on a very small plot of land, but each poem asks a wider question of our relationship with the environment that reaches beyond personal experience. The 'we' in

[342] Behind this poem is Mark Cocker's commentary on the British emphasis on 'tidyness' in the landscape. Writing of Gedney, in Lincolnshire, he says: 'Many domestic gardens look like interiors, and are managed as if nature has to be and can be controlled like the constituents of a living room. If the lawns could be vacuumed and preserved dust-free I imagine they would be.' Mark Cocker, *Our Place: Can We Save British Nature before It Is Too Late?*, p.168.

the final line of 'Creeping Buttercup' extends the statement to society in general. We need to make a deal with nature, we need to find environmentally-sensitive answers to questions of drought or dealing with 'pests', and we need to give nature and the environment our close attention in the way that lyric poetry can. These poems may be ecophenomological but they are also 'environmental' or what Bristow would call 'Anthropocene lyrics', lyric poems addressing universal questions against a wider, global environmental context.

The poem 'A Local Farm', the final poem discussed in this section, picks up some of the themes of the previous sequence on a larger scale, and is placed next to it within the collection, suggesting a link between them.[343] The poem had a slightly unusual genesis, as it began as the first stanza of 'Hares in a Field near Newburgh.' The stanza began as scene-setting for the encounter with the hares, but it became apparent both that it was not necessary to the first poem and that the idea of a 'model farm' was interesting in its own right. The poem is, essentially, walks through a farm which is presented as a model. It allows space for different kinds of produce and livestock, in unspoken contrast to the monoculture of industrial farms.[344] It has left parts of the land wild as habitats for various species and with 'no pesticides to silence them/bees and butterflies charge the green rows.' It is a farm run on similar principles to Berry's farm in Kentucky. In 'From the Crest' Berry addresses his farm directly:

> And speaking to you, I speak
> to all that brotherhood that rises
> daily in your substance
> and walks, burrows, flies, stands:
> plants and beasts whose lives
> loop like dolphins through your sod.[345]

The farm, for Berry, is not a factory but a contract with nature, land to be nurtured which in turn will provide food and a home for other creatures, both those that are bred there and those that are attracted to it by the conditions of its upkeep. The title of 'A Local Farm' too,

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[343] See page 60..
[344] See Chapter 13 'Factory Flowers' in Mark Cocker, *Our Place: Can We Save British Nature before It Is Too Late?*, for a description of the growing of ranks of uniform daffodils on a farm in Lincolnshire.
[345] Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, p.222.

makes reference to Berry's ideas of the importance of a local economy, supporting and supported by its community, as a factor in a strong local culture which can be placed against the exploitation, vulnerability and environmental damage of a centralised economy.[346]

My poem places its subject farm in a wider environmental context. It begins by observing that there 'is something generous in these fields'. This generosity is manifest in the giving up of space for wildlife, but also in the space it allows what it grows to 'make their own shapes'.[347] It is particularly manifest in the final stanza, where:

> ….a bale of hay spills
> onto the ground, a gift for passing horses
> and there's a kind of love in the path that's left
> at the field's edge, wide enough for dancing.

It is a similar generosity to that shown by Kinsella when he takes out water for the kangaroos in *Jam Tree Gully*. There is deliberately strong emotion in my last two lines, sensing strong feeling and commitment in the creation of such a farm. As the narrator suggests, it is 'the work of farmers who understand/their hold on land is only temporary.' We can use the land but we should also take care of it both for the other creatures we share it with and for future generations, another idea that is explicit in the work of Berry. In doing so we show an attention that the narrator describes as love.[348] The poem is local, rooted in a particular place, but once again it links to a broader, global idea, pointing to a way forward.

2. Raising Awareness and Making Connections

Raising awareness of environmental issues is central to this thesis, as it is to the work of the four key poets discussed. Ted Hughes's poems of river pollution were intended to draw attention to the issue. Gary Snyder wanted to draw sympathy for the plight of the whale in a

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[346] 'The Work of Local Culture' in Wendell Berry, *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry*, edited by Paul Kingsnorth, p.103.

[347] A similar generosity is highlighted in the poem 'The Coronation Beech' on page 44, where the beech tree too has been free to make its own shape.

[348] The idea of farms being worked by several generations is a recurring theme in Berry's poetry, but see especially 'A Country Funeral': 'We owe the future the past/the long knowledge that is/ the potency of time to come.' Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems*, p.184.

global capitalist market. Kinsella, in his own terms, wants to 'effect change' with his poems and raising awareness is a necessary prerequisite for that, and Berry sees the principal theme of his work as modelling agrarian politics in order to promote them. This chapter, as well as previous chapters, has already covered some of the ways my own poems aim to raise awareness of environmental issues. I have discussed using imagery to raise awareness in relation to the effects of radiation in the poem 'Looking for a Way up Black Combe', and in relation to rising sea levels and dune erosion in 'Benllech Bay', 'Snorkelling in Kalami Bay', 'Silverdale Shore' and the sequence 'Formby Beach'. I have also used both personal and third person narratives to raise awareness of issues of animal and land conservation, in poems such as 'Gary Snyder in the Forest', 'Grouse Moor', the sequence 'An Allotment Handbook', and animal encounters such as 'Sea Turtle'.

Chapter Three considers ways that I have tried to harness ecological information, particularly scientific information, within the framework of lyric poetry. It looks at deliberate rewilding to encourage the return of species in 'Ospreys at Foulshaw Moss', and to create 'carbon sinks' through the restoration of peat bogs in 'Floods', and at trying to find a metaphorical language for the effects of radiation in 'Looking for a Way up Black Combe.' Chapter Two discusses the importance of science to ecologically-aware nature poetry and introduced Edward O. Wilson's question of whether poetry can incorporate science for educational purposes without it seeming imported from a secondary source. Ted Hughes, in his letter to Gifford, was sceptical about this, but Snyder suggested poets shouldn't be afraid of it. The chapter also considers metaphor as a device for both making complex ideas accessible and allowing the ideas to make an imaginative connection with a reader. This final section looks at 'Bees on the Cheshire Lines', another example of incorporating the science of ecology into my poems in order to both raise awareness and emotionally engage readers in environmental issues and potential ways to combat them. The section finishes with a close-reading of a poem that considers species extinction, raising awareness of connections between past and present species.

(i) Bees and the Poetry of Science

'Bees on the Cheshire Lines' is an animal encounter that opens up into wider issues, moving

from the ecophenomenological to the environmental.[349] It makes an emotional connection with a reader, aiming to push 'consciousness into conscience', in the way that Solnick questions. The poem begins with the encounter, when the narrator's companion notices a bee:

> …rolled up on my shoulder:
> an early bumblebee, pulsing stripes of coal
> and flame as if singing courage to itself.

There is an immediate sense here, with the bee needing to sing courage to itself, that something is not quite right. The poem proceeds:

> Not wanting to startle it into stinging
> you lift your walking pole, prise the bee
> to perch on the tip. It looks lost or scared.

This prompts the exclamation that 'I feel faint to think there are fewer now/ and we don't know why for sure'. The loss of a major pollinator will have such a major effect on food production that this statement seemed to require a strong an emotional charge, and it is influenced by Kinsella's urgency in 'Eagle Affirmation', when he says: 'even one small missing wattle tree is agony'.[350] The link between observation and reflection is important here, as discussed earlier in relation to 'Floods'. Discussing Kinsella's poem Bristow says: 'This is not cause and effect, the emotion is not brought out by the observation but by the knowingness of our actions that impinge on non-human animals.'[351] My raising of awareness works in a similar way. The narrator feeling 'faint' is very much part of the experience of the poem, but it then acts as a prompt for reflection, rather than containing the reflection within itself.

Despite their lack of certainty my narrator considers a likely, if not the only, cause of the decline in bees: 'the golden cloth of oilseed rape behind us/and the chemicals the seeds are

[349] See page 68.
[350] John Kinsella, *Jam Tree Gully: Poems*, p.49. There is a further echo here of John Burnside's 'sometimes I am dizzy with the fear of losing everything' in 'History' in John Burnside, *The Light Trap, p.40*.
[351] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric*, p.5.

drenched in'. The chemicals are neonicotinoids or 'neonics' in shorthand. The poem again faces the challenge of finding a poetic language for science. Recent research suggests that the chemicals have a slow effect on a bee's navigation systems. The bees get lost. [352] In the poem I use a simile of the chemicals acting 'like static/on their homing signal' to communicate this process. Bees are creatures of community and, not being able to find their way back to the hive, they are unable to survive on their own. I wanted the poem to convey the tragedy of this so followed it with some examples of bees' remarkable navigational abilities. Bees:

> travel miles on their daily forage,
> can recognise a farmhouse they once passed
> and read the earth's magnetic pulse like a map

The imaginative leap in this poem came from articulating why a solitary bee cannot survive. The line 'a bee without family is without a soul' is a risk due to its anthropomorphism, but seemed to articulate the enormous sense of loss engendered by the chemical.[353]
As with 'Floods', this poem faced the challenge of keeping the digression rooted in the poem.

Again, the poem returns to its original moment to finish with a visual image, but the shock here is that the bee seems to be affected by the chemicals already described, as it 'weaves punctured circles in the air above these carefully-plotted paths.' The Cheshire lines referenced in the title is a series of paths built on the beds of old railway lines, and the bee's wavering course contrasts neatly with the precisely-drawn paths.

(ii) Last words: 'Skeleton of a Mastodon in the Natural History Museum, London' and a Poetry of Extinction

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[352] The significance of these chemicals is that, rather than being sprayed on in the field so much of the pesticide does not adhere to the plant, the seeds are doused in the chemicals so when the plant grows the chemical works through its systems and each part of the plant is infused with it. See Chapter 13, 'The Disappearing Bees' in Dave Goulson, A *Buzz in the Meadow* (London: Vintage, 2015), p.187.
[353] There is an echo here of Mary Oliver. In 'Some Questions You Might Ask' she asks of the soul: 'Why should I have it and not the anteater/who loves her children?/Why should I have it and not the camel?/Come to think of it, what about the maple trees?' Mary Oliver, *Wild Geese: Selected Poems* (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2004), p.28.

The final poem in the collection brings together many of the issues in the collection through a consideration of extinction, in order to raise awareness of the ultimate species loss. The question of species extinction was a challenging one to tackle as it deals with absence rather than presence, and a museum exhibit provided an impetus for this.[354] The reconstructed bones of a mastodon allow for a form of immediate sensory connection with an extinct species, that can then be used as the basis for a reflection on extinction which also makes connections to present species under threat. Once again the power of Gary Snyder's images of the whales is important here. The first stanza is struck by the tangibility of the exhibit. It is huge and 'so alive it could step from the platform,/plough its way through the cavernous hall.' The viscerality here aims to jar with the fact that we are looking not at a real animal but at a skeleton.

The poem then begins to distance itself from the creature by turning to an interpretation board. The importing of secondhand information serves the subject here, emphasising that we all we have to tell us of the once living creature are explanatory notes. In contrast to the apparently war-like nature of 'Armour for bones, scimitars for tusks', the creatures were, we are told, 'gentle/taking comfort from the warmth of the herd', and herbivores 'grazing the sheltered forest floor, or/browsing leaves and fruits that few could reach.'

The reason for the extinction is addressed by asking the question 'Did the hunters who felled the last one know?' This places us in the moment when the last few of the species are being tracked down, and aims for a contemporary resonance. If we know that we are about to make a species extinct will we stop? The poem also returns to the ideas in Snyder's 'Hunting' sequence, questioning hunting as a means of survival by suggesting that from 'what's known of earlier versions of us/hunting is rarely just about food.'[355] I wanted the

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[354] To give a few examples of other poems that have tackled this issue: John Montague's 'The Last Monster' (Neil Astley, *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems*,p 50) lists a number of extinct species such as the dodo and the great Auk. John Burnside's 'History', (a different poem from that previously referenced) commemorates the extinction of Miss Waldron's Red Colobus by auditing the sense of loss we feel when species are no longer with us. (John Burnside, *The Light Trap*,p.20.) W.S. Merwin's 'For a Coming Extinction' and Margaret Atwood's 'Elegy for a Giant Tortoise' are advance elegies acting as activist calls to protect the species. (Neil Astley, *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems* p.51 and p.52.)

[355] Dave Goulson discusses the wastefulness of hunting practices through history. Among his examples he references Matt Ridley's *The Origins of Virtue,* suggesting that there is strong evidence that Native Americans killed bison by driving herds of cliffs, and only eating the 'choicest cuts' from the top few, questioning the idea that earlier human societies lived more in harmony with nature. See Chapter Fifteen 'Easter Island' in Dave Goulson, *A Buzz in the Meadow,* p.237.

final stanza of the poem (and of the collection) to be emotive and an earlier draft referred to looking at the skeleton feeling shame, but with such a large subject it is difficult to express direct emotion without it feeling like a resort to cliché. The final draft brings us back into the present to state that 'this is what extinction means:/staring at a skeleton in a museum foyer' but it then makes a connection to two species that do still exist. An earlier draft had two species who receive a lot of media attention, the giant panda and the blue whale, but I was concerned that this in itself was a cliché so I kept the giant panda but added the badger, a species that is currently thriving but which is, as discussed earlier, subject to proposed culls. This inclusion also makes reference and adds resonance to the earlier poem 'The Badger', making questions of our treatment of it both implicit and explicit.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the main themes and techniques in my collection of poems *Field Book*. The poems are forged in the lyric tradition of early twenty-first century British ecopoets such as Alice Oswald, Kathleen Jamie, and John Burnside, as discussed by what has come to be regarded as the 'first wave' of British ecocritics, such as Jonathan Bate and Terry Gifford. Despite criticism for perceived limitations of its perspective, my poems aim to show that the lyric is ideally placed to tackle the complexities of the crisis, by:

1. The use of imagery to connect in a sensory way to local manifestations of the environmental crisis, enabling an understanding of vast and complex issues, such as the way rising tides and coastal erosion are addressed in the poem 'Formby Beach'.
2. Structuring personal responses to aspects of the Anthropocene in order to make emotional connections with a reader, as can be seen in the poem 'Sea Turtle'.
3. Finding a metaphorical language for complex scientific ideas, as evidenced by the poem 'Bees on the Cheshire Lines'.
4. Incorporating some of the ideologically-driven urgency from other ecopoetic traditions to 'let the idea drive the poem', as suggested by Mary Oliver[356], while maintaining the lyric's alertness to the intricacies of language. This can be seen in the poem 'A Local Farm'.

[356] Mary Oliver, *Blue Pastures* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), p.89.

The four key poets considered in the thesis are all poets who position their activism and their poetry within their role as owners of land as base for putting their environmental ideas into practice. Not everyone has access to tracts of land, and my poems aim to develop the work of Snyder, Berry, Kinsella and Hughes by placing elements of their work in a contemporary British context and aiming for a commonality of experience, while also being unafraid to confront the complexities and contradictions of the environmental crisis. The poems also aim to extend and develop the ways that the four key poets incorporate specific information about the environmental context in order to raise awareness of the issues at hand, seeking a poetic language for scientific ideas, as discussed above, and raising awareness of environmental initiatives.

The resulting collection can act as a bridge between the British lyric ecopoetic tradition and the more direct activism of poets such as Snyder, Berry and Kinsella. The poems are attuned to the Anthropocene in a way that fits in with Tom Bristow's idea of the Anthropocene lyric, engaging with the prevailing environmental conditions of particular places, while also making connections to the wider global environmental context.

Conclusion: Tiny Lenses

In *Field Book*, the collection of poems written as part of this thesis, I challenged my poems to confront issues around the environmental crisis while remaining true to the linguistic nuances of nature poetry in the British lyric tradition. As a poet whose previous work has been concerned with place, and been forged in the tradition of British lyric nature poetry, I have become increasingly concerned about the environmental crisis and want my work to tackle it more directly.

Considering recent ecocriticism in the work of Timothy Morton, Timothy Clark and Matthew Griffiths, I encountered criticism of 'first wave' British ecocritics, such as Jonathan Bate and Terry Gifford, and the poets who followed them, suggesting that poetry written within the British lyric tradition is often restricted by locality and characterised by 'ecomimesis', or sensory engagement which fails to show the intricacy of the relationship between humans and their environment.[357] Sam Solnick also criticises an over-reliance in Bate and Gifford on emotional states such as awe and humility, something which, in the context of my poetic practice, I would identify as being a particular contribution that poetry can make to understanding of the crisis.[358] As humans we need to find a way of living in the Anthropocene, and our emotions are an important aspect of this. Ecologists can give us facts, but lyric poetry can help us engage emotionally, and guide us in how to live, with a changing environment.

Susanna Lidström and Greg Garrard, in trying to balance the differing positions that have emerged in ecopoetics, highlight one of the key challenges of this thesis. They distinguish between 'ecophenomenological' poetry and 'environmental poetry.' The former is rooted in an individual response to the environment and aims to 'inspire wonder and appreciation for the non-human world' in order to encourage the reader to better care for it, assuming a link, as Solnick has suggested, 'between consciousness and conscience.'[359] The latter

[357] A term first used by Timothy Morton. *Ecology without Nature*, p.137

[358] Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p.21.

[359] Lidström, Susanna and Garrard, Greg, 'Images Adequate to our Predicament: Ecology, Environment and Ecopoetics', *Environmental Humanities*, Issue 5, (2013), p.36; Ibid, p. 25.

explores the wider geopolitical context of the environmental crisis.[360] Lidström and Garrard don't go as far as Timothy Morton's concept of 'ecomimesis', but they are critical of poetry they consider to be ecophenomenological. From their perspective, the 'natural world' that such poetry aims to connect to is 'generally idyllic and pre-Darwinian', and they assume 'that it is not referring to potential harmful forms of nature, such as viruses, poisonous plants, earthquakes and tsunamis and so on.'[361] They go on to question the relevance of poetry that focuses on individual experience and responsibility 'in a world where the most serious environmental challenges are dealt with by international and global institutions rather than individuals.'[362]

There are several difficulties with this position. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, the land management depicted in the poems of Ted Hughes and John Kinsella, while written within the lyric tradition and from an individual standpoint, far from having an idyllic view of nature, shows the harsh realities of farming, and of relations with neighbours with different perspectives. Garrard himself has argued that poets that may be regarded as nature poets, such as Kathleen Jamie and John Burnside, are capable of demonstrating a complex awareness of the global entanglements of our relationship with the environment.[363] Perhaps the key difficulty with this, however, is that Garrard and Lidström do not recognise that it is possible for a poem to both ecophenomenological and environmental at the same time.[364] They seem to ignore the longstanding differences between traditions of ecologically-aware nature poetry in Britain and North America, where poets such as Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, Mary Oliver, W.S Merwin and others, have a long history of writing directly activist place-based environmental poetry that makes connections to the wider geopolitical situation.

Lidström and Garrard, in their discussion of Ted Hughes, a poet they view as ecophenomenological, do show how poetry based on close individual observation of the

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[360] Greg Garrard and Susanna Lidström 'Images Adequate to our Predicament: Ecology, Environment and Ecopoetics', *Environmental Humanities,* Issue 5 (2014) pp.35-53. An article also referenced in Sam Solnick, ibid, p.30.
[361] Ibid, p.48.
[362] Ibid, p.48.
[363] Greg Garrard *'The Unbearable Lightness of Green: Air Travel, Climate Change and Literature'* in Green Letters 17(2) 2013. Also cited in Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene : Ecology, Biology and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p.25.
[364] A point also made by Sam Solnick, ibid.

natural world can help reconfigure our view of nature by taking a non-anthropocentric stance.[365] This is an important precursor of any environmental activism, to perceive humanity as being no more important than the external, 'natural' world. They also acknowledge the importance of a human emotional response to the questions of the Anthropocene, suggesting that:

> emotions are at least as important as rationality for decision making, on personal as well as institutional levels. {…} obstacles to developing sustainable societies are as much affective as scientific and political.[366]

Despite the difficulties with their approach the distinction is a useful one, and it does highlight challenges encountered in writing the poems in this thesis. The discussion of individual poems in the previous chapters indicated that, though the challenge was to make connections between the localised subject of the poem and the wider environmental context, what might be described as the 'lyric impulse' sometimes suggested that particular poems should remain rooted in their individual, sensory encounter.[367] The question arises of ways in which poetry can be activist while remaining true to the lyric impulse, how it can reach towards a broader social significance while still working 'as poetry', in Gifford's terms.

The work of the four key poets whose work is explored in this thesis provided some ways forward here but it also drew attention to further challenges. These can be illustrated by distinguishing the differences in approach between the poets. The work of Wendell Berry clearly articulates the links between the ecophenomenological and the environmental. His 'Window Poems' sequence, as one example, begins with localised observations but links them to the wider political context of exploitation of the environment by business interests, and of the then-current war in Vietnam.[368] His farming poems arise from personal experience but link in to the traditional social structures built around farming in a way that Lidström and Garrard describe as 'environmental' in the work of Seamus Heaney.[369] This

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[365] Greg Garrard and Susanna Lidström 'Images Adequate to our Predicament: Ecology, Environment and Ecopoetics', *Environmental Humanities,* Issue 5 (2014) p. 38.
[366] Ibid, pp.37-39.
[367] See the discussion on the poem 'The Badger' on p.191.
[368] See the discussion on pp.120-122.
[369] See the discussion on pp.142-145

thesis does, however, express reservations around some of Wendell Berry's more overtly politically activist poems. The 'Mad Farmer' poems in *Farming: A Handbook* would appear to explain Berry's agenda in a way that the poems don't seem to require, and some of the poems about his family come across as too self-righteous to connect with a wide readership. Rather than involve a reader in a cause, such poems can feel too much like propaganda. In my sequence 'An Allotment Handbook', I aim for the quieter voice of Berry's shorter lyrics, making links to a wider context through the imagery rather than more direct statement.

Gary Snyder's work draws on a range of traditions from ancient Chinese wilderness poetry to the Japanese haiku tradition, along with minority cultures such as the Inuit and Native Americans. Chapter Two discusses Bate's criticism of Snyder's poem 'Mother Earth: Her Whales' as 'written to express a set of opinions.'[370] The poem does include very bald political statement but, juxtaposed against imagery which creates a sense of wonder and awe in a reader, it illustrates the way such statement can be earned by the rest of the poem. This influenced the direct statement in poems like 'Bees on the Cheshire Lines' and 'Looking for a Way Up Black Combe.'

Snyder's drawing on other belief systems provides a range of symbols in his activist poetics. The coyote, for instance, is both a real creature under threat and becomes a symbol for a more harmonious way of co-existing as part of nature. Placing the literal and the metaphorical alongside each other, as seen in my poem 'Vultures', the poem becomes a plea for preservation of a species and an exploration of both its ecological and imaginative importance.[371]

Ted Hughes increasingly positioned himself as a political activist but expressed doubts about the way activism expressed itself in poetry, feeling it could be propaganda that wasn't 'the real thing'.[372] Despite this Hughes went on to write a number of explicitly activist poems, particularly those in the collection *River,* where the activism proceeds both through the collection of visceral images and through a direct political statement.[373] Still, in the farming poems of *Moortown Diary*, Hughes, in contrast with Berry, wrote out of his activism rather

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[370] See the discussion on pp. 103-106.
[371] See p. 70.
[372] See p. 102.
[373] See pp. 143-144.

than writing directly of his political beliefs, his small scale farming methods standing against the unstated methods of industrial agriculture with its use of chemicals and battery farming.[374] One of the key influences of Hughes on the poems of this thesis is the possibilities of how environmental activism in poetry can be implicit as well as explicit, and poems like 'Benllech Bay' are written out of a political activism rather than being expressly politically activist.[375]

John Kinsella, like Snyder, draws on a range of traditions. He writes out of his home landscape of Australia but sees his work within the British lyric tradition. The collection *Jam Tree Gully*, however, considered here, is to some extent a commentary on Thoreau's *Walden* and connects Kinsella to the American nature writing tradition. A line of influence can also be argued from Snyder and Berry, in the way his poems document his quotidian relationship with the land.

Chapter Two discusses Kinsella's approach to activism, exploring the way his poems connect with a reader through narratives drawn from his own life.[376] Rooting a poem in the personal gives a poet somewhere to position their activism. We find ourselves drawn into the incidents in the poems, and share Kinsella's concern and anger. The poem 'Write-Off' is one of the strongest examples of this, where the narrator's car hits a kangaroo who runs out of the forest to escape hunters.[377] The reader is involved in the poem, exploring the process and drawing the conclusion for themselves. This approach has influenced many of the personal narratives in my collection. The sequence 'An Allotment Handbook', for instance, tries to involve the reader in daily tasks on an allotment while making connections to a wider political context, but it allows the reader to draw their own conclusions, not directly telling them what to think.

The different approaches of these poets influenced the poems in *Field Book* but also created tensions in the writing, presenting challenges to my poetic voice. Even within a British lyric tradition that favours linguistic resonance over direct political statement, my natural voice is reticent, not comfortably able to make the sometimes-bold statements of poets like

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[374] See pp. 123-128.
[375] See page 26.
[376] See pp. 106-116.
[377] See the discussion on pp. 165-166.

Kinsella, Snyder, Berry and, occasionally, Hughes. I am more comfortable, in some ways, within the more descriptive territory of what Lidström and Garrard term the ecophenomenological, feeling that any overt activism needs to be earned by the poems. My response to this dilemma has been to try to engage with environmental issues but to the use the quietness of my voice as a tool for involving the reader.[378] The narrative presence is important in my poems because their focus is on human engagement with the environment, but this presence aims not to be too intrusive, to minimise its footprint in the way it suggests that all of us need to do with regard to the natural world. The distinction here is one made by Kinsella when he refers to the difference between a poem operating as 'a prompt for ethical change' and 'political instruction.' The reader is invited to share these reflections because the narrative voice is precise and considered and, though it has opinions, it does not shout them, and often relies on the imagery to make connections with the wider environmental context, or become environmental, as Lidström and Garrard suggest.

In the process of writing the poems I was opened up, through the work of Ted Hughes primarily, to the possibilities of how environmental activism in poetry can be implicit as well as explicit. Many of the poems in the collection have a very clear activist agenda, while others borrow their political stance from proximity to other poems, or from the overall context of the collection. The relationship of poems to each other in a collection is an important part of the work of the poets discussed. Each of these poets has worked in sequences or book-length collections where the explicit environmentalism in particular poems sets the context for poems where this is more implicit. I see this process working in *Field Book*. For instance, although not all the animal encounters deal with the specific threat to a species, enough do that all the animal encounters may be read in this light. The poems also opened themselves up to elements of a personal story that unfolded during the process of writing, which added an emotional charge to the poems but also gave them a different level of meaning so the poems work as personal lyrics as well as nature lyrics. The result is a collection of poems where the environmentalism is part of a cumulative effect, as well as the initial inspiration behind the poems.

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[378] See the discussion on p.106.

Field Book aims to place the environmentalist ideas of Kinsella, Berry, Snyder and Hughes in a contemporary British context, working towards a shared territory with a readership. The narrator of my poems is tied in to the everyday contradictions of the working world, and confronts environmental issues from this personal, local perspective. The poems 'dwell', in Bate's sense of 'opening up to the being of a place'; they are ecophenomenological, while also being conscious of the complexities of the environmental crisis, where one issue may be in direct conflict with another.

The environmental activism in the poems aims to work in three key ways. The first of these is through a personal, emotional engagement with the natural world, in the way that Bristow terms 'the Anthropocene lyric'. It includes moments of personal epiphany that aim to change the reader's perspective. This is most obvious in the poems 'The Eel' and the 'The Blackbird's Nest', where the narrator's youthful behaviour is seen to have an effect on their adult life.

The second of these is by raising awareness of environmental issues at both a local and global level, such as threats to species, possible causes of flooding, dune erosion, rising sea-levels and the disposal of nuclear waste. The poems aim to achieve this by incorporating information into the lyric framework, making the environmental context of the poems explicit. The challenge here was to do this in a way that feels part of the flow of the poem, and not imported from another source. The poems aim to find a metaphorical language for scientific ideas, as in the poems 'Floods' and 'Bees on the Cheshire Lines', but they try to keep this grounded in the narrative or imagery of the poem.

Thirdly, the environmental activism in the poems works by modelling possible ways forward, such as respect for animals, rewilding and moves towards self-sufficiency. The poems do this by emerging from personal, local experience but broadening their reach to highlight particular initiatives to ameliorate aspects of the crisis. An example of this is the poem 'Grey Squirrel at Hawthornden Castle', where the introduction of the pine marten as the natural predator of the grey squirrel is suggested as an ethical means of controlling squirrels.

In terms of an overall contribution to the environmentalist movement, poetry's contribution may be acknowledged as small. David Borthwick, in his introduction to the *Entanglements* anthology, suggests that 'Ecopoetry is a subtle form of activism. Poetry is not perhaps the most obvious way of reaching an audience in the twenty-first century.'[379] It may be true that more direct forms of activism are more effective in facilitating change, but, as poets, poetry is a tool that we have and the question, for me, becomes one of how the artform that we engage in can make a contribution to a broader understanding of the environmental crisis. John Kinsella discusses poems with community groups and hands them out at demonstrations.[380] The latter of these may be regarded as largely redundant given that demonstrators are, presumably, already engaged with the issue at hand, but the lyric poem, as we have seen, operates on a number of levels and may work to reveal new dimensions of the issue.

When poems from *Field Book* have been read in public, audiences have wanted to engage in discussion around the issues in the poems, and I often take part in small scale events in libraries that are designed to be both reading and discussion. This kind of event both draws the issues out of the poems and widens the audience for them. The poem 'Grey Squirrel at Hawthornden Castle', referenced earlier, highlights an issue that is controversial even in environmentalist circles and has provoked discussion. The poems also have potential for use in environmental campaigns. The environmental activist and writer Mark Avery, a former Director of the RSPB who now leads the public campaign to ban driven grouse shooting, was in the audience for a reading and has approached me about putting the poem 'Grouse Moor' on his website, recognising that the poem has the potential for an emotional connection with his readers that the arguments alone may not always achieve. This use of poetry is itself referenced in the poem 'Campaign', where the person to whom the poem is addressed hands out poems at a public meeting during a campaign to protect a local field from development.[381]

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[379] David Borthwick, 'Introduction', in David Knowles and Sharon Blackie, *Entanglements: New Ecopoetry* (Isle of Lewis: Two Ravens Press, 2012), p.*xx.*
[380] John Kinsella, *Activist Poetics by John Kinsella: Anarchy in the Avon Valley* (Liverpool University Press, 2010), p.15.
[381] See p.64.

Field Book is a collection of ecologically-engaged nature poems in the British lyric tradition, written from a particular ideological stance. They aim to challenge the received ideas of the inability of the British lyric poem to be politically-driven. The poems have clear environmental issues intrinsic to them, while still working with the resonances of language, and layers of meaning associated with the British lyric. They can be defined as what Bristow calls 'Anthropocene lyrics': poetry that explores one person's relationship with the environment in a particular place and time, while considering the wider consequences of that relationship within an age marked by ecological crisis. For Bristow, however, it is for the reader to make the connection between the poems under consideration and the Anthropocene, with the poets placing us 'on the cusp of this move.'[382] My poems try to make this connection clear. In the terms used by Lidström and Garrard they aim to be both ecophenomenological, in the sense that they arise from personal experience of the landscape and try to connect a reader to their immediate sensory environment, and environmental, in the sense that they try to connect this experience to the wider global-political context of the environmental crisis.

Although this thesis is critical of Lidström and Garrard for not acknowledging that a poem can operate on both levels at the same time, it also recognises that there is a distinction between the two approaches and that ecologically-aware nature poetry does not always work as activist poetry, that the experience of the immediate sensory environment does not always make the leap to the wider environmentalist context. Not all of the poems in this collection are explicitly activist, though they are all written out of a particular attention to, and concern for, the environment. Taken as a whole, however, an environmentalist stance runs through the collection, and creates a context for poems whose focus is more on the individual experience rather than the wider questions, to be read in. Overall I see this collection acting as a bridge between the British tradition of ecopoetry and the more direct politically urgent work of Snyder, Berry and Kinsella, having a quieter voice than the key poets discussed in this thesis but still having identifiable environmental issues, and an activist agenda, at their heart.

[382] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric*, p.5.

The current climate of ecocriticism is not favourable to the lyric nature poem. Matthew Griffiths suggests that issues as large and abstract as climate change require the disjunctions and associations of modernism to reflect their complexity, and Timothy Clark suggests that the environmental crisis is so complex that any individual attempt to alleviate it is quickly scaled out of significance.[383] It is hard not to read Clark as being fatalistic. As this thesis is finalised the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has just produced a 'Summary For Policymakers' which suggests that previously agreed international targets for reducing carbon emissions are inadequate to combat rising temperatures, and significant lifestyle changes at an individual level are required, in addition to government action.[384] This thesis aims to show that the ability of the ecologically aware lyric nature poem to reflect on the Anthropocene as it is experienced by individuals in a particular time and place is a powerful environmentalist tool. Poets concerned with the environmental crisis, who wish to address it in our work, should challenge the contribution that our poems are making , and ask if the poem needs to go further to meet the reader and take them beyond the 'cusp' of the Anthropocene, while still remaining true to our lyric impulse.[385] When the character in the poem 'Campaign' hands out poems at the community meeting, they are described as 'tiny lenses to change people's view of the land'. The poems in *Field Book* try to do that.

[383] Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World*, p.5; Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*, p.5.

[384] The IPCC report suggests that if the temperature increase is reduced to 1.5 degrees, a degree less than the target specified at the Paris agreement in 2015 (which is not currently on track) then a number of nations will still disappear beneath rising sea-levels. The report urges action at both an individual and governmental level, suggesting that if significant changes are not made by 2020 then climate change will be irreversible. 'Summary for Policy Makers' (ipcc.ch accessed 10/10/18).

[385] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric*, p.5.

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