

**Persephone Unbound:
The Natural Environment, Human Well-
Being and Gender, Explored in Selected
Texts, 1775-1900**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of the West of England, Bristol
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Faculty of Humanities, Bath Spa University College, Bath

September 2002



The Hunter caught & the escape of the Emperor.

FLIM-FLAMS! THE HUNTER CAUGHT, AND THE ESCAPE OF THE EMPEROR!

ABSTRACT: PERSEPHONE UNBOUND

With reference to Wordsworth's suggestion that the 'love of nature' leads to the 'love of man', this thesis examines claims that a sympathetic engagement with the natural world can contribute to human well-being and social progress. It considers how such claims might be substantiated by surveying a range of literary representations of the natural world between 1775 and 1900.

Categories of human well-being are explored in three contexts: valuing and accessing the countryside, botany and attitudes to animals. These accounts are focused in discussions of literary encounters with particular genera: mid-Victorian seaweed collecting and the satirical treatment of the great apes.

The ecocritical groundwork of Bate and Kroeber is extended to examine a range of non-canonical texts that confirm and complement, but also occasionally contend, the Wordsworthian approach. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which the human negotiation with the living world is complicated by gender identity. Gender affects access to the countryside and determines the public context in which knowledge about the natural world is represented and shared. However, this thesis offers a contributionist literary history in which an interest in other species has advanced women's social status in terms of mobility, education and opportunities to participate in science and politics.

This work takes its theoretical impetus from environmentalist and feminist cultural theories. The ideas of thinkers such as Murray Bookchin, on social ecology, and Freya Mathews, on the ecological self, have been particularly influential. The present analysis concludes in the belief that, in challenging the gendered hierarchy in the self-other opposition, such ideas represent a sophisticated continuation of the Romantic critique of the problematic relationship to the natural environment that exists in capitalist society. In so doing, ecocritical approaches make for a fruitful reconsideration of Romantic and Victorian nature literature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My primary acknowledgements must go to my parents and my supervisors. Graham and Maureen Hunt are owed much love and thanks for their encouragement, generosity and patience, not only during six years it has taken to complete the present thesis but also during previous my work as an undergraduate at Bath Spa University College and as a Masters student at the University of York.

Equally, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the assistance and diligence of my supervisors for their invaluable support over the last six years: Mr Richard Kerridge (Bath Spa University College), Dr William Hughes (Bath Spa University College) and Dr Robin Jarvis (University of the West of England), Professor Jeremy Hooker (University of Glamorgan), Dr. Jeff Rodman (formerly Bath Spa University College). I have also received invaluable support from the staff of the Graduate School at Bath Spa University College: Dr Paul Davies, Dr Gaynor Kavanagh, Mrs Allison Dagger and Mrs Jean Gardiner.

Additionally, I received essential assistance and unfailing support from the library staff and archivists at the following institutions: Bath Spa University College, Mr Nigel Paine of Bath Spa Slide Library, the British Library, The Bodleian Library, Bath Public Library, the University of the West of England, the University of Bath and the University of Bristol, University of Exeter.

As ever, love and mutual aid was received from Howard Lee and Fay Stevens, Joe Duncan (together with computer therapy), Stephen Churchill, Ruth Pooley, Martine Allen, Simon Skarritt, Diane Mason, Stephen Zweifel, Olga Gomez and Fred Gilham – together with countless cups of herb tea and sympathy. Equally, Ceri Burton for the lively discussion that initially inspired the project. It is also necessary to acknowledge the encouragement and inspiration of my comrades in the Green Discussion group with love and respect – Christopher Tyndale, Mary Van Reimsdyk, Dr John Wills and Dr Karen Jones, Graham Burgess, Tony Waterhouse, Gavin Withers, Katherine Wall and Nick Campion – as well as members of the Bath Eco-Futures and Bath Animal Rights/Earth First! groups. Merlin for inter-species insight and for creating those essential screen breaks by so assiduously/expressively vocalizing his needs.

Much generosity was also forthcoming from members of the Association for Studies in Literature and the Environment (ASLE) and the wider academic network. The prompt and courteous assistance received from the following were particularly appreciated: Dr Juliet Brodie (Department of Applied Sciences, BSUC) who advised on phylogenetic accuracy in Chapter Eight, Linda Beattie (RSPCA Enquiries Co-ordinator), Ann Dinsdale (Brontë Society Librarian), Emma Donaghue (novelist and playwright), Prof. David Goodman (Open University), Linda Irvine (curator at the Botany Department of the Natural History Museum, Kensington), Sarah Mason (BUAV), Dr James Ogden (University College of Wales at Glamorgan), Chris Reed (RSPCA Information Officer), Linda Rhodes (Community Librarian, Barking Central Library), Prof. John Tallmadge (The Union Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio) and Prof. Donald Worster (University of Kansas).

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Frontispiece and Chapter Separators

1. D'Israeli, Isaac. *Flim-Flams! Or the Life and Errors of My Uncle and His Friends* [1805], 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: John Murray, 1806), Plate VI, Vol. II, p. 167. THE HUNTER CAUGHT, AND THE ESCAPE OF THE EMPORER!
'Exhibits an unlucky accident to which the Members of the AURELIAN Society are subject; to be caught in their *own flappers!* The likeness of my UNCLE is exquisitely preserved through the gauzy texture, while the solid SECRETARY "*respires,*" (though with difficulty) under the needle of the great artist. My Uncle's ventilating hat is in the fore ground.'
2. Thomas Bewick, *1800 Woodcuts by Thomas Bewick and His School*, ed. By Blanche Cirker (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), plate 172, n. 9.
3. Bewick, *1800 Woodcuts*, plate 103, n. 1.
4. Bewick, plate 168, n. 3.
5. Illustration by Hugh Thomson, taken from Mary Russell Mitford, *Our Village* (London: Macmillan, 1893).
6. Illustration from Charlotte Smith, *Elegiac Sonnets with additional sonnets and other poems* [1784], 7th edn (London: A. Strahan for T. Cadell, 1795).
7. Bewick, *1800 Woodcuts*, plate 148, n. 8.
8. Bewick, *1800 Woodcuts*, plate 136, n. 10.
9. Seaweed collectors taken from Anne Pratt, *Chapters on the Common Things of the Sea-Side* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1850).
10. Bewick, *1800 Woodcuts*, plate 127, n. 6.
11. Illustration of 1895 by F. H. Townsend from Thomas Love Peacock, *Melincourt, or Sir Oran Haut-ton*, (London: Macmillan, 1927), frontispiece.
12. Emblem of the Victoria Street Society.
13. Bewick, *1800 Woodcuts*, plate 224, n. 5.

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PERSEPHONE UNBOUND:
THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, WELL-BEING
AND GENDER, EXPLORED IN SELECTED TEXTS,
1775-1900

PREFACE

It's these confounded poets that turn all your heads, and make you think you have nothing to do after you are married, but sit beside fountains and grottoes, and divert yourselves with birds and flowers, instead of looking after your servants, and paying your butcher's bills.
(Ferrier, *Marriage*)

In this thesis I have set out to explore the question: 'In what ways can today's ecocritical thinking about the environment, gender and identity inform a reading of non-canonical Romantic and Victorian literature about the human value of the natural world?' An observation and a contention immediately arise from this question. The observation, one that is neither original, nor commonly doubted, is simply this: the way in which the natural environment is perceived, and hence how it is written about, is sharply contingent upon the variables of human identity. The contention in what follows is that it was during the eighteenth century that Romantic writers recognized that this is a dynamic process, in which a positive engagement with the non-human environment can feed back into a cohesive, purposive and beneficent influence upon human well-being. The way in which this sense of affinity for other species and their habitats in Romantic nature sympathy was consolidated, developed and also challenged during the nineteenth century is documented in a rich literary inheritance. To revisit these debates contributes to an understanding of the continuing relevance of Romantic insight to environmental thought up to the present day.

I have taken as my motif the Graeco-Roman myth of Persephone, the earth deity who embodies female presence as cyclical and natural, connoting, it is alleged, together with Demeter and Hecate, a triple aspect of womanhood.² Persephone is a transgressive figure – consumer of the forbidden fruit of the pomegranate. In her struggle to flourish, during seasonal oscillations between the feminized material world of Demeter, and the patriarchal zone of Pluto's underworld, she mediates between two opposed realms. Persephone is embodied as a natural being, yet possesses the cultural qualities that distinguish human experience from that of other species. She therefore makes an apposite symbol for the human negotiation of the border territory between those assumed divides that constitute the

self and other – masculine/feminine, consciousness/unconsciousness, mind/matter, subject/object, autonomy/mutuality and nature/culture. This thesis explores the relationship between the imagining subject and the living world, a central problem of human identity, through the margins of the literary canon, the disputed notions of proper and improper, and the ethics and aesthetics of the human self and animal other that are the terrain of this enquiry. Mary Douglas once wrote ‘all margins are dangerous’.³ They may also be liberating.

INTRODUCTION

The images I want to examine are the quite simple images of felicitous space. In this orientation, these investigations would deserve to be called toponophilia. They seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love. For diverse reasons, and with the differences entailed by poetic shadings, this is eulogised space.

(Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*)⁴

Roots and Contexts

The present study takes as its point of departure the extremely diverse factors that historians such as Keith Thomas, David Pepper and Donald Worster have assembled to account for the emergence of what is now termed environmental awareness.⁵ Londa Schiebinger writes that that the number of plant species known to Western taxonomists is estimated to have quadrupled between 1550 and 1700.⁶ Eighteenth-century naturalists, of whom Karl Linnaeus, Alexander von Humboldt and Joseph Banks were only the most prominent, circulated botanical and zoological specimens around a new global matrix, thus generating a sophisticated network of interconnected enthusiasts. From the more productive among these ventures came such achievements as the *Systema Naturae* (1735), and the expansion of Kew Gardens and the Jardin des Plantes during the late eighteenth century. Moreover, expeditions in the early nineteenth century led Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace to put forward the hypothesis of natural selection in 1859.

Other developments were closer to home. Agricultural enclosure, industrial production and the excavation of the canal and railway networks cumulatively brought about a vigorous redefinition of the physical landscape.⁷ In 1811 the population of England and Wales was 10½ millions; by 1821 it was nearly 12½ millions. This demographic expansion was the largest ever proportional rise recorded in these countries in a single decade.⁸ It appeared to be a timely endorsement of the prophecy in Thomas Malthus's *Essay on Population* (1798), a work of political economy and jeremiad which identified material limits to human increase. During the late eighteenth century, the Anti-Slavery Society became an effective and successful prototype for a multitude of later campaign organizations, including the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1824), and the earliest British conservation group, the Commons Preservation Society (1865).⁹ A discovery particularly important for today's environmentalism occurred in 1896 when the Swedish scientist Svante August Arrhenius formulated a theory of global warming, based on the observation that an

increase in carbon dioxide would trap more radiation in the Earth's atmosphere which, over time, would contribute to a temperature increase.

These bare facts, to which countless others might of course be added, together created the preconditions for the development of today's environmental movement. To mark out the territory of this broader context, however, is to say nothing of the importance of more immediate human responses to the natural world. The corpus of Romantic literature documents complex individual and social responses at a time when there was an unprecedented physical transformation of the environment and a new taxonomy of living things.

This thesis therefore aims to explore and particularize examples of nature sympathy through selected textual encounters from 1775 to 1900. To attempt to develop any more substantial methodology towards accounting for the ontological importance of the human valuing of the non-human other, it is necessary to turn to a phenomenology of self. Our identity as experiencing subjects is structured by the material conditions of our time, the cultural circumstances in which we exist and our genetic inheritance. The imaginary dimension to the experience and understanding of the physical world is an important concern of the present study. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, confided in 1795 that the isolated coastline near Portør, Norway had induced in her an imaginative reverie of a dystopian kind. Musing alone, Wollstonecraft made some hypothetical calculations, which preceded Malthus's mathematical suppositions by three years, causing her to worry about the fate of famished survivors on an overpopulated earth:

I anticipated the future improvement of the world, and observed how much man had still to do, to obtain of the earth all it could yield. I even carried my speculations so far as to advance a million or two of years to the moment when the earth would perhaps be so perfectly cultivated, and so completely peopled, as to render it necessary to inhabit every spot; yes; these bleak shores. Imagination went still farther, and pictured the state of man when the earth could no longer support him. Where was he to fly from universal famine? Do not smile: I really became distressed for these fellow creatures, yet unborn.¹⁰

Paradoxically, it is the emptiness of the place that gives rise to fears about the problems that plenitude and material affluence might bring, and speculations about environmental checks upon population growth. This excerpt is an interesting foreshadowing of *The Last Man* (1826), the eschatological novel by Wollstonecraft's daughter, Mary Shelley.¹¹ There are many such instances in Romantic and Victorian literature, whereby a single aspect of the

natural world inspires a highly charged moment, thus for the individual subject appearing to hold a significance far beyond the immediate circumstances.

That apocalyptic fears of an environmental crisis and a growing sense of the alienation of human relations in urban, industrial society, might be facets of the same malaise is largely a Romantic insight. Robert Southey complained in 1802 that ‘this London poisons my body, and God knows is not the most favourable atmosphere for my brain’, thus expressing his concern about the individually debilitating and socially destabilizing effects of mass industrial society.¹² Examining a genealogy of nature sympathy can contribute towards the historical consciousness necessary to inform and critically evaluate the claims and strategies of present-day environmental debates. Ecocriticism and green cultural theory now make available critical strategies for fresh insights into representations of the natural world in eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature.¹³ An interdisciplinary approach, using today’s environmentalist ideas, makes it possible to look at Romanticism and its ‘natures’ with new vision and urgency.

It should be clear from the outset that this study cannot be a comprehensive summary, given the diffuse character of Romantic nature sympathy, and still less an unequivocal endorsement of such an impulse. In any discussion of Romanticism it is necessary to predicate a distinction. As an historical period, Romanticism refers approximately, in Britain, to the years between the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 and Victoria’s accession in 1837. However, Romanticism also exists as a living tradition that has continued since the eighteenth century. Notoriously, definition of the term ‘Romanticism’ has presented an intractable challenge for critics. Arthur O. Lovejoy famously suggested that accuracy demands literary critics should speak of ‘Romanticisms’.¹⁴ It may well be that a chronological definition of this movement is too particular to convey an accurate sense of the diversity of writers within an historical time-span but, equally, too general for the nuances of individual authorial positions that constitute an ongoing Romantic tradition. Romanticism encompasses therefore, multiple – and often antagonistic – political, artistic and philosophical forms. It may be expressed in a Rousseauist desire for a ‘return to nature’, the feudal nostalgia of Edmund Burke or the revolutionary sentiments of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Certainly, the great watchwords of European Romanticism – genius, sublime, sympathy, imagination, feeling, mutability – convey a sense that the Romantic outlook is one which privileges a qualitative rather than quantitative estimation of the world, being an anti-utilitarian preoccupation with the infinite and immeasurable. Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy offer a useful working definition of Romanticism as a by-product of the capitalist modernity against which it is in perpetual revolt.¹⁵ The chief virtue of this approach to

Romanticism is that it provides scope for a loose conceptual whole able to contain both the 'contradictions' and 'essential unity' of the diversity of anti-capitalist positions.¹⁶

Romanticism, therefore, is a tendency or a strain of thought rather than an absolute position. There is a strong sense, articulated by M. H. Abrams, that the Romantic aspiration was anti-reductionist rather than anti-rationalist; not so much anti-classicism as concerned to oppose an expressive art to a hollow imitative art.¹⁷ William Blake's famous image, 'Newton' (1795), in which the scientist is depicted in a state of solipsism, measuring with a pair of dividers while oblivious to his surroundings, exemplifies the Romantic antipathy to the quantitative approach of the scientific revolution. Yet necessary as this corrective might have been, the qualitative and quantitative are not mutually exclusive categories but ultimately exist in a continuum. The Romantic impulse was therefore one of a yearning for integration of the perceived divide between the unitary self and other, whether the cause of such a rupture be attributed to the scientific revolution, industrial capitalism or the egotism of modern individualism. One significant outcome of the Romantic world-view was the appearance of modern dialectical thought in the early nineteenth century, expressed in Blake's epigram 'without contraries is no progression', most fully theorized by Georg Friedrich Hegel and given the greatest historical resonance by Karl Marx.

It is clear that Romanticism is characterized more by the diversity of its positions than by any coherent body of thought. During the twentieth century, for example, one trajectory of the Romantic environmental tradition in Germany (where it remains strong) had its eventual expression in the 'blood and soil' sentiments of the Nazi ideologue Walter Darré. The tradition was equally alive, however, in the works of Herman Hesse, and later in the libertarian Green politics of Petra Kelly. Other strains of green Romanticism are apparent today among many international writers who have contested industrialism and globalization on environmental grounds – E. F. Schumacher, Raymond Williams, American nature writers Gary Snyder and Rick Bass, Murray Bookchin, Indian opponents of inappropriate development such as Vandana Shiva and Arundhati Roy, George Monbiot and José Bové of the *Confédération Paysanne*. In a variety of ways these writers have challenged what they have identified as the destructive impact of industrial capitalism upon the natural environment. Their work is in keeping with the Romantic tradition of nature sympathy in so far as they have articulated the idea that demands for human quality of life are best met within a different philosophical and economic paradigm – although there is little unanimity about either the form that such an alternative paradigm might take or how it might be attained. Given such eclecticism, nature sympathy is most productively revealed in particular terms of engagement with the living world.

In the present study, with reference to a diversity of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary voices, I have endeavoured to identify some positive idea of Romantic nature sympathy by exploring the way in which, to use William Wordsworth's phrase, it might be possible to move 'Through Nature to the love of human kind'.¹⁸ The American writer Robert B. Riley (1990) suggests that in order to secure environmental protection we 'need to ask not just what we can do for nature but what nature can do for us'.¹⁹ If we are to examine the emergence of environmental concern – in what follows I shall aim to show that the formative years for this were 1775-1900 – I feel that a fundamental question ought to be directly addressed, namely: 'How is human life enhanced by engagement with, and respect for, nature?'

To this end, my contribution offers selected instances in which the benefits of the natural world have been commended in accounts of both individual well-being and pleasure and social progress. I shall be opening up three principal fields of enquiry: the love of the countryside as conditioned by subject identity, botany and, most substantially, attitudes to animals. Discussions of botany and animals find their argumentative focus through case studies of literary encounters with particular genera: the aquatic Victoriana of seaweed collecting and the great apes as literary shape-shifters. Both reflect a substantial preoccupation with development and origins at a time when organic evolution became a ready trope for social progress. Following the first three chapters, which set out methodological and thematic approaches, each thesis section will examine a succession of contexts from the late eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century.

Kinship and Affinity

When offering a synthesis of claims for the capacity of nature sympathy to contribute to well-being, flourishing and self-realization, it must be conceded that these latter are complex and intangible qualities. Qualities such as intellectual enhancement or emotional contentment come into being through the active engagement of an individual with his or her surroundings. A discussion of human flourishing in Chapter Two details evidence of the twin loves of life and place now most succinctly described by those environmental neologisms, biophilia and topophilia. Some of the examples that follow offer broad claims for the human benefits of engagement with the natural world, such as Denis Diderot's celebration of natural history and William Cobbett's notes on the physical and moral effects of gardening. However, I have adopted an organizational framework in order to manage the multiplicity of particular benefits, albeit one with a structure flexible enough to encompass a

range of themes and subject positions. My methodology rests upon the ‘hierarchy of needs’ constructed by the humanistic psychologist Abraham H. Maslow in *Motivation and Personality* (1954; 3rd edn 1987), because it offers an adaptable and well-known model for determining categories of well-being. In ‘The Biological Basis for Human Values of Nature’ (1993), Stephen Kellert, aware of Maslow’s model, outlines categories of well-being which are applied in an explicitly environmentalist context.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen examples that illustrate three broad categories of well-being extrapolated from Maslow and Kellert. These are detailed in Chapter Two and are sustained as themes underpinning the remaining chapters. First, there are physical benefits, such as the recuperative effect of seaside expeditions that the Victorian writer Louisa Lane Clarke describes. Second, there are social and psychological benefits of the kind suggested, for example, by the late eighteenth-century educational writer David Williams, who commended nature study as a means to usefully occupy children’s minds. Finally, there are spiritual and ontological benefits. This category equates to Maslow’s notion of self-actualization. Self-actualization pertains to an accommodation of self with other, whereby the individual realizes his or her potential through the maximum deployment of personal abilities, in heightened states of fulfilment. Maslow includes the feelings of coherence and unity stimulated by nature appreciation as one of the primary manifestations of such states, which he terms ‘peak experiences’. This lends itself to the attainment of the insight that individual integrity is best ensured, and the human spirit best flourishes, when one is situated in (and able to make a creative contribution to) sustainable, diverse, and dynamic surroundings. In this respect, I conclude Chapter Two by suggesting a resemblance between the idea of a universal kinship in the late nineteenth-century writings of Edward Carpenter and Henry Salt and contemporary environmental theories such as Freya Mathews’s notion of the ecological self.

Chapter Three will explore Wordsworth’s intuition that there is a ‘love of nature leading to love of man’, through the optimistic, far-reaching and even utopian claims in *The Prelude* that direct engagement with the natural environment makes us flourish and realize our selves most fully as human beings and encourages a more harmonious relationship with other people. While Wordsworth has long been the most prominent nature poet in the English Romantic canon, Jonathan Bate and Karl Kroeber reinvigorated this aspect of his work in the early 1990s by suggesting that it registers an incipient *ecological* sensibility.

Despite this emphasis upon Wordsworth’s role in charting the textual territory of Romantic nature writing, it should be acknowledged that he wrote out of a wider literary

culture struggling to make sense of the human relationship with the natural environment. The Wordsworthian approach to the improving influence of nature opens the way to pursue an agenda beyond Wordsworth, by looking at different Romantic and Victorian ecologies, such as women's encounters with the natural environment, which are considered in Chapter Four. Gender constitutes a prominent instance of the way in which subject identity complicates experiences of the natural world. Women and men's different circumstances, it is argued, affect the terms of their participation in the study of the natural world, and decisions about its treatment.

There is still much work to be done in opening and exploring the canon of Romantic and Victorian nature writing, a task in which the present study seeks to contribute. Gender is an important factor when considering how far solitary, interpersonal and collective contexts determine experiences of the environment and other species. In this thesis I counterpoint individual masculine encounters in Wordsworthian nature writing (in Chapters Three to Five) to women writers' experiences of the natural environment, which are more often shared with intimates such as partners, friends and family. Chapter Four, for example, features family excursions in the natural history dialogues of Charlotte Smith and Priscilla Wakefield written in the 1790s. A key instance of a unitary encounter is that of the solitary walker, considered in Chapter Five, 'Wandering Lonely'. This masculine Romantic trope, emblematic of a coherent, autonomous and bounded self, defined against a feminized nature, is one that may not be straightforwardly translated to the experience of women writers, given the conventional enclosure of womanhood in the domestic sphere.

By 1900, some advocates already understood the widening of moral sympathy to be the logical corollary and extension of the claims for human rights on the part of women, the working classes and non-whites since the previous century. Throughout the years 1775-1900 liberal and emancipationist discourses of political rights developed as women increasingly struggled for acceptance as articulate subjects and full participants in social institutions. In 1792, Wollstonecraft controversially argued for a limited extension of opportunities and the enhancement of women's status in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Several decades later, in 1868, Anna Kingsford still angrily objected to exclusion and the self-interest of male cultural hegemony: 'Who barred against women the doors of the colleges, the academies, the scientific societies, the associations, the institutions?'²⁰ However, it is clear that there was a cultural shift in hegemonic ideas between 1775 and 1900, when women were on the threshold of political enfranchisement.²¹ The increase in women's power, most conspicuously demonstrated by the early twentieth-century suffragette and suffragist campaigns, was built up during proceeding decades through

participation in extra-parliamentary social reform movements from the Anti-Slavery Society, to opposition to the *Contagious Diseases Act* and anti-vivisectionism.

Feminist attention to the ‘politics of the personal’ contrasts competitive individualism with community-oriented and environmentally concerned approaches. Critics such as Nancy Chodorow, for example, have contrasted the unitary self, associated with masculine development, with a more relational model of self, which closely complements the ecological self discussed in Chapter Two. Environmentalist accounts of self, such as the ecological self and Richard Dawkins’s neo-Darwinian challenge to the ‘discontinuous mentality’ outlined in Chapter Eleven, have their antecedents in nineteenth-century ideas such as the Wordsworthian notion of the One Life and the idea of a universal kinship proposed by late Victorian thinkers such as Edward Carpenter. Contemporary theorists of the ecological self, such as Freya Mathews, look not only to Spinozan alternatives to the atomistic character of Newtonian physics, but turn to quantum physics, based upon the radical continuity of matter and energy, for authentication of ecological holism. Each individual within a species, of course, exists in the form of a relational, contextual ecosystem. There is an integral paradox in this situation in as much as the individual is at once dependent upon this milieu for its survival and definition, yet inevitably engaged in competition and conflict with other members of its own species, other species and environmental conditions.

Chapters Six and Seven consider botany as another area that is made problematic by the so-called separate spheres, the cultural separation that rendered ‘natural’ the divide between the feminine, domestic sphere and the supposedly more strenuous demands of the masculine, public sphere.²² The influence of the sexualized Linnaean system (the dominant taxonomic framework until the 1830s),²³ for instance, invited claims that botany was an inappropriate study for women. Critics, including Alan Bewell and Judith Pascoe, have revealed opposition to women’s participation in Linnaean botany on the grounds that it imparted sexual knowledge incompatible with prevailing prescriptions about proper female duty and conduct. However, I shall develop the argument that botany was also an area of science to which women could make a valuable contribution that challenged the separate-spheres model. To this end, ‘Cultivation and Blossoming’, considers claims for the improving influence of botany, both by Rousseau and in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century educational curricula.

This theme is extended and consolidated in the discussion of mid-nineteenth-century seaweed collecting in Chapter Eight. Enthusiastic tributes by male algologists such as

Robert Greville and David Landsborough, constitute evidence that challenges the notion that the separate-spheres paradigm was universally imposed. Ann B. Shteir and David Allen have drawn attention to Margaret Gatty's importance as a seaweed collector, though there have been no detailed studies of Victorian writings about marine botany, a body of literature that I have identified as a sub-genre within popular natural history.²⁴ My discussion of seaweed collecting and well-being concludes with the suggestion that this pursuit offers an illustration of the way in which natural history can ground personal cosmologies.

Links between natural history and the human relationship to the physical world are similarly foregrounded in the culminating chapters, which look at moral claims attendant upon animals. Anthropological studies of most historical cultures provide *some* evidence of admiration for other species and the natural environment. However, the growth of such respect, together with the privileged place allocated to natural history, associated with the influence of Linnaeus during the mid-eighteenth century, and Darwin in the mid-nineteenth century, has been particularly documented.²⁵ The period 1500-1800 was that of those 'changing sensibilities' which Keith Thomas so comprehensively records in *Man and the Natural World* (1983), while Harriet Ritvo analyses evidence of a notable transition towards more favourable attitudes to animals between 1800 and 1830 in *The Animal Estate* (1987).²⁶

Chapters Nine to Twelve examine the ways in which debates about human rights and moral improvement became embroiled with those concerning the treatment of non-humans. Cultural historians such as John Mackenzie and Keith Tester have offered correctives to Thomas's 'changing sensibilities' thesis. Mackenzie points out, for example, that any new attitudes coexisted with an imperial drive that bolstered its credentials for colonial rule by putting its administrators through the rite of passage of big game shooting in the tropics. Any re-examination of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attitudes to animals takes place, therefore, in the context of today's quarrel about moral obligations towards other species between contemporary protagonists such as Mary Midgley, Michael Leahy and Peter Singer. Chapter Ten focuses upon the extension of philosophical arguments about sympathy to include non-humans during the late eighteenth century. There is a detailed examination of the early nineteenth-century literary treatment of the orang-utan in Chapter Eleven. Chapter Twelve moves on to explore the collective participation of women in the chorus of outrage against vivisection during the final quarter of the nineteenth century.

My conclusion demonstrates ways in which the three principal strands of my enquiry – respect for nature, well-being and gender identity – are intimately entwined in the texts I have examined.

New Cosmologies and Senses of Loss

Before continuing, it is necessary to consider changing conceptions of nature, which suggest why the natural world emerged as a particular subject of interrogation during the eighteenth century. From the late seventeenth century the emergence of deism challenged the formerly axiomatic belief that God continued to have a direct controlling influence over the physical universe. Writers such as John Toland in England and Voltaire in France proposed a less interventionist supreme being, exemplifying the increasingly mainstream scientific belief that, while God provided the initial impetus for the created universe, the cosmos unfolded according to its own laws thereafter. Without divine omnipotence, the search for an explanatory purpose for life on Earth must be located in humanity and the natural environment. In *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (1967), Clarence J. Glacken posed the question:

What happens to the concept of the harmony of nature when the idea of final causes is abandoned? Buffon's answer is that nature should be envisaged and studied for itself. In such a conception, environmental factors immediately assume greater significance.²⁷

The rise of more secular understandings of the natural world in European culture was a reorientation that continued to be contested after 1775. An interest in the living world's *intrinsic* value becomes characteristic in science during the late eighteenth century, reflecting the origins of both an environmentalist perspective and a literary tradition of the exploration of nature in its own right. The evolutionary hypothesis represented a decentring of the human subject and a radical challenge to the anthropocentric world-view comparable in magnitude to that precipitated by the Copernican refutation of geocentrism in the sixteenth century.²⁸ There was a transition towards a horizontal metaphysics that eventually displaced the transcendent, vertical and hierarchical chain of being in prevailing scientific orthodoxy.²⁹ While the publication of *The Origin of Species*, 1859, marked a pivotal shift, the evolutionary debate was already underway by the late eighteenth century (through the ideas of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Diderot).

The creationist narrative of origins was challenged by the implications of Charles Lyell's uniformitarian geology during the early 1830s.³⁰ The Romantic period was the threshold of the transition from a theological to a more naturalistic grounding for human ontology, consolidated by Darwin and Wallace's theory of natural selection, which replaced

divine purpose with amoral chance as the explanatory mechanism for life on earth. So disturbing indeed were the implications of this theory, which signified not so much the origin as the elimination of absolute species difference, that Darwin confided to his trusted correspondent, Joseph D. Hooker, 'it is like confessing a murder', hence realizing that his hypothesis could potentially render the existing teleological conception of the world redundant.³¹ This was particularly troubling in a society in which morality and the idea of intentional design were inextricably linked. Writings such as those of mid-nineteenth-century clergyman and naturalist David Landsborough (for whom science was an adjunct to faith), reveal clearly that in popular concerns about such 'humble' species as the seaweeds, an entire cosmology was in question.

It is apparent, however, that any realignment retained a profoundly anthropocentric dimension, one grounded in the power of human reason and science to understand and modify the physical environment, rather than divine agency. The new perspectives therefore represented a reaffirmation rather than an abandonment of human dominance. Yet Romantic and Victorian literature often expresses concerns about industrialization and its impact upon the natural environment. In their ambivalence towards technical 'progress' writers as diverse as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Ruskin betrayed, perhaps, a tacit acknowledgement of unease about their own complicity in the detrimental impact upon the natural environment, and indeed upon human communities, of the economic system upon which they depended.³² Ruskin even feared that writers might be particularly culpable: 'it is painful to me, as an author, to reflect that, "of all polluting liquids belonging to this category (liquid refuse from manufactories), the discharges from paper works are the most difficult to deal with"'.³³

The extent of the impact of industrialization and urban growth upon the English countryside has been the subject of ongoing debate. The material benefits of industry and empire were accompanied by a disquieting sense of 'atopia' and disconnection.³⁴ Raymond Williams's often cited 'escalator' analogy, in *The Country and the City* (1973), has proven to be an extremely influential observation concerning perceptions of the English countryside since the Early Modern Period.³⁵ He documents that for centuries authors have consistently reminisced about their own childhoods, imagined to be idyllic and unspoiled, and unfailingly regarded the span of their own lives period as the period of environmental destruction. Such literary evidence supports a persuasive case for the ahistorical and constructed character of nature nostalgia. Various reworkings of the pastoral tradition, often ironical – from classical georgic writers such as Theocritus (c.308-c.240 BCE) and Virgil (70-19 BCE) to John Clare and William Cobbett to Richard Jefferies and Thomas Hardy and voices from the twentieth century such as D. H. Lawrence – should make us cautious about

the valorization of lost idylls. However, the force of this point is not therefore that the natural environment is mere phantasmagoria, hallowed only in the muddled minds of forgetful poets lost in rustic reminiscences. Williams's fears that an uncritical interpretation of such rural representations might not illuminate so much as erase history because 'the temptation is to reduce the historical variety of the forms of interpretation to what are loosely called symbols or archetypes'.³⁶ However, this is to enforce a broader point that an attentive and more integrated reading of literary texts may also bring to life a sense of historical specificity and geographical particularity.³⁷ Furthermore, Williams also makes clear the enduring and tenacious nature of the love of the countryside.

In this sense, Williams's caution regarding literary reminiscences does not contradict Oliver Rackham's *History of the Countryside* (1986), which chronicles rural change and continuity in much detail. Rackham does, however, place a different emphasis, arguing that it remains true that the English countryside of 1800 was significantly different from that of two centuries later. It was not an Edenic garden or a vast unspoiled wilderness. However, if it was a land almost bereft of wilderness, in the sense that little or none was without human intervention, it was not thereby without wildness. Rackham demonstrates, for example, that substantial encroachments have been made into such ecologically diverse habitats as moorlands, wetlands and heaths and that there has been massive loss of wild grassland.³⁸ His comparative analysis also reveals that a more diverse range of habitats existed in 1800 than 2000. Anecdotal and nostalgic accounts are therefore supported by quantifiable evidence of habitat destruction:

It is not just through the rosy spectacles of childhood that we remember the landscape of the 1940s to have been richer in beauty, wildlife, and meaning than that of the 1980s. It was, and the Luftwaffe aerial photographs prove it. The landscape of the 1800s was richer still, as we learn from the writings of Professor Babington. There are four kinds of loss. There is the loss of beauty, especially that exquisite beauty of the small and complex and unexpected, of frog-orchids or sundews or dragon-flies. There is the loss of freedom, of highways and open spaces, which results from the English attitude to land ownership [...]. There is the loss of historic vegetation and wildlife, most of which once lost is gone for ever [...]. I am specially concerned with the loss of meaning.³⁹

Such a passage could well have been written with Williams's book in mind. It is clear that despite Rackham's reliance upon 'objective' sources, such as rolls and boundary papers, charting, archaeology and the empirical study of physical landscape, he is moved to description suffused with values such as 'beauty', 'freedom' and 'meaning'. In this thesis I am concerned with the qualitative aspects of the losses that Rackham identifies.

The Nature of Nature

The liberal reification of the self, closely associated with the advancement of a capitalist economy, ironically coincided with a profound distrust and break of faith in the substantiality of that self. This is manifest also in the Romantic regret that modern urban Europeans in particular were both isolated from each other and out of kilter with the physical environment. It logically follows that concerns to heal this disjunction should be premised upon aspirations to reunify this divided and alienated self. The idea, most clearly expressed by Francis Bacon, that the self was forged in its conquest and triumph over nature and the repression of difference, was clearly challenged during the Romantic period, most poignantly in *Frankenstein* (1818).

Changing ideas about human nature are revealed in the etymology of the term 'humanity' which underwent a proliferation of meanings that date from the eighteenth century. Differences in nuance were expressive of qualities such as altruism, sensitivity and compassion – attributes which attracted much attention during the so-called age of sensibility. Today's normative sense of 'humanity' as a collective noun, referring to the human species in its totality, was, during the eighteenth century and until recently, more commonly conveyed by 'man' or 'mankind', terms now looked upon unfavourably for their gender bias.⁴⁰ A common and powerful employment of 'humanity' was as an abstract noun, referring to that quality of concern and care for others, so much a part of the cultural optimism of a reforming age. Closely related is the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century adjectival use, now archaic, for example in Richard Martin's nickname, 'Humanity Dick', so-called due to his tireless campaigns to place animal welfare on the legal statute. This qualitative rather than quantitative use of 'humanity' is continued in the derivatives 'humane',⁴¹ 'humanitarian',⁴² and 'humanize'.⁴³ Significantly, this complex of meanings suggests the durability of the idea that when we act sympathetically or empathetically we are being most truly human, and realizing our true species potential. There is much evidence that such sympathy commonly extended beyond human objects during the eighteenth century. As I shall demonstrate, writers such as Catharine Macaulay and John Lawrence understood consideration for the welfare of non-human animals to be a *sine qua non* for the humanity of the human being. In contemporary environmental theory, for social ecologists Murray Bookchin and Janet Biehl, such an ethical dimension is now based upon the assumed evolution of a sophisticated moral agency that is one of the distinguishing features of human cultural life, making us possessors of a 'second nature'.⁴⁴ Aldo Leopold (1949) remarked that Darwin's ideas 'should have given us, by this time, a new sense of kinship

with fellow-creatures' and noted that 'for one species to mourn the death of another is a new thing under the sun'.⁴⁵

However, an attachment to nature can be less than humane in its social and moral consequences. A number of important difficulties must be confronted when considering the Romantic celebration of nature. First, beneficial contact with the natural world, advocated by propertied male writers, has by no means been unproblematically and universally available to all human groups. Second, nature is a fluid abstraction that has notoriously been invoked to justify the entire spectrum of political views, too often leading not to 'the love of man' but to reactionary and chauvinist political practice. Condorcet regretted that there existed many who were too willing to 'make nature herself an accomplice in the crime of political inequality'.⁴⁶ John Stuart Mill later concurred with this sentiment, asking, 'was there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it?'⁴⁷ T. H. Huxley duly awarded nature the title of 'the headquarters of the enemy of ethical virtue'.⁴⁸ Finally, the transcendentalism of the Wordsworthian approach to a feminized Mother Nature sometimes appears to rank the constructions of the human mind above the material world.

The latter difficulty, encountered when attempting to clarify the epistemological relationship between human nature and external nature, warrants particular attention at this point. As we have seen, the secular emphasis upon the individual self, concomitant with the expansion of industrial capitalism, intensified interest in the problem of the human subject's relationship to the broader physical environment. Such was the quandary raised by the subjective understanding of material existence that Immanuel Kant recognized, in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), that it was necessary to distinguish any posited *a priori* physical, noumenal world from the human sensory apprehension of an experienced, phenomenal world.⁴⁹

Human experience of the non-human is a socially mediated process, its outcomes refracted through the determining cultural lens of human subjective identity. Attitudes towards, and hence writings about, nature have long been informed by direct sensory apprehension of the flora, fauna and topography of the world around us, combined with artistic and literary representations of it. Writers and artists shape living things according to the imperatives of their individual cosmologies. The relationship between the natural environment and literature is an intimate and dialectical one; the source of meaning is within a human culture that is in turn bounded by its context in the physical world. As Tom Jagtenberg and David McKie have commented, 'the semiosphere and the biosphere [...] are entwined'.⁵⁰

William Hazlitt was fully aware as a writer that intertextuality was an important, if often unconscious, factor in determining one's perception and representation of nature. He acknowledged that his direct observations became mediated in such a way, confessing:

Part of the impression with which I survey the full-orbed moon shining in the blue expanse of heaven, or hear the wind sighing through the autumn leaves, or walk under the echoing archways of a Gothic ruin, is owing to a repeated perusal of *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.⁵¹

During the nineteenth century, secular incredulity towards the notion of the 'Book of Nature', as a revelation of God's purpose, contributed to a humanist awareness of the way that the physical world was constructed with not only the imaginary power, but also the fragile deficiencies and myopia, of human perception. In *The Environmental Imagination* (1996), Lawrence Buell identifies the Romantics as the first theorists to grapple with the modernist problem: 'The breakdown of trust in an autonomous self, the deterioration of faith in a symbolically significant universe, and a rejection of bound poetic forms.'⁵²

Raymond Williams describes the concept of 'nature' as 'perhaps the most complex in the language' in *Keywords* (1976) and cites fourteen uses for the word. In this thesis I use the phrase the 'natural environment' in a restrictive sense used today as a catch-all for that which Williams cites as one of its later meanings:

Nature has meant the 'countryside', the 'unspoiled places', plants and creatures other than man. The use is especially current in contrasts between town and country: nature is what man has not made, though if he made it long enough ago – a hedgerow or a desert – it will usually be included as natural.⁵³

The semantic difficulties of nature as a concept are revealed even within the confines of this definition, given that what is regarded as 'unspoiled' is deeply subjective and culturally relative, and that few or no parts of Western Europe exist without some degree of human intervention. Also, while the Romantics referred to 'nature' in the sense of pertaining to the order and workings of the physical world, the definition cited above is close to today's specific sense of 'nature conservation' which did not appear until the mid-twentieth century.⁵⁴

Some environmentalists, notably the Norwegian deep ecologist Arne Naess and American philosopher David Abram, have advocated a phenomenological epistemology as a fruitful way to address the relationship between noumenal and phenomenal versions of

nature. In *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (1989), Naess posits a holistic response to the epistemological difficulty of conceptualizing 'living Nature': neither the 'naïve' assumption of an unproblematic green realm readily identified as all things in the countryside, nor the solipsistic assumption of a cultural realm that is purely subordinate to the human mind. Consciousness exists in the perception of the external world by the embodied subject. Naess's account of childhood fascination and identification with the natural world raises epistemological questions about the relationship between the self and non-human nature that exercised Wordsworth during the previous century. Naess advocates the development of a phenomenological nature concept which takes account of both objective and subjective descriptions by emphasizing a strong sense of the relational field within which both subject and object coexist.⁵⁵

Given the continuity of humans with other species as biotic organisms within an ecological context, the monist designation of nature and culture as attributes that coexist along a continuum, (like other opposed couplings such as chaos and order), appears to be most helpful in conceptualizing ideas that are at once divergent, yet mutually confirming.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the presence and health of the non-human realm is not only environmentally sustaining but also ontologically affirming in as much as human identity is itself only a viable notion in the context of the non-human. This dynamic tension is a consequence of the anomalous situation of humanity residing as natural beings while experiencing a uniquely evolved cultural existence. The self-conscious awareness of this dilemma is at the root of modern environmentalism. The possible limits of human agency and the desirability of human intervention constitute the fundamental ground of debate within environmental discourse. Kate Soper has, for convenience, distinguished two polarities as Promethean and Romantic tendencies in attitudes to nature and it is within such differences in emphasis that any contention and consensus must be situated.⁵⁷

The position of humanity between nature and culture makes our situation an anomalous one in as much as we share an identity as humans that is at once in contradistinction to other species, yet also continuous with them as products of the same ecological processes and contexts. Like them, humans inhabit a biosphere and are possessors of natures that are contingent upon a materially dependent and genetically inherited spatio-temporal existence. At the same time evolution has left us in a unique situation,⁵⁸ with an accumulation of an unparalleled elasticity in our possible behaviour patterns to the extent that terms such as 'natural lifestyle' cannot be validated without an appeal to a return to a supposed 'nature' which is impossible to verify.

This proliferation of possible patterns of behaviour is grounded in our possession of historical consciousness. While it is true that other species might recall and anticipate events, and can directly communicate information through a range of gestures and sounds, it is only within human culture that past generations are able to linguistically inform those living in the present.⁵⁹ According to monist accounts such as that of Mary Midgley, it is this specific linguistic capability, not simply 'thought', (a term used to cover a whole range of mental abilities assumed as a dividing line in Cartesian, mechanistic thought), that distinguishes humans.⁶⁰ While it may be the case that other species have rudimentary cultures, the power to abstract knowledge, turn it into symbolic form, and reinterpret it, is an aspect of ratiocination that has not been developed by non-humans and marks out our particular and exceptional species being. To be unique in this sense is not to be anomalous and alien to nature, but is a profoundly significant dimension of our species being.

This crucial distinction does not preclude our shared identity with other organisms in other areas where there might be affinity and comparable characteristics; however it does facilitate a form of consciousness and power of intervention in global processes that, at least in environmentalist thought, makes a sense of moral responsibility a logical corollary.⁶¹

¹ Dr Redgill to Lady Emily; Susan Ferrier, *Marriage* [1818], 2nd edn (London: Thomas Nelson, [1953]), p. 451.

² Proserpina and Ceres in Roman mythology.

³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* [1966], (London: Ark, 1984), p. 121.

⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* [1958], trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), introd. p. xxxv.

⁵ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* [1983], (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984); David Pepper, *The Roots of Modern Environmentalism* [1984], (London: Routledge, 1990); Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* [1977], (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁶ Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 14.

⁷ Agricultural change brought about a fundamental alteration in the human relationship to the land. Enclosure changed the physical appearance of the landscape, as the remnants of the open field system were replaced and marginal and undrained 'wasteland' came under cultivation. Factors such as regional variation between arable, cereal and pastoral districts and differing patterns of lease and tenancy, however, problematize the notion that there occurred any rapid homogenous process with an even impact. Evidence of different patterns and paces of change and regional variation, complicate the idea of an 'Agricultural Revolution' and, consequently, agrarian historians and economists continue to debate questions about the location and chronology of such a transformation. It is incontrovertible that in England the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were periods of substantial improvements in agricultural output, in crop diversification, in the acceleration and practical completion of parliamentary enclosure and of experimentation and innovation. Factors such as the Continental Blockade of Britain during the wars with France in particular stimulated production for the home market, while perhaps slowing down the rate of imported innovations. The resulting surplus in agricultural output between 1775-1900 fulfilled a vital precondition for the emergence of an industrial sector with all the social and economic consequences of that transition, particularly the demographic shift from country to city. There was a consolidation of the far-reaching underlying change from subsistence to a market economy. J. V. Beckett, *The Agricultural Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), provides a literature review and considers the main currents in the debate. Parliamentary enclosure, which began as far back as 1604 was significantly intensified: 21% of the total land area of England was enclosed as a result of approximately 4, 000 acts that were passed between 1750 and 1830 (Beckett, *The Agricultural Revolution*, p. 36).

⁸ The 1821 Census for Great Britain documents that the population of England and Wales recorded as 10, 502, 500 for 1811, had increased to 12, 218, 500 by 1821. *Abstract of the Answers and Returns made pursuant to an Act, passed in the first year of the Reign of His Majesty King George IV intituled 'An Act for taking an Account of the Population of Great Britain, and of the Increase or Diminution thereof.'* Preliminary observations, enumeration, abstract, MDCCCXXI, House of Commons, 2 July 1822, p. xxxii.

⁹ The chronology of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals does much to disprove accusations that animal welfare groups are dismissive of human concerns. The SPCA was founded by members of the Anti-Slavery Society. When the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was founded in 1884, sharing the same premises as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 20% of its members were already members of the RSPCA. See Coral Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers and Vivisection in Edwardian England* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 29.

¹⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* [1796], and William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of the Rights of Woman* [1798], ed. with introd. by Richard Holmes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 130. The population controversy was first provoked by William Godwin's essay, 'On Avarice and Profusion', published in *The Enquirer* [1797]. Wollstonecraft's letters are addressed to an unnamed correspondent in London (her lover, Gilbert Imlay).

¹¹ Mary Shelley, *The Last Man* [1826], ed. by Morton D. Paley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹² Letter to John Rickman, 6 February 1802, *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. by Kenneth Curry, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), I, p. 269. Christopher Williams offers some more objective evidence that might support Southey's intuition that reduced mental performance could be a consequence of environmental degradation, see *Terminous Brain: The Environmental Threats to*

Human Intelligence (London: Continuum, 1997). Southey's 1803 poem, 'The Alderman's Funeral', contains the following lines that further stress his belief in the efficacy of exercise in the open air:

When yet he was a boy, and should have breathed
The open air and sunshine of the fields,
To give his blood its natural spring and play,
He in a close and dusty counting-house
Smoke-dried and sear'd and shrivell'd up his heart.
(lines 105-109)

Poems of Robert Southey, ed. by Maurice H. Fitzgerald (London: Henry Frowde; Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 419.

¹³ Throughout this study I shall intersperse my use of the phrase 'natural' with the less effusive though perhaps more accurate term, 'non-human'. 'Natural' has become a deeply laden concept, containing the inherent contradiction that as a description of the natural it is itself defined by its opposite, the cultural. The point that the natural environment of the countryside, certainly in England, is largely a human construction, has in itself become a platitude within ecocriticism. I have capitalized 'Green' only where I am deploying the word in a sense that specifically pertains to the Green Party or Die Grünen in a party political sense, in keeping with the older generic usage of lower case 'socialist ideas' as distinct from more specific usage, for example in 'Socialist Party of Great Britain', which refers to a particular political organization.

¹⁴ Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', pp. 3-24 in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. by M. H. Abrams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

¹⁵ Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy, 'Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism', *German New Critique*, 32 (1984), 42-92. The phrase 'Romantic anti-capitalism' is attributed to the Hungarian Marxist, Georg Lukács. Sayre and Löwy break down the varieties of Romantic anti-capitalism into six principal categories: Restitutionalist, Conservative, Fascist, 'Resigned', Liberal, Revolutionary and/or Utopian (which includes Jacobin-Democratic, Populist, Utopian-humanist, Libertarian or Anarchistic and Marxist).

¹⁶ While I have confined my study to the period historically identified with Romanticism and its immediate aftermath, the characteristic economic components of capitalism, namely the transition from subsistence to extractive agriculture, the division between home and workplace of labour and the central emphasis upon economic surplus for market trading between private owners, predate the eighteenth century. Writing in 1984, Sayre and Löwy instance oppositional movements with a distaste for capitalism, such as the ecology, feminist, pacifist and liberation theology movements, and literary utopias, such as the works of Tolkein and Borges, located outside the capitalistic system ('Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism,' pp. 91-2).

¹⁷ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1958).

¹⁸ 1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 587-88. All references are to William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: A Parallel Text* [1971], ed. by J. C. Maxwell, corrected reprint (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

¹⁹ Robert B. Riley, 'Flowers, Power, and Sex', in *The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place, and Action*, ed. by Mark Francis and Randolph T. Hester Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), p. 60.

²⁰ In *An Essay on the Admission of Women to the Parliamentary Franchise*. Quoted by Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford: Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work*, ed. by Samuel Hopgood Hart, 3rd edn, 2 vols (London: Watkins, 1913), I, p. 17. Anna Kingsford (1846-1888) was a social reformer, physician, one-time President of the British Theosophical Society and poet.

²¹ The second *Married Women's Property Act* (1882), in particular, had already remedied several legislative double standards. See Phillippa Levine, *Victorian Feminists 1859-1900* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 139-40.

²² An historical account of the separate-spheres paradigm is supplied by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) Amanda Vickery's revisionist account challenges the assumption of a monolithic hegemony of the separate spheres in the family institution during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', pp. 197-225 in *Gender and History in Western Europe*, ed. by Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (London: Arnold, 1998). An account of the contested nature of the separate spheres, from the perspective of literary criticism, is Mary

Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

²³ After this date, the 'natural' taxonomic system of Augustin Pyrame de Candolle, which classified species by making a broader comparison of the structural anatomy of plants, gradually became more popular than the 'artificial' Linnaean system, which defined them according to their sexual parts. See A. G. Morton, *History of Botanical Science: An Account of the Development of Botany from Ancient Times to the Present Day* (London: Academic Press, 1981), pp. 371-3.

²⁴ Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England 1760 to 1860* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 183-87; David Allen, 'Tastes and Crazes', *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. by N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1996) 397-400. Rebecca Stott contributes a complementary account of Victorian marine zoology in 'Through a Glass Darkly: Aquarium Colonies and Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Marine Monstrosity', *Gothic Studies*, 2.3 (December 2000), 305-327.

²⁵ Lynn Barber, for example, singles out the early to mid-nineteenth century in *The Heyday of Natural History: 1820-1870* (London: Cape, 1980).

²⁶ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 126-7.

²⁷ Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), p. 519.

²⁸ Those cosmological and biological blows to 'the universal narcissism of men' Freud identified in 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis', to which he added the later psychological blow of his own psychoanalytical theories and which are extended further by Gillian Beer to include the blow caused by quantum physics. See Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 12-13.

²⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan identified a shift from the medieval conception of a transcendent vertical cosmos to a more immanent horizontal representation of landscape. See *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 129.

³⁰ Lyell's influential *Principles of Geology* was first published 1830-33. Evidential support for evolution provided by palaeontology was derived from the study of the fossil record in strata which had recently been much exposed by the cutting of the canal network. Such fossils famously caught the attention of surveyors such as William 'Strata' Smith at the end of the eighteenth century. See David Elliston Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp. 57-59.

³¹ Letter to J. D. Hooker, January 1844, *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, ed. by Frederick Buckhardt and Sydney Smith, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985-93), III, p. 2.

³² Gilbert F. LaFreniere, 'Rousseau and the European Roots of Environmentalism', *Environmental History Review*, 14 (1990), 41-72 (p. 47) draws attention to a useful theoretical distinction by Charles Van Doren – the differentiation between *process* or 'irreversible cumulative change' from *progress* or 'irreversible meliorative change.' Charles Van Doren, *The Idea of Progress* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 6.

³³ Letter to Aunt Jessie, September 1873, in *Fors Clavigera* [1871-1873], *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903-12), XXVII, p. 607. Ruskin is quoting from the *Fourth Report of the Commissioner appointed in 1868 to Inquire into the Best Means of Preventing the Pollution of Rivers: Pollution of Rivers of Scotland, 1872* [Rivers Pollution Commission, p. 62].

³⁴ 'Atopia' is Edward S. Casey's term for a sense of alienation from place. See *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993).

³⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973).

³⁶ Williams, *Country and the City*, p. 347.

³⁷ Williams was himself deeply committed to the importance of the politics of ecology and returned to the natural environment as a theme throughout the remainder of his life. See 'Socialism and Ecology' (1982), 'Decentralism and the Politics of Place' (1984) and 'Between Country and City' (1984), all reprinted in Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. by Robin Gable (London: Verso, 1989).

³⁸ Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (London: Dent, 1986).

³⁹ Rackham, *History of the Countryside*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁰ Indeed, if William Wordsworth had been able to run his famous rhetorical question from the 1802 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads – ‘What is a poet? It is a man speaking to men’ – through a Microsoft spellcheck, his choice of phraseology would now, properly, be queried ‘Gender-specific expression. Consider replacing with humanity, humankind, or people.’

⁴¹ First use in the sense of ‘characterized by such behaviour or disposition as befits a man: civil, courteous, obliging’ recorded by OED as 1784. Use for the Humane Society: a Society for the Rescue of Drowning Persons recorded for 1776.

⁴² Although there is an earlier theological usage, the use of ‘humanitarian’ in the sense of ‘holding that man’s duty is chiefly or wholly comprised in the advancement of the welfare of the human race’ is first recorded in 1831. The specific use as ‘a philanthropist; especially one who goes to excess in his principles’ dates from 1844. A decade later the modification of this sense to ‘having regard to the interests of humanity or mankind at large’, a usage that dates from 1855 is cited as ‘often contemptuous or hostile’ (OED).

⁴³ An intransitive use of ‘humanize’, in the sense of ‘to grow humane’, has a first use recorded for 1790.

⁴⁴ Janet Biehl, *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1991), p. 21. Bookchin further suggests, in a key term, human beings should recognize that beyond our socialability as a species we have a ‘ontological consociation’ with the natural world, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982), p. 48.

⁴⁵ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: With other Essays on Conservation from Round River* [1949], (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 109 and 110.

⁴⁶ Cited in Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasurement of Man* [1981], (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 21.

⁴⁷ John Stuart Mill, ‘On the Subjection of Women’, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. by John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 482.

⁴⁸ Cited in Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, p. 182.

⁴⁹ Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Open University Press, 1988), p. 37.

⁵⁰ Tom Jagtenberg and David McKie, *Eco-Impacts and the Greening of Postmodernity: New Maps for Communications Studies, Cultural Studies, and Sociology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), p. 2.

⁵¹ William Hazlitt, ‘Lectures on the English Comic Writers’ [1818], *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: Dent, 1930-34), VI, p. 125.

⁵² Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 167.

⁵³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords, A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), pp. 184-89. In the period under study, the fullest deliberation upon the diversity and the contradictory meanings of ‘nature’ was undertaken by John Stuart Mill in his essay on *Nature* written during the 1850s. ‘Nature’, one of *Three Essays on Religion* [1874], ed. by J. M. Robson, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* [1963-91], 33 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) X, p. 374.

⁵⁴ The OED dates the first usage to that of the British Ecology Society in 1943.

⁵⁵ Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* [1989], trans. and ed. by David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 47-63.

⁵⁶ The binary opposition between nature and culture, conventional to contemporary constructionist views, does not constitute a neat moiety because the former is measured absolutely and the latter relatively. The appearance of a single radio transmitter could prevent an entire horizon from being designated natural. However, the presence of one self-seeded sapling in a metropolis does not, of course, prevent it from being considered an artificial or cultural domain. Adorno invokes the idea of ‘culturescape’ to describe a merging of cultural and natural landscapes, ones in which human constructions have been ‘reclaimed’ by natural processes or are made by a modest rearrangement of immediately existing natural materials. Such objects are pleasing, Adorno suggests, because ‘they do not visibly bear the stigmata of market society’, but laments that such pleasure is tainted by guilt born of complicity with what he terms ‘utilitarian pseudo-progress’ (*Aesthetic Theory*, p. 95). The ruins of Tintern Abbey or stiles entwined in overgrown hedgerows might be examples. A fine evocation of culturescape is John Clare’s poem ‘Pleasant Places’ (*Poems of the Middle Period*, pp. 224-25). The provisional presence of absent human intervention in the works of Andy Goldsworthy or Richard Long may also be considered as more deliberative ventures into another (admittedly market-oriented) version of culturescape.

⁵⁷ Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). Soper's study is a sustained clarification of the entangled concepts of nature and provides a theoretical apparatus with which to approach Romantic nature. Donald Worster similarly labels this opposition 'Arcadian' and 'Imperialist', in *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* [1985], (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Stephen Cotgrove selects yet another terminology when he sets out a distinction between 'cornucopians' to 'catastrophists' in *Catastrophe or Cornucopia: The Environment, Politics and the Future* (Chichester: Wiley, 1982), p. 26.

⁵⁸ Ironically this might be attributed to the extreme slowness of *Homo sapiens* in terms of rates of development and maturation. This theory of neoteny has its origins in the theories of the Dutch anatomist, Louis Bolk. Despite misgivings about the uses to which Bolk put this theory, Stephen Jay Gould suggests that it remains a plausible account of the evolution of human intelligence. Stephen Jay Gould, 'The Child as Man's Real Father', pp. 63-69 in *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* [1978], (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

⁵⁹ By abstracting and passing on symbolic information, orally, pictorially or textually, humans have become uniquely adaptive and able to circumvent the evolutionary developments of 'deep-time'. Among other species, behavioural information is passed on in an organism's genetic codes so that eventually behavioural modification may take place in a (probably) non-teleological process of natural selection, through a dialectical interaction with the external environment. For humans, symbolic language has operated as a catalyst that has facilitated behavioural transformation and environmental intervention and modification with great rapidity in evolutionary terms. The question of whether any other species could develop such a capability is impossible to answer definitively – other species, or even at some future date extraterrestrials, or might be assisted through human agency (I am thinking here about linguistic experiments with great apes), is a matter of investigation far beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁶⁰ Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979). In René Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (1637) it is the possession of a soul that is quintessentially human and that constitutes the absolute division which sets humanity apart from the rest of material nature.

⁶¹ There is a substantial literature on the evolution of morality and altruism, which takes as its foundation hints from Darwin's own work (particularly in *The Descent of Man*), from the works of nineteenth-century Social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer, to Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* and to more contemporary interventions in this debate, most prominently Richard Dawkins's *Selfish Gene* (1976).



NATURE WRITING AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

Happy, truly, is the naturalist. He has no time for melancholy dreams. The earth becomes to him transparent; everywhere he sees significances, harmonies, laws, chains of cause and effect endlessly interlinked, which draw him out of the narrow sphere of self-interest and self-pleasing, into a pure and wholesome region of solemn joy and wonder.
(Kingsley, *Glaucus*)¹

Nature Scepticism

The seminal consciousness that a positive engagement with the natural environment was valuable, if not vital, to human well-being was central to Romantic understanding. The German social theorist Klaus Eder identifies the ‘moralization of nature’, as a principal feature of the Romantic world-view which repudiates narrowly utilitarian attributions of value.² The Romantic valorization of a self in accord with nature is conditioned by fears that society has become estranged from, and in conflict with, natural processes. The enlarged claim that human well-being should be grounded in respect for the natural world reflects a fundamental shift in Western European cultural thought, one that anticipates and informs today’s environmentalism.

However, two caveats should be added. First, while Romanticism is a product of Western European thought, recent research, for example Richard Grove’s *Green Imperialism* (1995), reveals a more diverse, non-European legacy of ecological thought. This less ethnocentric account of the origins of environmental awareness, though beyond the scope of the present study, focuses upon British culture and its immediate influences, and opens up a rich theme for future scholarly investigation.³ Second, while early nineteenth-century nature study was predominantly regarded as morally improving because it was viewed as the revelation of God’s Creation, today it is clearly more likely to be valued for furthering secular scientific knowledge. Furthermore, technical and social developments mark qualitative differences between the more localized objections to environmental degradation during the period of the present enquiry, and twenty-first century resistance to alleged threats to the global environment on the part of green and anti- or post-capitalist groups. In this respect, several factors have altered the context of environmental debates, for example the development of nuclear power and weaponry, the availability of safe and effective birth control methods, the implementation of genetic modification and other outcomes of bioscience, the impact of a globalized media on perceptions of the environment and the cultural impact of the so-called new social movements.⁴

My concern now is to explore some early literary accounts of the use and benefits of the natural environment through instances in a range of genres between 1775 and 1900. John Aikin's *Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777), endorsed claims that the study held a humanitarian benefit:

That this study is not only a source of agreeable and innocent amusement, but conduces to humanize and enlarge the mind, and in various ways to promote the happiness of mankind, has been sufficiently proved by the observations of many ingenious writers.⁵

Aikin's assertion is characteristic of a new literary sensibility. However, many Romantic and Victorian authors felt compelled to justify not only respect, sympathy or love for other species but even their interest in this 'innocent amusement'. The narrator of Priscilla Wakefield's *Instinct Displayed* (1811) is sensitive to the charge that some will find the pursuit of natural history idiosyncratic, banal or simply vulgar:

Our correspondence is also a subject of ridicule for [the Miss Ormonds]: they say we write about nothing but cats, and dogs, and magpies, and that our letters could only amuse a man who shows wild beasts at a fair. They have no eyes for the beauties of nature, or the wonders displayed in the dispositions in the various tribes of animals.⁶

Far from being obvious and universally accepted, it seems that in this period the 'love of nature' was an impulse that frequently met with scorn. Beneath the enthusiasm for nature there lay an implicit defensiveness, not only against ridicule, but in anticipation of accusations of irrelevance, idleness, romantic sentimentality, obsession and, at worst, outright misanthropy. Hannah More was a stern critic who deplored what she regarded as self-indulgence in 'Sensibility' (1782), observing in a chiding tone:

There are, who fill with brilliant complaints the page,
If a poor linnet meet the gunner's rage;
There are, who for a dying fawn display
The tend'rest anguish in the sweetest lay;
Who for a wounded animal deplore,
As if friend, parent, country, were no more [...] ⁷
(*'Sensibility'*, 279-84)

The mid-Victorian naturalist, George Henry Lewes clearly felt compelled to justify the compulsive nature of his studies. *Sea-Side Studies* (1858) concludes with a magnanimous defence of natural history:

All the forms and facts of Nature carry with them a deep spiritual significance, and cannot be reverently studied without revealing it; for are they not the manifestations of the Universal Life? Unreflecting minds often deem it a trivial occupation for serious men to devote themselves with patience to the study of anatomical details, and the scrutiny of facts which seem to have no practical bearing on the great affairs of life. These details, like all other facts of Nature, may, indeed, be studied in a trivial spirit, uninspired by a loftier aim; but under their lowest aspect they have still the unalienable value attendant upon all truth; and under their highest aspect they teach us something of a noble wisdom which profoundly affects the practical affairs of life, by affecting the direction and the temper of our thoughts.⁸

Frameworks for Human Well-Being

In order to give structure to my historical account of claims that nature study has both practical and profound benefits, as Lewes suggests, I shall make use of a prominent model of human well-being – Abraham H. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. First elaborated in *Motivation and Personality* (1954), Maslow’s model remains extremely influential and provides a coherent organizational framework for exploring the benefits of engagement with the natural world and the ways in which ‘the direction and temper of our thoughts’ might be affected by nature.⁹ Maslow’s broad categories are physiological and safety needs, the need to belong, and for love and esteem and self-actualization (a Jungian concept, more often termed ‘self-realization’ in environmental discourse). There is an immediate difficulty, particularly for secular environmentalism which seeks to redress the Judaeo-Christian legacy that has often privileged a spiritual afterlife over material existence (reflected, for instance in the pejorative nuances of the term ‘mundane’).¹⁰ While Maslow partly replicates this conventional but unhelpful opposition between the material and spiritual, he recognized, however, that it was inappropriate to his model, acknowledging that ‘the romantic-classic opposition’ should certainly be modified because ‘it has been based on the [...] illegitimate dichotomy between lower needs as animal and higher needs as nonanimal or antianimal’. ‘Along with this’, he continues, ‘must go considerable revision of the concepts of rational and impulsive, and the general notion of the rational life as opposed to the instinctive life’.¹¹

Maslow is careful to add two caveats to mitigate resemblances between his triangular model and similar images of class hierarchy. First, that the physiological and the instinctual needs at the model’s base are not in any meaningful experiential sense any ‘lower’ than the ontological aspirations at the apex. Second, Maslow concedes that, in practice, it is impossible to divide the needs of the complex human subject into mutually exclusive and discrete categories. On the contrary, he insists that to isolate and ‘make atomistic lists of drives or needs’ (*Motivation and Personality*, p. 7) would be erroneous, because different

drives exist simultaneously yet have shifting precedence in an individual's priorities at different times.

Familiar with Maslow's hierarchy, and recognizing its pertinence to the idea of the beneficence of the love of nature, Stephen Kellert provides an updated and detailed taxonomy of human values more directly based upon the relationship with the natural world. In 'The Biological Basis for Human Values of Nature' (1993), Kellert identifies nine categories of value.¹² These categories are proposed on the basis of a predominantly sociobiological interpretation of biophilia. This is unsurprising since E. O. Wilson, the first theorist of biophilia, was the author of *Sociobiology* (1975). Biophilia assumes that humans, like other evolved organisms, will behave in ways influenced by biological imperatives, and express an affinity for aspects of the natural environment, such as plentiful resources, that address such imperatives. However, while humans may have a genetic disposition to find aspects of the natural world appealing, responses to particular ecological contexts vary significantly due to sociocultural factors such as gender and ethnicity. The minds of the contributors to *The Biophilia Hypothesis* are exercised, therefore, by the familiar nature/nurture debate.

I have conflated areas of human improvement into three broad categories: physical benefits (encompassing Maslow's basic physiological and safety needs), social and psychological benefits (equating with Maslow's needs for belonging, love and esteem), and spiritual and ontological (particularly environmentalist claims that engagement with the natural world contributes towards social progress and self-realization). Such categories of human well-being are probably not best expressed within the confines of a hierarchical model. Ecological thought, which values physicality, is not well served by a privileging of the immaterial and eternal over the embodiment of the here and now. The dualist legacy that exalts a transcendent, disembodied, other-worldly domain (apparent, to give two diverse examples, in the privileging of the absolute self over the physical world by German Romantic Johann Fichte, or in the twentieth-century theological writings of C. S. Lewis) over immanent conceptions of spirituality can be an alienating and divisive one. It is important to retain, therefore, Maslow's caveat that these are not mutually exclusive categories, thereby signifying the essential mutually sustaining unity of the material and immaterial.

Physical Needs

In the following excerpt from the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot provides an enthusiastic starting point that encompasses a range of human benefits:

Natural history is inexhaustible; it is equally suitable for exercising the most exalted genius, for the relaxation and amusement of those who are busy with other things, and for those who seek to avoid the boredom of an idle life. Natural history occupies them with research which is amusing, easy, interesting and varied; and provides reading matter which is both agreeable and instructive. It gives exercise to body and mind. [...] This science can be studied at any time, in any place, and at any age. With so many advantages natural history, once it becomes well known, will always be esteemed and flourishing; the more it is studied the more seductive it becomes.¹³

There is no apologetic tone here as Diderot proposes that nature study offers physical and intellectual benefits available to all. It encourages bodily exercise. It contributes to amusement and the prevention of boredom. It assists intellectual development and even the engagement of genius.

Similarly, William Cobbett's celebration of gardening in *The English Gardener* (1829) provides a summary of the 'agreeable and instructive' benefits of engagement with nature. Gardening is, Cobbett writes, 'favourable to the study of any art or science', and combines recreation with physical exertion, being 'conducive to health by means of the irresistible temptation which it offers to early rising; to the stirring abroad on one's legs'. It fills, therefore, the vacuum of spare time that might otherwise be occupied with, at best, idleness, at worst, immorality or criminality. Cobbett argues that gardening was preferable for 'daughters, and even sons' to assist their mother in the greenhouse rather than concerning themselves with cards or 'the blubberings over a stupid novel'. Cobbett has also introduced a gender differentiation here. The greenhouse and the flower garden might be considered as particularly feminine realms in distinction to the hearty and productive space of the masculine vegetable garden. There is a sense that he felt that it was principally female hours that needed to be passed usefully. This was not only because young women might be expected to have more available time, but also due to the longstanding belief that useful and moral conduct on the part of young women might have a moderating affect on the behaviour of men. As such, *The English Gardener* is of a piece with Cobbett's other writings which characteristically combine political radicalism with cultural conservatism. In his hopes for human improvement through gardening however, his vision is a broad and magnanimous understanding of the immediate and particular. In believing in the importance of place and that gardening helps 'to endear us to the spot on which it is our lot to live', Cobbett

anticipates the ultimately ecological insight that familiarity and intimacy with the locality where we find ourselves is a desirable end in itself; an idea shared by the writers from *Common Ground* who cherish 'local distinctiveness' in our own time.¹⁴ Focus and application of this kind is good for mental health; in this case some possible reciprocity between a fertile tilth and a vibrant mind is proposed. Cobbett's fondness for being rooted and grounded in place is an inclusive kind of particularism in so far as he claims that gardening has a positive contribution in its benign influence upon all those that have access to a plot of land. This universal value is emphasized in his conclusion that 'gardening in general is favourable to the well-being of man. As the taste for it decreases in any country, vicious amusements and vicious habits are sure to increase'.¹⁵

Other authors were anxious that metaphysical considerations should not be unduly privileged above the material benefits that the non-human environment provided, such as foodstuffs and medicinal cures. Charlotte Smith, for example, wrote:

I cannot say that I think the pleasure of botanizing destroyed, by considering plants as convertible into drugs; on the contrary, I reflect with satisfaction, that objects so beautiful in themselves, are also endowed with the power of alleviating pain or diminishing fever.[...]¹⁶

Rousseau, as we shall see in Chapter Six, objected to the profit-making impulse in botany as a vulgar motivation ('it is no good seeking garlands for shepherdesses among the ingredients of an enema'), thereby repudiating the reductionism that treats wild plants as mere commodities for human use.¹⁷ Charlotte Smith's corrective to such attitudes, in valuing plants equally for their beauty and their healing power, however, conforms to the rationalist tradition in women's writing that Anne K. Mellor identifies in *Romanticism and Gender* (1993).¹⁸ The material benefits derived from knowledge of the processes and diversity of life of the kind that Smith describes contributes towards secure, plentiful lives and more sustainable health for beneficiaries.

Particularly after the aestheticization of the walk during the late eighteenth century, the countryside became increasingly identified as a space for exercise and leisure for a broader middle-class base beyond the aristocracy and gentry.¹⁹ Such venturing facilitated the onset of mass tourism during the mid-nineteenth century. At the amateur level, natural history, unlike other sciences, was largely open to the participation of women. Outdoor pursuits promoted physical fitness by developing muscular growth and body definition, improving blood circulation, grace and suppleness, and many urged the enjoyment of healthier respiration in the cleaner atmosphere away from centres of industry. In Wollstonecraft's

novel, *Mary* (1788), a rural environment is preferred to urban settings associated with ill-health and human misery: 'as the summer advanced, Henry grew worse; the closeness of the air, in the metropolis, affected his breath; and his mother insisted on his fixing on some place in the country'.²⁰

Natural surroundings were a site for rest and physical regeneration. It was the allegedly recuperative power of the seaside that made it a particularly attractive destination. For Louisa Lane Clarke (1865), the seaside suited both stimulation and relaxation with:

The hot and dusty city a past thing like a weary dream of night. Our faces are cooled by the delicious breezes, our life renewed by fresh air; our minds strengthened by relaxation if we have worked, and soothed if by sorrow or illness we have suffered.²¹

The distinction between the freedom associated with the coast and the toil of industry located inland bears comparison with the opposition conventionally made between the country and the city. In *Glaucus* (1855), Charles Kingsley similarly described the seaside as a respite from the city. However, confessing 'you are half-tired, half-ashamed, of making one more in the ignoble army of idlers', he felt it necessary to justify such visits with an account of physical and intellectual benefits.²² Again, Anne Pratt (1850) believed it necessary to defend the inactivity and lack of economic purpose on the part of the 'lingering groups' wandering by the ocean:

Call them not idlers. They may have come from scenes of busy toil for needful repose, and while listening to sweet sounds, and looking on lovely objects, they are getting treasures of memory for future duty.²³

Pratt's suggestion that the seaside generates a store of beautiful images for the mind recalls Wordsworth's claim (discussed below, Chapter Three) that strolling through the Lakeland environment impressed his mind with 'a dance of images' which would later become available for the memory and imagination or re-emerge in dream states. Maslow's physiological needs, and Kellert's utilitarian needs, therefore have cognitive as well as physical benefits.

Social and Psychological Benefits

Several social factors help to explain the gradual democratization of nature study during the nineteenth century. An increased middle-class population found more available leisure time in which to enjoy the countryside than before 1775. For the urban working class opportunities were more limited until the later nineteenth-century when the *Ten Hour Act* (1847) and the *Bank Holiday Act* (1871) provided some recreational margin for competing attractions such as organized spectator sports, the proliferation of the music hall and mass communications media and the possibility to travel to rural and seaside locations.²⁴

Furthermore, while natural philosophy was still understood in a theological framework, as Roy Baumeister suggests in *Identity* (1986), secularization resulted in an increasing reluctance to defer personal fulfilment until a possible afterlife during the eighteenth century.²⁵ In *The European Mind 1680-1715* (1953), Paul Hazard finds the appearance of this quest for 'happiness on Earth' particularly exemplified in the works of Blaise Pascal and Lord Shaftesbury.²⁶ Human relationships, the arts and the exploration of the sublime experience in the physical world were prominent sources of satisfaction and euphoria for those seeking fulfilment on Earth.

Nature study combined all three. It provided occasions to forge and develop interpersonal bonds on the part of those who shared a mutual enthusiasm for the living world, whether friends, family or lovers. The spirit of companionship and conviviality is often an important dimension to the experience of chancing upon a rare species or a beautiful natural setting. Margaret Gatty, for example, undertook some of her seaweed hunts with a large entourage of family members and servants, and developed friendships and working relationships with a number of fellow algologists (see Chapter Eight).

The natural world was similarly a setting for intimacy in love relationships, providing both beautiful surroundings and escape from the public gaze and moral constraint. For instance, John Clare's rural writings include some fine observations of the species of the Northamptonshire countryside, gained *en passant* while on the primary purpose of courting Patty. The following journal entry tells of an encounter with the nightjar:

My Love rambles then made me acquainted with many of the privacys of night [*del. s*] which she seemd wishing to keep as secrets I was then the companion of the Evening and very often the morning Star Pattys Lodge stood in a lone spot and the very path seemd to loose itself in the solitudes and [*del. seemd*] was glad to take the direction of rabbit tracks ere it coud lead one to the door nature revell'd in security this bird was one of her curiosities²⁷

Clare's identification of 'security' with Patty's hidden lodge, embowered within nature like the retreats of the nearby nightjar and rabbits, is an instance of the phenomenon of pleasure in natural objects, such as nests, burrows and shells, that Gaston Bachelard eloquently proposes as images of refuge in *The Poetics of Space* (1958).²⁸ Such memories confer associations between well-being and rural surroundings and the other species that live there and, for Clare, make the ground hallowed and the woods enchanted. Equally powerful are those images, sounds, smells and tastes of the countryside that call to mind childhood experiences. William Hazlitt's description of such evocative associations, in 'On the Love of the Country' (1814), gestures towards a generic quality in natural objects, in the sense that today's primroses are continuous with and for practical purposes, identical with, those of our youth. The particular and the generic collapse in upon each other and do not trouble the admirer with challenging alterations. So in an autobiographical sense, the apparent durability of the common scenes and objects of nature can help to ground a sense of continuity in our own identity. Hazlitt's theory that it is pleasurable (and sometimes painful) childhood associations that stimulate the 'Love of the Country', explains Charlotte Smith's love of rookeries, the presence of which enhances the process of recall and visualization (see below, Chapter Four).²⁹ Similarly, Pratt found that collecting and cooking dulse had this nostalgic effect:

perhaps because it brings with it some associations with childhood, as some of us may now like blackberries or other wild fruits, because they remind us of by-gone times, and happy hours in the woodlands.³⁰

Conversely, the uprooting of people from a much loved part of the countryside and place of attachment may cause a profound sense of estrangement and disorientation. Again, the case of John Clare, that most sharp-focused poet of local distinctiveness, forcefully demonstrates the atopia that can be caused by being uprooted from the home locality, due to the compulsion of the flexibility required of the labourer to meet the demands of the economy.³¹ 'The Flitting', a poem of Clare's Northborough period, expresses the intensity of this bewildering sense of disruption:

Alone & in a stranger scene
Far far from spots my heart esteems
The closen with their ancient green
Heath woods & pastures sunny streams
The awthorns here were hung with may

But still they seem in deader green
The sun een seems to loose its way
Nor knows the quarter it is in³²
(lines 49-56)

Tilley writes that ‘the meaning of place is grounded in existential or lived consciousness of it’.³³ Clare consciously rejects the gilt-edged frippery of poetic arcadia in order to record specificity of place, complete with coudung and thistledown. Such is Clare’s intimate bonding with place – perhaps most evocatively expressed by the Welsh expression ‘y filltir sgywar’ (‘that place which you own through familiarity and which “owns” you’)³⁴ – that the enforced nomadism of his displacement is little eased by the fact that the move from Helpston to Northborough was approximately three miles. Indeed, this love of place is disrupted at the cost of the breakdown and incarceration in Northampton Asylum to which it apparently contributed. However, ‘The Flitting’ also relates the process whereby renewed contact with familiar species around him, such as the jack-by-the-hedge, partially enables Clare to rediscover his poetic voice. It thereby re-establishes connections and consequently signifies a growing confidence about adjustment to the new situation. Nevertheless such a readjustment was merely provisional and incremental; tragically the psychic reorientation was never realized. So, attachment to a sense of place is not always one of reassurance and comforting familiarity. Indeed, it is perhaps rarely so if the attachment is genuine. Long-term familiarity with a locality (like any intimate relationship) will bring with it experiences of unhappiness, discomfort and even trauma if that place is disrupted.³⁵

Both what Hazlitt terms ‘natural objects’ and familiar surroundings can, therefore, become heavily laden with emotional freight, projected onto them by deep and often obscure human needs and motivations. Tuan suggests that:

Topophilia is not the strongest of human emotions. When it is compelling we can be sure that the place or environment has become the carrier of emotionally charged events or perceived as a symbol.³⁶

Attachment to place makes possible a literal grounding of human identity. This Heideggerian sense of dwelling contrasts with the alienation experienced by those compelled to emigrate away from community and familiar home surroundings by economic forces. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari theorize the loss of transcendent signifiers as ‘deterritorialization’, which they suggest is endemic to the logic of market forces, and that makes impossible the kind of immanent grounding of self in place to which Clare aspires.³⁷ Such trends, integral to the expansion of capitalism, clearly militate against some strains of

present-day environmentalism, conflicting most directly, for example, with the idea of bioregionalism proposed by Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann.³⁸

Several authors have argued that nature study develops intellectual and scientific discipline that can profitably be applied to other areas. David Williams even went so far as to declare that 'natural history is the first ground and foundation of philosophy'.³⁹ A number of mental faculties are cultivated by engaging the mind with natural history including observational skills, powers of concentration and attention to detail, descriptive abilities and the structuring and ordering of knowledge. Long before ecological science emerged, nature study instilled conceptions of the inter-relatedness of existence and ecosystems, thus encouraging a holistic way of looking at the world. However, the precise terms of such an understanding of the physical world are fluid. The appearance of ecology during the nineteenth century represented a secularization of the models of interconnection familiar in natural theology. While the idea of interconnectedness was retained, there was a significant adjustment in the transposition from the dominant metaphor of the Great Chain of Being towards a more dynamic web of life, in which the gradations between species are relative rather than absolute. Ecological insight can encourage sensitivity to the impact of human activity within this interconnected web of life. It informs decisions about maintaining the balance between the unique human ability to adapt to and modify the living world and the underlying reliance upon its sustained ecological integrity, for human well-being.

Some of the mental improvements resulting from the study of the natural world enhance the intellect more directly. It was argued, for example, that an appetite for nature study could stimulate a broader enthusiasm for reading literature. In the *Natural History of Birds* (1806), Charlotte Smith commended the pastime to young readers for this reason: 'your future studies will introduce you to Aristotle and Pliny; but names more familiar to you are those of Bacon and Boyle, and among very late instances that of Erasmus Darwin'.⁴⁰

Some also valued the absorption of the mental faculties in the 'improving' study of natural history as a diversion. David Williams approved of the physical sciences in part because:

In the same manner as the general truths of natural history might be sometimes exemplified in the gardens and fields; many of the mathematical, astronomical, and particularly the mechanical problems, might be examined in consequence of a ride or a walk. This would not only be present instruction, but get the pupil into the habit of having an object and a view in every thing he does. He will then never experience the common unhappiness of not knowing what to do with himself; or

when he has resolved on a ride or a walk, be miserable for want of being able to determine where to go, or on what object to engage his thoughts.⁴¹

It was feared that the contagion of *tædium vitæ*, that perennial enemy of eighteenth century well-being and morality, could all too easily, become complicit in 'dissipation' or even sexual intrigues and adventurism, most invidiously on the part of young women. While there was clearly a didactic purpose in promoting practical study among more wealthy women, Shteir initially appears to be overstating her case when she suggests that:

It is not difficult to argue that botanical study for women in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served, and in some quarters was intended to serve, as a form of social control, substituting innocuous activities and attitudes for others more threatening to conventional views of womankind.⁴²

Nevertheless, Kingsley's ideas provide some evidence to support Shteir's argument. He clearly believed that the study could be both a benign channel for unruliness and criminal tendencies in young men, and an alternative to unlicensed desires among young women:

I have seen the young London beauty, amid all the excitement and temptation of luxury and flattery, with her heart pure and her mind occupied in a boudoir full of shells and fossils, flowers and sea-weeds; keeping herself unspotted from the world, by considering the lilies of the field, how they grow.⁴³

For Landsborough, 'the naturalist knows nothing of that *tædium vitæ*, – that vampire, *ennui*'. The benefits of natural history combine physical fitness, mental discipline and spiritual piety:

Habits of observation, of patient research, of accurate discrimination, and orderly arrangement are gradually acquired. Wherever he is – on the wild moor or on the shore of the sea, he learns to see thousands of beautiful, wonderful things which the untrained, uninitiated eye never observes. Is he healthy? His rural rambles are conducive to the continuance of health [...] let him have an interest in the wonders of nature – in the works of God's hand, – meditating on them, he forgets his ailments, and health, which he ceases to pursue, by the blessing of God often comes as it were of its own accord. His mind is soothed and refreshed, and the salutary influence is felt by the enfeebled body.⁴⁴

Anti-Pastoral Voices

The pastoral tradition, dating from the *Idyllia* of Theocritus, the *Eclogues* of Virgil and the Horatian odes, is a familiar and enduring one. Much admired and reworked in the Augustan period, pastoral writing celebrates rural retirement as a respite and retreat from the moral and physical pollution of the city. The countryside has long been valued as a space for

mental and psychic recuperation, a soporific to the deprivation suffered in crime- and disease-ridden urban streets. During the nineteenth century, rural surroundings continued to be represented as a healthy alternative to the claustrophobia of confined urban streets, associated with domestic strife and social disorder, and the exploitation suffered on the factory floor. Wakefield, for example, feared for the consequences of urban life upon children's development:

[...] Surely none can see the beauties of creation, and not admire them. Children brought up in crowded cities are to be pitied in this respect: they see scarcely any thing but the works of art, and they associate the ideas of beauty and value, to the production of the mechanical only.⁴⁵

Later, feminist reformers such as Frances Power Cobbe and Dora Greenwell became particularly concerned about the environmental impact of urban poverty upon relations between the sexes and the treatment of children. Cobbe, sceptical that the anomie of the industrial proletariat could be instantly transformed to benevolence by wild nature, nevertheless insisted on the importance of environment upon individual behaviour in 'Wife-Torture in England' (1878):

Paradoxical as it sounds, it takes a good deal of civilization to make a man love savage scenery, and a highly cultivated mind to find any 'pleasure in the pathless woods' or 'rapture in the lonely shore'. Nevertheless, for moral health as much as for physical, a certain number of cubic inches of space are needed for every living being.⁴⁶

George Eliot shared this scepticism when she satirized the misplaced idealization of the English peasantry in 'The Natural History of German Life' (1856): 'selfish instincts are not subdued by the sight of buttercups [...] To make men moral something more is requisite than to turn them out to grass'.⁴⁷ Wordsworth himself opposed the Kendal to Windermere Railway, denying that positive benefits would accrue from bringing large numbers of people to the Lakes on the grounds that occasional day trips would be insufficient to develop an appreciation of romantic scenery, while irreparably destroying the area's beauty.⁴⁸

So, by the end of the nineteenth century, some of the optimism about the humanizing potential of engagement with the natural world was qualified. In 'Under an Elm-Tree; Or Thoughts in the Country-Side' (1889), William Morris was cautious about the appearance of continuity in the countryside, which in reality he predicts will 'vanish year by year [...] under the attacks of the most grovelling commercialism'.⁴⁹ Morris, author of the naturalistic utopia *News From Nowhere* (1890), painfully observed that pastoral representations of the countryside too often screened reality. He recognized that the countryside was peopled by

labourers experiencing extreme hardship. The existing pastoral experience is for Morris, therefore, one that is sadly and deeply illusory. In the tradition of George Crabbe's *The Village* (1783), a century before, he engages in anti-pastoral musing that complicates his own deep affection for the English countryside.

Idly looking at nature, Morris suggests, it is easy to absorb the beauty and tranquillity of a midsummer afternoon, to believe 'that all is happy that is not anxious' and even hold the anthropocentric view that all exists exclusively for human benefit. However, he quickly becomes aware of, and troubled by, the socio-economic realities, and glaring inequalities, intrinsic to the landscapes that he so much enjoys. An early intimation of a more dejected mood behind Morris's ironically rosy description is suggested by the allusion to the 'sapphire blue' river, 'unaware of the fate that Barking Reach is preparing for its waters'.⁵⁰ A socialist gaze is brought to bear. This countryside is a human rather than Godly creation. In Morris's anti-capitalist analysis, the superficiality of the countryside's picturesque appearance is exposed by a holistic aesthetic that urges that true beauty cannot be realized in a rural landscape populated by people not living to their full human potential. The present class system obstructs such development and prevents the free enjoyment of the beauty of the countryside.

Morris, contemplating beneath his elm, is moved to reflect further upon the illusory quality of the bucolic spectacle before him. The juxtaposition of a cart-horse near to two labourers, a man and woman likewise working the land, de-romanticizes the idea of rustic toil. Farm workers toiling for another's profit become instruments alienated from their labour and thus 'featherless two-legged animals', not fully human.⁵¹ Morris's choice of location (according to legend, St. George slew his dragon on the neighbouring hill) draws attention to the wider condition of England by contrasting the ancient dignity of the chalk horse of Uffington with the debased, but equally emblematic, beast of burden below. That capitalist modes of production rely upon a division of labour and a deskilling of rural craftworkers and artisans rather than the creative production essential to self-realization and human flourishing is a familiar objection in oppositional economic works from Marx's *Grundrisse* to E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* and *Good Work*. In Morris's countryside, the aesthetic beauty of birdsong is mingled with human voices – the complaints of exploited haymakers forced to work for subsistence wages. It becomes apparent, therefore, that the countryside is vulnerable to the same market forces that prevail in the industrial cities.

Morris was aware that a parochial idealization of closeness to the land could rest upon sentimental nostalgia for an imagined feudal stability. Ever mindful of what he considered to be the reactionary ideology of those that controlled the forces of production in the countryside, Morris's oppositional voice was one that rejected a regressive return to the land but advocated rather a forward-looking movement in which more progressive contact and identification with the countryside could enable all to benefit, both materially and spiritually.

The well-being that may be derived from the experience of the natural world is therefore one complicated by economic relations and vulnerable to disruption by negative environmental factors. More positively, Morris believed that the countryside could, potentially, provide the context for a participatory, and indeed emancipatory, sense of community. Despite some reservations, he retained a faith in the regenerative power of the natural world upon the human psyche that secures his importance as a nineteenth-century environmental thinker.⁵²

Sense and Sensitivity

Another social benefit of respect for nature derives from a concern for individual animals. Some commentators regarded the development of sensibility to other species as a measurement of human improvement. John Locke and Immanuel Kant both proposed that the encouragement of sympathy for other species in the young instils sensitivity and ethical awareness that may ultimately inhibit cruelty to other humans (see Chapter Ten).⁵³ They suggested that if children develop habits of care in their treatment of domestic animals, they are more likely to become sociable and altruistic adults. This theory has since sustained the enlarged claim that compassion towards non-human species is the greatest expression of 'humanity', the ethical dimension that is unique to our species.⁵⁴ Sympathy for other species is a particular concern for Priscilla Wakefield in *Instinct Displayed*. Here, a sympathetic gaze at microscopic life prompts a chain of thought leading to a discussion about education, patriarchal cruelty and social responsibility. Wakefield extends her attention from the particular in order to consider instances of cruelty germane to a broader enquiry into social ills and well-being. Indicating that the treatment of animals is conditioned by both the biological 'provision of nature' and the cultural fact of 'education', Wakefield demonstrates awareness that attitudes towards other species are influenced by factors such as gender and class. She explicitly associates boys' deterioration in behaviour with the way in they are socialized:

Women are more tender-hearted than men, which may partly be attributed to a wise provision of nature, to qualify them for the maternal office. But they are also indebted to education: cruelty is discouraged in girls as unamiable, and discordant with their natural character; so that an affectation of great sensibility has, of late years, been very fashionable. Boys, on the contrary, from false notions of courage and spirit, are suffered to take the birds' nests, to tyrannize over horses, and dogs &c. till their feelings are blunted to a degree that influences their conduct for the rest of their lives.⁵⁵

Wakefield melds together a biological explanation of sexual difference – that women are more 'tender-hearted than men' because they are suited to the 'maternal office' – with the determining influence of education upon gender. She insists that it is 'false notions of courage and spirit' that accounts for boys' cruelty and hence contests and reverses such masculine conventions. Class assumptions about cruelty are also challenged. Men's cruelty:

[...] prevails where there is least cultivation; consequently, we see animals treated with the most unfeeling barbarity by butchers, fishmongers, poulterers, draymen, cattle-drivers, &c. But can we expect reformation, whilst those who should know better, buy crimped fish, and deal with poulterers who pluck their fowls before they are dead, which is a common practice, because it is done with less trouble? (*Instinct Displayed*, p. 289)

While cruelty is primarily identified with working-class offenders, the middle classes are equally censured for their culpability in buying the products of cruelty. The 'unfeeling barbarity' of those that work with live animals is attributed to the fact that there is 'least cultivation' among this class. While true humanity is most clearly demonstrated in kind behaviour towards non-humans, Wakefield represents the inhumane treatment of other species as a model for human tyranny and the abusive exercise of power:

The lesson of humanity to every thing that breathes, should be taught from the very dawn of reason, and repeated on every occasion of enforcing it. Angling with worms, birds'-nesting, and spinning cockchafers, are, by the unthinking, overlooked in their children as the common amusements of their age; but they harden the heart, and sow the seeds of a cruel disposition, that is often exercised towards wives, children, and servants. (*Instinct Displayed*, p. 289)

In demonstrating her regard for animals, Wakefield illustrates Kellert's 'moralistic' category of feeling for the natural world, characterized by a sense of ethical awareness. Eighteenth-century humanitarian sensibility was partly informed by the belief that the nurturing and sympathetic impulse, which convention and tradition had assigned to women as an integral feature of femininity, could become a morally improving force for social transformation. Concerns about the treatment of animals, such as those voiced by Wakefield, therefore raise

far-reaching contentions, essentializing women's traditional roles, yet at the same time prompting speculation about the culturally constructed nature of gender difference. Respect and 'feeling' for other species is explicitly associated here with the 'dawn of reason'.

Finally, consideration for other species may be linked to cultural advances that come within the remit of Kellert's 'humanistic' (group bonding and co-operation) and 'ecologicistic-scientific' (knowledge and understanding) categories. The demand for women's empowerment, from the time of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays to the suffragette agitation of Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst and Charlotte Despard, was fundamentally a struggle for full social agency, by attaining cultural and political representation and participating in those disciplines such as science, medicine and law that had previously been foreclosed to them. This challenged the historical convention that had designated women as more 'natural' beings than men, their provenance suited to private accomplishments rather than public utterance. Active engagement with the natural environment was a cultural endeavour, a conscious intervention in the understanding of the human relationship with the natural world. For women, therefore, the study of the living world became part of the ontological transition in the social status of women, and a break with masculinist traditions that had quantified women by emphasizing their continuity with corporeal nature. Nature writing, participation in natural history and campaigning on behalf of the natural environment and other species all contributed to women's increasing intellectual confidence by 1900.

Spiritual and Ontological Benefits

An implicit harmony exists between the earth and the people it nourishes, and when imprudent societies strike a blow against what beautifies their environment they have always ended in regretting it. There where the land becomes ugly, where all poetry disappears from the landscape, imaginations are extinguished, spirits are impoverished, routine and servility overtake the soul and set it on the path to torpor and death.⁵⁶

(Reclus, *Concerning the Awareness of Nature in Modern Society*)

The Aesthetics of Nature: Mystery, Beauty, Wonder and Fear

If natural history proclaims the interconnectedness and complexity of life on Earth, then it also provides a context for human existence and, given the determining influence of environmental surroundings upon self, pertains to the problematic ontological question of what it means to be human. Indeed, the idea of the human is conventionally defined by its

antithesis, the non-human. In the exploration of the non-human aspects of the natural world, there is a fascination with mystery and curiosity for the quality of otherness that is often encountered, in all its unpredictability and strangeness. Intellectual curiosity and the need to know and explain the physical world are both located in Kellert's ecologicistic-scientific category, and cited by Maslow as basic cognitive needs:

Studies of psychologically healthy people indicate that they are, as a defining characteristic, attracted to the mysterious, to the unknown, to the chaotic, unorganized, and unexplained. This seems to be a per se attractiveness; these areas are in themselves and of their own right interesting.⁵⁷

The exhilaration and pleasure that was felt in the presence of the natural world or when confronted by curious, newly imported artefacts from the colonies was expressed in many Romantic and Victorian texts. Wakefield enthralled young readers of *Instinct Displayed* with facts gleaned from recent global exploration, supplying them with innumerable fascinating examples of the unusual, unaccountable and uncanny. She described:

[...] A certain species of sparrow, found in Hindustan, which, in the night-time, lights up her nest with glow-worms; and, after collecting them for this purpose, she fastens them to the inside of her nest, by means of a peculiar kind of clay, of a glutinous nature.⁵⁸

In *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (1989), the American environmental philosopher Eugene C. Hargrove argues that there is tentative empirical evidence that the fact of the *existence* of natural beauty entails a positive aesthetic value in its own right. For Hargrove vicarious aesthetic pleasure can be derived from a description of wonders such as those described by Wakefield, even if the reader (and, presumably, the writer) have never directly encountered the species in question.⁵⁹ However, pleasure in the textual or artistic representation of an ancient, unique or uncanny natural object or being in this sense is dependent upon the existence of the original. One of the criteria for the enjoyment of natural beauty, Hargrove suggests, is that it should be grounded in authenticity if it is to produce a pleasing effect.⁶⁰ Perhaps the best that can be done to uphold the aesthetic value of the existence of less charismatic nature, such as vultures or parasitic flora, is to argue that they are an intrinsic and essential part of the organic cycle of biotic life and death upon which other species such as the graceful blue whale, the exotic bird of paradise and the exquisite bee orchid depend.

Maslow proposes that the 'mystic experience' and the human fascination with the wonderful and mysterious are continuous with other powerful forms of (ostensibly) non-

utilitarian admiration, each being 'subjectively rich experiences of the same passive, aesthetic sort'. At the same time, he concedes, these are inexplicable in terms of known drives, acknowledging, 'the fact that the aesthetic response is useless and purposeless, and that we know nothing about its motivations, if indeed there *are* any in the ordinary sense, should indicate to us only the poverty of our official psychology.'⁶¹

This sense of dissatisfaction with the limits of 'official psychology' surely accounts for the preference for phenomenological understandings of the human relationship with the natural world by philosophers such as Bachelard, who looked to poetry as well as science when considering aesthetic appreciation. This epistemological challenge is true also of the limits to artistic interpretation. An experience of the natural world recorded as a piece of imaginative literature becomes a transsubjective phenomenon, a provisional space, at rest somewhere between objective existence and subjective experience. Bachelard writes: 'At the level of the poetic image, the duality of subject and object is iridescent, shimmering, unceasingly active in all its inversions.'⁶² The appreciation of natural phenomena, both through direct apprehension and in literary and artistic representation, is fundamental to the awareness of humans as self-conscious, experiencing subjects. Such aesthetics are historically contingent and culturally determined. Gilbert LaFreniere (1990) attributes the aestheticization of wild nature, characterized by minimal human intervention, to the influence of Rousseau and his immediate antecedents such as Shaftesbury.⁶³

Today, however, the notion of a branch of the liberal arts called nature criticism is almost inconceivable to us. During the 1960s Theodor W. Adorno made a detailed exploration of the aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty in his final, uncompleted work, *Aesthetic Theory*.⁶⁴ Adorno set out to explain the omission of a philosophy of nature aesthetics due to a transfer of attention to art criticism. In most aesthetic theory, he suggests, a focus upon the agency of the human subject excludes phenomena that come into being by natural means. This elevation of the artefacts of human creativity is attributed to the wider privileging of intellectually inspired products above entities generated by natural reproduction; a valuation that is integral to the capitalist subordination of animals, the natural environment and women (deemed inherently reproductive rather than productive in a gendered division of labour).⁶⁵ For Adorno, natural beauty always exists as an indefinite, ineffable quality. He articulates the paradox that, while attempts to distinguish the beautiful from the mediocre in nature are predisposed to failure, the 'general levelling notion that everything is beautiful' is even more fallacious (*Aesthetic Theory*, p. 107).

The practical appreciation of a natural scene involves an uneasy subject-object relationship. While the subject enjoins a controlling presumption over the object, in order for natural beauty to retain interest value it must hold an element of ultimate incomprehensibility and an unknowable quality in order to be able to impart some information that the perceiving subject does not already know. The natural object thus retains the integrity of autonomous presence.⁶⁶ In this respect an essential property of natural beauty is that it is impossible to copy by artificial means. In Adorno's words, 'natural beauty as an appearing quality is itself an image. Hence, to try to copy it is like committing a tautology' (*Aesthetic Theory*, p. 99). This is why the staged mediation of the park or touristic alpine vista is so often unsatisfying and why more immediate and thoroughgoing experiences of natural beauty often demand what Adorno terms 'unconscious apperception' (*Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 101-2).

Enjoyment in the human experience of the natural world is based upon the transformative power of the imagination. This subjective dimension confronts us with the epistemological difficulty of grounding the human perception of a natural location (and indeed a built environment) consisting of far more potential perspectives than a single subject can ever apprehend. Such are the discrepancies between objective and subjective experiences of the natural world which phenomenology attempts to explore and address. Furthermore to look beyond the confines of human affairs, whether into the double helix of a strand of spirogyra, the complex ecological exchanges in and around a mature oak tree or to the outermost reaches of the solar system, irresistibly involves extending the measure of the human understanding, by prompting the experiencing subject to consider the wider relational context in which he or she is situated.

Adorno particularly stresses the importance of variation as a factor in nature's beauty, suggesting that any description that is confined to obvious and unchanging facts risks falling into bathos and banality (*Aesthetic Theory*, p. 104). There is some evidential support for Adorno's ideas in empirical research. Studies of historical subjects are of course difficult to verify beyond existing literary evidence, whereas such studies that have been carried out during recent decades have consistently revealed aesthetic preferences for dynamic living environments over static, lifeless ones.⁶⁷ Research undertaken by American psychologists, Rachel and Stephen Kaplan indicated that, in the late twentieth century, human study groups across cultures held preferences for environments in which they felt well-orientated and could predict and understand. At the same time, however, those surveyed heavily valued environments that allow scope for exploration and retain an element of mystery and the unknown (thus corroborating Maslow's speculations).⁶⁸ Accessibility and security are

valued, yet a terrain is also more desirable if it is complex and, in its wildness, holds a potential for adventure. It seems then that a balance between comforting familiarity and a pleasant *frisson* of estrangement is most appealing.

The contradictions go further. The complexity of the human psyche is such that it is possible to appreciate both awe when entertaining the prospect of infinitude and unpredictability while, equally, experiencing pleasure in an all-embracing sense of coherence. The idea that the physical universe conforms to laws and structures that may be comprehended through methodological scientific scrutiny is a deeply satisfying one, because it reassuringly suggests some pattern in the seeming chaos of existence. Paradoxically however, the belief that some meaning exists beyond the limits of the bounded individual, may also be a pleasing affirmation, essential to the sense of awe regarding nature that constitutes the sublime. The aesthetic self thus simultaneously succumbs to different (sometimes contradictory) needs and motivational drives. The primary drive for safety is complicated by its coexistence with less tangible aesthetic factors such as the desire to explore mystery. The appreciation of a homogenous, monocultural environment is most readily explained by economic considerations. The cultural geographer Jay Appleton has argued at length in his influential study, *The Experience of Landscape* (1996), that particular environments are favoured because they address biological imperatives by offering either safe prospects or 'refugia' – secure retreats from possible threats – although these are enjoyed, interpreted and represented according to an infinite number of cultural variants.⁶⁹ Judith H. Heerwagen and Gordon H. Orians (1993) place a particular emphasis upon this idea by suggesting that environmental affinities may be influenced by behavioural differences attributable to gender, given that women may be more vulnerable to attack from dangerous species or sexually coercive males in certain terrains.⁷⁰

As well as being aesthetically uplifting, an important sense in which the contemplation of the infinite complexity, mystery and magnitude of the physical universe has been felt to be valuable and improving is its capacity to confront human subjects with the hubris of anthropocentrism. Wordsworth reminded his readers that we are 'kindred to the worm' (discussed below, Chapter Three), an insight afforded by those closely observed connections of a reworked sublime located in the small, local and humble, particularized or even microscopic domains, that Timothy Brownlow (1983) terms 'micropanoramas'.⁷¹ These are complemented by astronomy in checking human aspirations to omniscience. Adorno discusses the value of magnitude in *Aesthetic Theory*, arguing that it 'has a positive impact, in that it is a reminder of the limits of human domination and of the powerlessness, ultimately, of the human bustle'.⁷² In *Minor Morals* (1798), Charlotte Smith observed the

consequences of astronomical speculation for human arrogance and hubris through her representative, Mrs Belmour, and draws some salutary conclusions as she ponders the possibility of life on other planets:

This thought ought never to occur to us without bringing with it a lesson to our vanity. If the planets only are peopled, to say nothing of the myriads of millions of stars which we see only in our horizon, how paltry and how poor ought to appear the little pursuits and passions which agitate us, and which we appear to think of consequence enough to interest the whole universe! [...] However, it is well that people are of consequence to themselves, and serves to keep their lives from stagnation; but I have always thought the study of astronomy gave more effectual lessons of humility than elsewhere are to be learned.⁷³

Circumspection is valuable not just because it is a pragmatic recognition of the limits of human perception but also because it necessitates an acknowledgement of the infinite. With this idea in mind, Lewes wrote in 1858:

In direct contact with Nature we not only learn reverence by having our own insignificance forced on us, but we learn more and more to appreciate the Infinity on all sides; so that we cannot give ourselves up to one small segment of the circle, no matter how small, without speedily discerning that life piled on life would not suffice to travel over this small segment of a segment.⁷⁴

More common, particularly in pre-Darwinian texts, are the endurance of world-views grounded in natural theology – being the belief that God's works are revealed through the wonders of the natural world. Theorized in the works of John Ray, William Derham and William Paley, the study of the 'Book of Nature' was a means to fortify religious faith by familiarizing the self with evidence of God as manifest in the created world.⁷⁵ Thus Wakefield, again thinking of the human condition as being suspended between the macrocosm and microcosm, writes:

Who can admire, without adoring that Power that has so eminently displayed his wisdom and goodness, in the endowments of every inhabitant of this globe, from man to the most minute insect that our microscopes discover! – each created for a certain portion of enjoyment, adapted to its nature; with organs and dispositions so exactly fitted to procure this peculiar enjoyment, that none can doubt its being the work of an all-powerful, infinitely wise, and benevolent being.⁷⁶

Wakefield outlines a theological understanding of the adaptation of life forms to the physical world, due to a cosmic force ultimately attributable to a First Cause in the form of a Supreme Being. However, it seems that, at the moment of profession of faith in such writings, the possibility of doubt is introduced by its denial. The discovery of the great diversity and complexity of life could be understood as a testament to the power of God but

also as a challenge to the idea of a universe that was divinely created for human benefit. During the Early Modern Period the natural sciences had brought about that 'vast expansion in the size of the known world' recorded by Keith Thomas and consequently revealed the existence of an immense diversity of species living and dying beyond human knowledge and purpose.⁷⁷

The Evolution of Respect for Nature

The many strains of current environmental thought, despite their differing priorities, appear to converge and have their synthesis in the enlarged idea that a respectful and receptive relationship to the natural world can be a powerful component in the attainment of human flourishing and self-realization. Such a proliferation of ideas across disciplines represents a continuation of the developmental unfolding of Romantic cosmology.

Biophilia and the Gaia hypothesis each sustain the value of non-human biota to human ontology in the field of biological science. Both are suggested by the evolutionary hypothesis of Darwin whose scientific imagination and vision was defined by the formative influence of the Romantic period on his world-view. The understanding and negotiation of the relationship with the natural world is one undertaken by each generation and culture and an integral aspect of the search for meaning in human existence. T. H. Huxley wrote:

The question of questions for mankind – the problem which underlies all others, and is more deeply interesting than any other – is the ascertainment of the place which Man occupies in nature and of his relations to the universe of things.⁷⁸

Maslow calls the exhilaration felt by a healthy sensory being living in a responsive organic environment 'biopleasure'. 'Biophilia' is a term that similarly describes the satisfaction experienced due to the presence of, and affinity for, other living things, an effect whose cause is difficult to explain by the semantics that structure objective scientific discourse. The youthful Ruskin envisioned a particularly pure strain of biophilia when he found that exploring mountainous terrain aroused in him a pleasure 'comparable only to the joy of a lover in being near a noble and kind mistress, but no more explicable or definable than that feeling of love itself'.⁷⁹ In *Praeterita* (1885-89) he wrote:

I was absolutely interested in men and all their ways, as I was interested in marmots and chamois, in tomtits and trout. If only they would stay still and let me look at them, and not get into their holes and up their heights! The living inhabitation of the world – the grazing and nesting in it, – the spiritual power of the air, the rocks, the waters, to be in the midst of it, and rejoice and wonder at it,

and help it if I could, – happier if it needed no help of mine, – this was the essential love of *Nature* in me, this the root of all that I have usefully become, and the light of all that I have rightly learned.⁸⁰

The quality of euphoric and elemental expression in Ruskin's writing reinforces Maslow's suggestion that such human feelings might be defined as 'end experiences, ultimate rather than instrumental'.⁸¹ Hyperevolution accounts for humanity's distinct artistic and cultural presence among lifeforms rendering humankind, as E. O. Wilson suggests, a uniquely poetic species for whom 'the symbols of art, music, and language freight power well beyond their outward and literal meanings'.⁸² At its most succinct, the biophilia hypothesis holds that humans, as evolutionary beings, retain an inherent affinity with other living things. Furthermore, if the natural environment is significantly degraded, and the Earth's biological diversity is correspondingly depleted, this may significantly diminish the quality of human culture and existence. While earlier accounts of the value and beauty of nature emphasized the usefulness of other species to humankind, post-Darwinian understandings of nature were less human-centred. In Wilson's approach any hiatus between anthropocentric and intrinsic valuations of the natural world is mitigated, for, if human well-being is dependent upon the health of ecosystems as well as individual species, even those venomous or parasitic biota which are ostensibly most unfavoured in human terms have a vital function as organisms in a broader context.

James Lovelock attributes the first modern scientific expression of the view that the world could be considered as a huge self-regulating organism to James Hutton's work of 1785.⁸³ Lovelock's own version of this idea, the Gaia hypothesis, formulated with Lynn Margulis, has given rise to mixed interpretations in terms of its consequences for human culture. The Gaia hypothesis partly devalues human culture in its insistence that humanity is incidental to the presence of Gaia as a self-regulating organism. Lovelock is careful to stress that, despite his personification of this world-organism, he does not consider Gaia to be a sentient being, imbued with God-like teleological purpose.⁸⁴ While Lovelock's model has no macroconsciousness of this kind, self-reflexive humanity does, however, possess a significant role, being the species that has evolved furthest towards attaining self-consciousness and awareness of ourselves as part of a planetary whole. Human value is established through the idea that humanity has combined evolutionary traits, eventually achieving the unique 'capacity to collect, store, and process information, and then use it to manipulate the environment in a purposeful and anticipatory fashion'.⁸⁵ 'The evolution of *homo sapiens*', writes Lovelock, 'with his technological inventiveness and his increasingly

subtle communications network, has vastly increased Gaia's range of perception. She is now through us awake and aware of herself.'⁸⁶

These late twentieth-century scientific theories engage with the ontological consequences of the context of humans as cultural beings within a natural world. While they remain *hypotheses* (and so empirically unproven), they have, nonetheless, invigorated the ongoing debate about human culture and the natural world in the biological sciences.⁸⁷ Social ecologists have postulated the value of the natural world to human well-being in the realm of environmental political theory by developing Murray Bookchin's ideas. Bookchin's notion of the evolution of humanity as self-conscious nature is consonant with Lovelock's ideas, and similarly able to construct a potentially complementary relationship with the natural world. It is also in keeping with Kroeber's suggestion that the idea of the 'evolution of culture' is predicated by Wordsworth.⁸⁸ For Bookchin, humans exist as second nature, as fully embodied organisms within a naturalistic environment, yet with certain aspects of species uniqueness that facilitate an extraordinary and ontologically significant capacity to abstract facts about the material environment which enables *Homo sapiens* to undergo hyperevolution, meaning vastly accelerated species development. This capacity enables humans to self-perpetuate and intervene in the material environment on a scale beyond all other species.

In Marxist theory, humanity's possession of a second nature, a part of and apart from first nature, is one that has disquieting connotations of an alienated and unresolved ontology. Bookchin, however, imagines further possibilities in the future, describing a human nature realized in a harmonious relationship with the rest of the living world and ultimately reaching a utopian potential he terms 'free nature', where the 'animalistic evolutionary past' and the social evolution of the present are not in perpetual opposition but:

[...] come together in a new transcendence such that all the splits that separate us from the biological world will be sublated into a rational society. One in which humanity, living in harmony with itself, will become natural evolution rendered self-conscious, guided by a humanistic ethics of complementarity.⁸⁹

The relationship with the non-human accordingly becomes not a deviation from human concerns, or an evasion of social responsibility, but central to the humanist project. Bookchin remains a staunch upholder of the rationalist tradition, whilst being deeply critical of the Promethean spirit of capitalism.⁹⁰ Human ontological status as 'second nature' therefore, and the aspiration to attain a harmonious resolution with the rest of the physical environment as self conscious 'free nature' becomes, through Bookchin's approach not so

much a revolt against the ideas of humanism and rationalism but a progressive refinement of them. During the late nineteenth century ideas such as the evolution of co-operation were theorized by seminal 'green' thinkers such as the anarchist writer Peter Kropotkin, exiled in London after 1886. Edward Carpenter's writings similarly pursue the idea of an evolution in human consciousness from the simple consciousness of animals and primitive humans, to the self-consciousness of presently socialized humanity, and, ultimately, to the expanded 'cosmic consciousness of the coming man'.⁹¹

In *The Rights of Nature* (1989), historian Roderick Frazier Nash explicitly documents 'the evolution of ethics', by designing models of the historical process (and, it should be added, the conflict) that brought about the extension of the idea of 'natural rights'.⁹² Nash's use of the idea of evolution to describe this process of historical change is significant for, while some eighteenth-century writers argued for the extension of respect and rights to non-humans (and sometimes linked this cause to anti-slavery and women's emancipation), it was the impact of Darwinism that transformed the context of the debate. With characteristic prescience, Thomas Hardy wrote that few people realized:

[...] That the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of the common origin of all species is ethical; that it logically involved a readjustment of altruistic morals by enlarging as *a necessity of rightness* the application of what has been called 'The Golden Rule' from the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom.⁹³

During the later nineteenth century, evolutionary theory also provided a ready-made metaphor for progress for some 'new women' who hoped the force of social evolution (or sometimes revolution) would bring about the correct combination of changes in cultural environment and personal autonomy necessary for their own self-development. An application to natural history formed a practical and engaged means of self improvement and accordingly was one way in which the active participation necessary to such a development came about. Several nineteenth-century women poets took an interest in natural history and fashioned their own application of Darwinism to society and in support of women's rationality and autonomy. Mathilde Blind, Constance Naden and May Kendall all adapted Darwinian themes to verse.⁹⁴ For Louisa Sarah Bevington (1845-1895), the anarchism inspired by Peter Kropotkin's evolutionary writings of the 1880s and 1890s linked personal autonomy and liberation with social conscience and responsibility.⁹⁵ In this way the idea emerges that personal autonomy is necessary to move beyond individual egotism towards an expansive and empathetic recognition of mutuality and interconnectedness.

Ecology and Self-Realization

In present-day environmentalism too, conditions of individual well-being are often rooted in considerations of relational context. Human autonomy cannot be sustained beyond the context of relationships with other beings, human or non-human. As such, there are significant parallels with the ethic of care and reciprocity which Mellor identifies as characteristic of the alternative emphasis voiced by Romantic women writers.⁹⁶ The idea of an extended self is common to ecocentrism and postmodern theory, and has powerful implications for well-being in society. For Jagtenberg and McKie, the extended self appears as a logical corollary to the possibility of multiple selves distinguished and itemized by Norman Denzin in *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies* (1992).⁹⁷ This more diffusive, and less appropriating, self is inspired by feminist analyses which challenge the notion of self based upon separation and exclusion. Indeed, Jagtenberg and McKie point out that environmental thinkers have often turned to feminism as a precedent for an analysis of the rhetorical structures of marginalization and exclusion.⁹⁸

In environmental theory the most fully realized self is that ecological self proposed as a desirable aspiration by writers such as Freya Mathews, Arne Naess, Joanna Macy and Theodore Roszak. Without unduly imposing present concerns upon an earlier period, such a project to reunite the alleged disjunction between reason and instinct, matter and spirit, is strikingly consonant with the Romantic project which M. H. Abrams details in *Natural Supernaturalism*. In Abrams's study of the metaphorical implications of 'spousal verse' – the title of which itself attempts a resolution of opposites through oxymoron – Romantic holism is troped as the physical union of masculine and feminine polarities.

The Australian environmental philosopher, Freya Mathews, has most extensively theorized the (perhaps utopian) development of an ecological self. Mathews outlines two contending accounts of physical existence. Mathews characterizes the dominant Western philosophical legacy as 'latitudinarian', one premised on the pursuit of individual self interest in the belief that 'it is God's providence, manifested in the material order, that guarantees that the system whereby each individual looks to his own concerns will emanate in an ultimate, optimal social order'.⁹⁹ This conception is predicated upon a mechanistic and dualistic cosmology, the dominance of which has had, she believes, a detrimental impact upon the natural world. Given that 'matter was conceived as in every respect antithetical to spirit', she argues, 'the insensate, brute and blind, the inert and formless, the non-self, the Other, the External-matter of course ceased to be an object of moral concern or interest'.¹⁰⁰

Atomistic science, with its emphasis upon the division of the world into discrete units, is the philosophical and ideological counterpart to the economic liberalism of the free market: 'the latitudinarians conferred the sanction not only of Newton, but of God Himself, on the idea of a free market economy in which individuals would pursue their own material interests subject only to minimal legal constraints'.¹⁰¹

If such an atomistic model owes much to Newton, an alternative, monist tradition of thought finds its historical precedent in Spinozan pantheism. It is the latter tradition, Mathews believes that is supported by the insights of quantum physics, in which an emphasis upon dynamic energy flow ('geometrodynamics') disrupts the division of matter and spirit assumed in atomistic science. This 'flow view of things' is more commonly represented in Eastern philosophy and also, Mathews suggests, present in Romantic critiques of Newtonian mechanistic outlooks.¹⁰² The Western mystical tradition of Jacob Boehme and Emanuel Swedenborg is apparent in the works of the Romantic poets, particularly William Blake. Carpenter's distinction between possible stages of selfhood, and his predication, especially in the *Art of Creation* (1904), of a Universal or Omnipresent Self, both affirms the influence of Eastern thought and anticipates the twentieth-century idea of the ecological self. Carpenter's thought is also deeply grounded in the metaphysics of Shelley and the eighteenth-century philosopher, George Berkeley. This sense of an extended, interconnecting self expressed in the context of a universal kinship was shared by Carpenter's contemporary, Henry Salt, who argued 'all sentient life is akin and he who injures a fellow being is in fact doing injury to himself'.¹⁰³

Mathews explores Naess's suggestion that self-realization in ecological terms would entail the recognition that 'the metaphysical fact of interconnectedness' logically 'involves the identification of the small human self – the personal ego – with ever wider wholes, up to the level of the cosmos as a whole' (*Ecological Self*, p. 148). Essential to this idea is one that reiterates the observation of Bookchin and Lovelock that humanity alone is able to 'grasp our unity with the greater whole'. While humans share an interconnected and dependent relation to the universe in keeping with other species 'we are *aware* of this relation – and it may be this difference that makes the difference, that invests our lives with a greater meaning' (*Ecological Self*, p. 149).

Differences in this fundamental epistemological argument about the nature of things are frequently conceptually gendered, as Val Plumwood demonstrates in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) – the elevation of mind over body is metaphorically analogous to the masculine mastery of a feminized world or the imperial conquest of subject peoples and

lands. Plumwood's critique of such repressive tendencies in European civilization is in keeping with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's influential *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), written out of the cataclysm of World War II, which prompted the authors to determine 'why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism'. Central to their answer is the divided consciousness of enlightenment logic itself: 'abstraction, the tool of enlightenment, treats its objects as did fate, the notion of which it rejects: it liquidates them.'¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Paul Davies has drawn attention to the gendered parallels in the Western process of self-assertion through competition with and domination over others and the capitalist commodification and appropriation of the physical world; both objectify and instrumentalize.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, Eastern accounts are preoccupied with the harmonization of masculine and feminine energies and aspects and had a considerable influence upon the Romantic imagination.¹⁰⁶ The Romantic notion of 'spousal verse', reflects the impulse to transcend conceptual polarities and the aspiration to achieve a dynamic union of opposites in a creative tension. Such contrasting binary and holistic approaches clearly have environmental consequences.

The insights of ecological science and new physics appear to confirm the 'flow view of things'. This holistic conception of the relationship between things cannot be adequately communicated by the partiality and myopia of ordinary descriptive language, requiring rather what Davies terms a sacred or mystical grammar, making use of the kind of metaphorical gesturing that is found in Romantic poetry, particularly that of Shelley and Blake.¹⁰⁷ The holistic approach embraced as a part of the Romantic 'revolt' is in keeping with Mathews's important ontological distinction: 'human unity, and indeed the unity of any organism, can be adequately understood not in substantival but only in functional – systemic – terms'.¹⁰⁸

All biotic life resides in a paradox. A living organism is by definition something that comes into being through its inner autonomy and some degree of envelopment from its immediate surroundings. At the same time it has logical meaning and existence only in its interdependence within the context of an ecosystem characterized by perpetual processes and energy fields. Complex and diverse ecosystems have qualities when taken as a whole that are, like gestalts, beyond their physical parts. American biologist F. E. Clements characterized such advanced evolutionary occurrences as climax ecosystems.¹⁰⁹ Davies carries this systems analogy (and the truism that humans exist as organisms within ecosystems like other species) one stage further from material to cognitive consequences. He makes the powerful suggestion that the human mind is so dependent upon the iconography, metaphors and mythology of the natural world for its conceptual language that

when we address the environmental crisis we not only attempt to protect other species but contribute to the continuity of a 'sustainable mindfield', thus establishing a connection with permaculture as an environmental and cultural praxis.¹¹⁰ This is to be expected in so far as ecology is the inspiration for environmentalist world-views that find their *logos* in the ecosystem.

The idea of self-interest therefore becomes a complex issue in environmental philosophy. In *The Ethics of Place* (2001), Mick Smith offers some radical criticisms of the shortcomings of the idea of expanding Enlightenment concepts of ethical concern to embrace animals and the natural environment (an approach he terms 'axiological extensionism'). Smith suggests that 'the anchoring of ethical values in *self-interest* reflects, rather than challenges, the hegemony of self-ish individualistic ideology that pervades modernity and capitalism'.¹¹¹ He therefore shifts the ecological emphasis from selfishness to symbiosis, expressed through the premise that the autonomous human subject is logically dependent upon qualities such as conscience, wonder and desire that inextricably link it to others.¹¹² Holmes Rolston III also points out the shortcomings of individual selfishness, arguing that the individualistic stress upon the 'selfish gene' has severe limitations given that 'one cannot be very selfish if one's fate is blended and interlocked with that of a hundred thousand others'.¹¹³ Again, the Norwegian deep ecologist, Arne Naess observes the ecological insight that any organism (including a human) cannot exist outside its milieu. Indeed the concepts are mutually dependent and are meaningless without the other: 'Organisms and milieux are not two things – if a mouse were lifted into absolute vacuum, it would no longer be a mouse. Organisms presuppose milieux'.¹¹⁴

Current controversies about individualism and mutualism among neo-Darwinists, with their implications for human culture, echo earlier divisions of opinion between competitive social Darwinists, such as T. H. Huxley and Herbert Spencer, and those who regarded co-operation and 'mutual aid' as the great and defining evolutionary advantage. Kropotkin, for example, wrote that: 'It is hardly needful to say that those mammals, which stand at the very top of the animal world and most approach man by their structure and intelligence, are eminently sociable', thereby deducing that 'intelligence is an eminently social faculty'.¹¹⁵ The insight that individual self-esteem is best complemented by mutualism is consonant with the conditions for human well-being that Maslow identified, citing Erich Fromm's contention that 'self-love (or better, self-respect) is synergic with rather than antagonistic to love for others'.¹¹⁶

The ecological self radically extends the application of this respect and affinity to non-human others. In *Respect for Nature* (1986), the American environmental philosopher, Paul Taylor urges that, so far as possible, humans accommodate the propensity of other sentient beings to realize their individual *telos*. In order to sustain a rational and consistent grounding for the intrinsic worth of human life, Taylor insists, the ethical and respectful treatment of other species is essential. Partially adapting the Kantian categorical imperative, he writes that moral rules must be applied disinterestedly because,

if they were considered to be morally binding only when they were expected to help an agent achieve some personal end or satisfy some particular interest (even an interest in furthering the good of others), no moral requiredness would attach to them unless the end in question was first judged to be morally acceptable. In order to make a correct judgment about *this*, valid moral principles would have to be applied. If these principles were in turn used only as a way to achieve some further end or satisfy some further interest, again the end would have to be judged a morally desirable end to pursue or the interest a morally worthy one to fulfill. So we cannot ultimately avoid the necessity of relying on standards and rules that are applied as matters of principle.¹¹⁷

This leads directly to a consideration of what self-realization might mean. It is a term which seems to assert an absolute condition, but which in reality is a more relative state of being, at best aspirational rather than descriptive, one of process and development rather than teleological attainment. Indeed, given the eighteenth-century decline in infant mortality and reduction in absolute material want in Western Europe, which was accompanied by rapid technical innovation and the advance of a more broadly based political power structure, the idea and direction of human perfectibility was an important preoccupation of the Romantic age. Philosophers such as Condorcet and William Godwin were exercised by the possibility of, and limits to, perfectibility and by the standard by which social progress could be measured.

The idea of self-realization, or, perhaps more neutrally, well-being, remains problematic. Given the fateful cosmic predicament of an ephemeral and myopic human existence hedged by mortality, it might at best consist of transitory moments of ecstasy or visionary insight or the sanguine yet stoical accommodation experienced by rare, historical, enlightened figures such as the Buddha. During the Romantic period one might look to a sense of self-realization in Rousseau's evocations of the highest personal pleasure in the natural world:

My meditations and reveries are never more delightful than when I can forget myself. I feel transports of joy and inexpressible raptures in becoming fused as it

were with the great system of beings and identifying myself with the whole of nature.¹¹⁸

In such instances of personal insight and accommodation, the bounded ego is merged by transcending the polarities of physical existence, thereby attaining that infinitely expansive identification of self and universe expressed in Eastern concepts such as nirvana and moksha.

This difficulty in articulating well-being is considered by Paul Taylor, as he weighs the human consequences of respectful, or destructive, relationships to local and global ecosystems:

What is the Human Good? [...] The general concept has a number of approximate synonyms, such as 'human flourishing,' 'self-actualization,' and 'true happiness.' Our grasp of the concept, however, is not helped by simply equating it with one of these terms, since their meaning is as obscure and indeterminate as the idea of 'the good of humans' itself. Perhaps the clearest way to define it is to say that it is the kind of life one *would* place supreme value on *if* one were fully rational, autonomous, and enlightened.¹¹⁹

Naess looks to Eastern vocabulary to furnish his meaning as he attempts to articulate the importance of the natural world to a realized self but also conceives of self fulfilment according to a Romantic tradition.¹²⁰ Just as the appeal of feminist and anti-slavery discourses was vested in their forced recognition of commonality, Naess theorizes the possibility of self-realization through the idea of an ecological self manifest not by marking off, but by making connections with, other entities.¹²¹ In *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, he employs gestalt theory in order to promote the radical transformation of the idea of self. Naess elevates an ideal self that consists of the totality with which we are able to identify, rather than more conventional approaches by which self-identity is defined by distinction from that which it is not.¹²² Describing a relational state in which 'gestalts bind the I and the not-I together in a whole', Naess's formula for multiple rather than singular modes of identification and affinity later leads him to speak of a 'democracy of life forms'.¹²³ In doing so he is implicitly making a claim that to extend the circle of philosophical and ethical concern to non-human species and the natural environment is an end point and a logical extension of the earlier inclusion of formerly excluded and marginalized human groups.

However, in identifying the continuity of human and non-human nature it is important to avoid those reductionist aspects of sociobiology which present human nature as frozen in hunter-gatherer social relations, recalling, in Janet Biehl's words, that: 'human beings, by

virtue of their potentiality to choose different social roles, transcend the more rigidly biological sexual differences among nonhuman beings'.¹²⁴ Human moral agency stems from the distinction of self-conscious decision-making in environmental intervention.

Bookchin's hopes for a resolution of the Romantic disjunction between human culture and the natural world through a sympathetic rationalism is strikingly close to the conclusion of environmental literary critic, Karl Kroeber. Kroeber, drawing upon the ideas of Gerald M. Edelman, takes Bookchin's optimism further by suggesting that human self-consciousness could be a force to abolish alienation from the physical world:

As far as Edelman is correct we are better adapted to rational existence on this globe than any other species. Nothing beats self-consciousness for dealing with the ever-changing environments featured by our earth [...] If Edelman is right, humankind is not alienated by its attainment of self-consciousness. To the contrary, self-consciousness proves that if there is any one species that especially *belongs* in the earth's biosphere it is *homo sapiens*. Wordsworth was right: we are superbly fitted to nature and nature is fitted to our development, even, as Wordsworth dared to suggest, to underwriting the evolution of culture.¹²⁵

Again, this Romantic concern to resolve alienation is in keeping with the spousal verse of Wordsworth, Coleridge and the German Romantic tradition of Schelling and Novalis outlined by Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*. According to the influential creed of German *Naturphilosophie*, individual human genius lay in the discovery and revelation of one's own sublime inner nature by engaging with the natural world in which distinctions between morality, science and art disappear in the face of a single underlying truth; the transcendent unity of subject and object. The Romantics hoped that the love of nature and literature would have a part to play in the transformation of consciousness and culture in which compassion becomes not folly but ingenuity.

These are the most utopian and far-reaching claims of the ongoing Romantic tradition in literary and philosophical environmentalism. Holistic perspectives attempt to combine diversity and interconnectedness with the integrity and realization of particular organisms. An ecological outlook is one that does not take undifferentiated phenomena and merge them into an undefined whole but rather, attends to the relationship between the individual and its diverse context in order to perceive interconnectedness.¹²⁶ In looking at the spiritual and ontological value of non-human species and natural environments for human well-being, I have attempted to identify ways in which the ongoing Romantic impulse converges in scientific, political and psychological environmental thought. Such endeavours also offer models for *shared* activities and experiences as conducive to self-enhancement, leading to

concepts of an extended self. Human well-being is complicated not only by the diversity of human subject positionings but also by the complexity and multiplicity of the human self. There is an acknowledgement not only that human experience of the physical world is culturally constructed but also that the subject/object relationship is a dynamic one in which we are conditioned by our material circumstances.

In thinking about and engaging with such difficulties of individual and species identity, we sharpen and define our relationships to others and, hence, the principles and terms of our own lives, our individual telos. In the practical context in which we find ourselves situated – as possessors of a myopic consciousness in an infinitely complex world – this ongoing process is an enduring problem of human existence. For David Abram, writing in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), the recognition of affinity with other species is one that is not only desirable but also essential because ‘we are human only in contact, and conviviality with what is not human.’¹²⁷ For Abram, the environmentalist celebration of the living world is consonant with the immanent, embodied nature of the experiencing self proposed by phenomenologists, principally Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962). Without the explanatory closure offered by the idea of a supernatural, transcendent Final Cause, the enigma of human purpose becomes framed in terms of how best to participate as a subjective consciousness in a world that is itself envisaged by Abram as ‘all alive, awake, and aware’.¹²⁸ The answers in a continually evolving and dynamic universe will always be provisional.

The application of phenomenology to the environmental debate tentatively offers another way beyond the confines of the problem of self by a transformation of the notion of the self/other division in the subject/object relationship. For phenomenologists, from the nineteenth century onwards, a defining emphasis is placed upon the inextricable dependency of subject and object. As Jane Howarth (2000) writes, such an approach clearly transforms understandings of the human relationship to the natural environment, for phenomenologists always a ‘lived world’.¹²⁹ A human experiential account of an encounter with the natural is affected not only by what Howarth terms the ‘horizons’ of the meeting such as the individual’s own value systems, subject positioning and previous expectations but also the more immediate context of the encounter – quite simply in what circumstances it takes place and with whom.

¹ Charles Kingsley, *Glaucus; or, The Wonders of the Shore* [1855], Volume V of *The Works of Charles Kingsley*, 28 vols (London: Macmillan, 1879-82), pp. 14-15.

² Klaus Eder, *The Social Construction of Nature: A Sociology of Ecological Enlightenment* (London: Sage, 1996), p. 144.

³ See Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴ The innovation of technical strategies to quantify and document environmental degradation is also significant. Notably, James Lovelock invented an 'electron capture detector' that revealed pesticide residues in both the fatty tissues of penguins in the Antarctic and the milk of human nursing mothers, thus providing methodological support for Rachel Carson's famous critique of the pesticide industry, *Silent Spring* (1962). See J. E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* [1979], (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. x.

⁵ John Aikin, *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (London: J. Johnson, 1777), p. iv.

⁶ Priscilla Wakefield, *Instinct Displayed, In a Collection of Well-Authenticated Facts, Exemplifying the Extraordinary Sagacity of Various Species of the Animal Creation* [1811], 2nd edn (London: Darton, Harvey and Darton, 1814), p. 115.

⁷ Hannah More, 'Sensibility', published in *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 31.

⁸ George Henry Lewes, *Sea-Side Studies at Ilfracombe, Tenby, The Scilly Isles, and Jersey* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1858), p. 397. In this account of an addiction to natural history, Lewes was himself intrigued by the obsessive aspect of his study. Probably unconsciously, Lewes conveyed a notion of natural objects of scrutiny marching across the mind like soldiers on procession with cadences peculiarly reminiscent of Thomas De Quincey's opium dreams:

The typical forms *took possession* of me. They were ever present in my waking thoughts; they filled my dreams with fantastic images; they came in troops as I lay awake during meditative morning hours; they teased me as I turned restlessly from side to side at night; they made all things converge towards them. If I tried a little relaxation of literature, the page became a starting-point for the wandering fancy, or more obtrusive memory; a phrase like "throbbing heart" would detach my thoughts from the subject of the book, and hurry them away to the stage of the Microscope, where the heart of some embryo was pulsating. I could not look at anything intently, but the chance was that some play of light would transform itself into the image of a mollusc or polype.

(Lewes, *Sea-Side Studies*, pp. 34-5).

De Quincey had similarly experienced 'vast processions', passing across his mind during waking opium reveries in *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater* [1821], ed. by Alethea Hayter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 103. Wordsworth too, recalled dreams in which figures and shapes passed before his eyes in a 'second-sight procession' (1805 *Prelude*, VII, 601).

⁹ Abraham H. Maslow (1908-1970), *Motivation and Personality* [1954], 3rd edn, rev. by Robert Frager, James Fadiman, Cynthia McReynolds and Ruth Cox (New York: Harper Collins, 1987).

¹⁰ A rather extreme example being 'The Shortness and Misery of Life' (pub. 1709), by the eighteenth-century poet Isaac Watts.

¹¹ Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, pp. 59-60.

¹² These are utilitarian (practical and material exploitation of nature); naturalistic (satisfaction from direct experience and contact with nature); ecologicistic/scientific (systematic study of structure, function and relationship with nature); aesthetic (physical appeal and beauty of nature); symbolic (use of nature for metaphorical expression); humanistic (strong affection, emotional attachment and 'love' for nature); moralistic (strong affinity, spiritual reverence and ethical concern for nature); dominionistic (mastery, physical control and dominance of nature); and negativistic (fear, aversion and alienation from nature). See *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, ed. by Stephen R. Kellert and Edward O. Wilson (Covelo, CA: Shearwater Books published by Island Press, Washington D. C., 1993), p. 59. Kellert's commends Maslow for 'implying the pursuit of self-realization through a broad valuation of nature as a higher order of human functioning', yet, perhaps mistakenly, identifies Maslow's failure to recognize that different simple and higher needs can be pursued concurrently ('Biological Basis', pp. 59-60) – a complexity that Maslow does in fact acknowledge and address.

¹³ Translated by David Goodman from the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, par une société de gens de lettres, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (Neuchâtel, 1765), VIII, p. 228. Entry entitled 'Histoire Naturelle', cited in David Goodman, *The Open University Arts: A Second Level Course The Enlightenment, Units 17-18: Buffon's Natural History* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1980), p. 12.

¹⁴ See the collection prepared by Common Ground: *Local Distinctiveness: Place, Particularity and Identity. Essays for a Conference September 28, 1993*, ed. by Sue Clifford and Angela King (London: Common Ground, 1993).

¹⁵ William Cobbett, *The English Gardener* [1829], ed. by Peter King (London: Bloomsbury, 1996). All quotations in this paragraph taken are from p. 43. Despite such universalist sensibilities, however, Cobbett was not adverse to the occasional slander in order to demonstrate the superiority of English culture over French habits. Purslane, for example, he described as 'a mischievous weed, eaten by Frenchmen and pigs when they can get nothing else. Both use it in salad, that is to say, raw' (p. 132). Certainly, many churches and local parish authorities were persuaded of the beneficial influence of allotments where the values of thrift, self-help and mutuality were cultivated just as surely as onions, carrots and beetroots. However, as David Crouch and Colin Ward demonstrate in *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture* [1988], 2nd edn (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 1997), allotments are also in keeping with a long tradition of working-class co-operation and independence of spirit. Such roots live on in the deeply politicized community gardening movement in the United States and outbreaks of guerrilla gardening by environmental activists affiliated to Reclaim the Streets in Britain.

¹⁶ Charlotte Smith, *Conversations Introducing Poetry: Chiefly on Subjects of Natural History. For the Use of Children and Young Persons*, 2 vols (1804), II, p. 65.

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* [1782], trans. by Peter France (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 110.

¹⁸ Smith was no doubt impressed by the additions to the existing pharmacopoeia of plant-based drugs with effective ameliorative powers at the eighteenth century's close, most notably the therapeutic properties of digitalis. See Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Chapter 3.

¹⁹ George III and Queen Charlotte's patronage conferred particular respectability upon natural history. Aristocratic fascination for natural objects, such as that of Lord Bute and the Duchess of Portland, usually relied upon cultivating the local knowledge of middle-class, artisan and working-class collectors in order to obtain specimens. During the mid- to late eighteenth century, upper-class merchants often developed an interest in natural history due to the benefit of their global connections. The clergy too were heavily represented among amateur naturalists. However, Anne Second, in 'Artisan Botany' (1996), reveals that a culture of nature study among manual workers was also already flourishing by the late eighteenth-century. From the late eighteenth century onwards, key botanical texts and original floras became more readily available in English. Works of natural history, rural life and picturesque travel appeared on the shelves of eighteenth-century circulating libraries, and larger print runs, together with a greater number of outlets, made available more affordable volumes of specialist and popular titles. The introduction of the steam-driven printing press, which significantly began to reduce production costs after the end of the French Revolutionary wars, acted as another catalyst to literacy, further helping to popularize and democratize all aspects of nature sympathy (Allen, *Naturalist in Britain*, p. 96). Certainly by the mid-nineteenth century an enthusiasm for natural history had so thoroughly permeated bourgeois culture that it had become a defining characteristic of the Victorian middle class.

²⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, a Fiction* [1788] and *The Wrongs of Woman* [1798], ed. by Gary Kelly (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), *Mary*, p. 59.

²¹ Louisa Lane Clarke, *The Common Seaweeds of the British Coast and Channel Islands; with some insight into the Microscopic Beauties of their Structure and Fructification* (London: Frederick Warne, 1865), p. 17.

²² Kingsley, *Glaucus*, p. 1.

²³ Anne Pratt, *Chapters on the Common Things of the Sea-Side* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1850), p. 2.

²⁴ However, several social historians note that, overall, industrialization brought about a significant reduction in working-class leisure time and popular culture. See James Walvin, *Leisure and Society 1830-1950* (London: Longman, 1978), p. 4. Also Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978) and Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular*

Recreation in English Society 1700-1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

²⁵ Roy F. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 60.

²⁶ Paul Hazard, *The European Mind 1680-1715* [1953], trans. by J. Lewis May (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 335-47.

²⁷ John Clare, *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. by Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 34-35.

²⁸ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, chapters 4 and 5.

²⁹ Hazlitt, 'On the Love of the Country' (an essay originally addressed to the editor of the *Round Table*, 1814), *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, IV, p. 18.

³⁰ Pratt, *Chapters on the Common Things of the Sea-Side*, p. 135.

³¹ For Clare, poet of the open fields and moors, to be compelled, by the nature of his employment, to carry out the physical labour involved in the destruction of such 'wastelands' was, surely, a source of great conflict of mind. See Edward Storey, *A Right to Song: The Life of John Clare* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 89.

³² John Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period: 1822-1837*, ed. by Eric Robinson, David Powell and P. M. S. Dawson, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996-98), III, p. 481.

³³ Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p. 15.

³⁴ See *Local Distinctiveness*, ed. by Clifford and King, p. 83.

³⁵ Francis Kilvert, for example, recorded an indignant entry on 26 March 1872:

The New Barn Meadows are fearfully cut up by the timber carriages, which are hauling away the fallen giants, ash and beech. The shouts of the timber haulers were ringing hollow and echoing through the wasted murdered dingle. My beautiful favourite Cwm is devastated and laid waste.

Francis Kilvert, *Kilvert's Diary: 1870-1879* [1944], a selection ed. by William Plomer (London: Cape, 1973), pp. 168-9.

³⁶ Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 93.

³⁷ See Philip Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 3-4. Today, such enforced nomadism is more immediately apparent in the migration often generated by the drive for productive efficiency and pressures of political instability in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

³⁸ A political structure subsequently theorized more extensively by Kirkpatrick Sale. See Robyn Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach* (London: UCL Press, 1992), pp. 167-70.

³⁹ David Williams, *A Treatise on Education: In which the General Method Pursued in the Public Institutions of Europe; and Particularly in those of England; that of Milton, Locke, Rousseau and Helvetius are Considered; and a more Practical and Useful one Proposed* (London: T. Payne, E. and C. Dilly, G. Kearsly and P. Elmsley, 1774), p. 117.

⁴⁰ Charlotte Smith, *A Natural History of Birds Intended Chiefly for Young Persons* [1806], 2 vols (London: Whittingham and Arliss, Bumpus and Sharpe and Son, 1819), p. 4.

⁴¹ Williams, *Treatise on Education*, p. 176.

⁴² Ann B. Shteir, 'Linnaeus's Daughters: Women and British Botany', published in *Women and the Structure of Society: Selected Research from the Fifth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women* ed. by Barbara J. Harris and JoAnn K. McNamara (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), p. 73.

⁴³ Kingsley, *Glaucus*, pp. 55-56. Biblical allusion to Matthew 6. 28.

⁴⁴ D. Landsborough, *A Popular History of British Sea-Weeds: Comprising their Structure, Fructification, Specific Characters, Arrangement, and General Distribution, with Notices of some of the Fresh Water Algæ* [1849], 2nd edn (London: Reeve and Benham, 1851), pp. 77-78.

⁴⁵ Wakefield, *Instinct Displayed*, p. 112.

⁴⁶ Frances Power Cobbe, 'Wife-Torture in England' [1878], reprinted in *The Wives: The Rights of Married Women*, a collection in the *Perspectives on the History of British Feminism*, ed. by Marie Mulvey Roberts and Tamae Mizuta (co-published in London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, and Tokyo: Kinokuniya Company, 1994), p. 20.

⁴⁷ George Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', *Westminster Review*, new series X (July 1856), p53-4. Hilda Kean records that Kew Gardens were opened up in 1841 because it was hoped that an affection for flowers would have an ameliorative effect upon working-class visitors and provide a more acceptable distraction than alcoholic drinks. Kean, *Animal Rights*, p. 40.

⁴⁸ Wordsworth argues that a taste for romantic scenery is not spontaneous but must be gradually cultivated. See sonnets of protest and letters to the Editor of the *Morning Post*, appended to the *Guide to the Lakes* [1835], ed. by Ernest de Sélincourt, 5th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906; 1977 rpt), pp. 146-66.

⁴⁹ William Morris, 'Under an Elm-Tree; Or Thoughts on the English Country-Side' [1889], *Political Writings of William Morris*, ed. by A. L. Morton (London: Lawrence and Wishart; New York: International Publishers; Berlin: Seven Seas Books, 1973), p. 219.

⁵⁰ From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Barking Reach was particularly notorious for pollution from Thames-side industries. These included the Lawes Chemical Company, founded in 1857 at Creekworth, which produced artificial fertiliser and sulphuric acid, which was shortly to be followed by more than ten other chemical manufacturers by the Edwardian period. To make matters worse, after 1865 the sewage system for central London was discharged into the tidal estuary, where it was assumed that it would safely disperse; in practice, however, the tidal patterns caused a vast quantity of this sewage to congeal around Creekmouth. This environmental pollution contributed to the disaster of 1878 that would almost certainly have been on Morris's mind when he referred to the area in this essay a decade later. Stephen Pewsey writes, in a commentary accompanying the Alan Godfrey reprint of the 1894 Ordnance Survey map of this area: 'In 1878 the polluted state of the Thames contributed to the Princess Alice disaster. Over 600 people lost their lives on 3rd September when a collier struck the pleasure steamer, *Princess Alice* off Tripcock Ness. Even strong swimmers were sucked down or choked by the swirling filth. Most bodies were never found, and the accident remains Britain's worst inshore shipping disaster. [...]'

I am indebted to Linda Rhodes, the Community Librarian at Barking Central Library, for supplying this information in email correspondence, December 2001.

⁵¹ Morris, 'Under an Elm-Tree', p. 217.

⁵² See Peter Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain 1880-1900* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1988).

⁵³ Locke had urged that 'humanity' should be instilled in children because:

[...] the custom of tormenting and killing of Beasts, will, by degrees, harden their Minds even towards Men; and they who delight in the suffering and destruction of inferiour Creatures, will not be apt to be very compassionate or benigne to those of their own kind.

John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* [1693], ed. by John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 180.

There is some evidence to link animal cruelty and domestic violence and the area is currently one of much scrutiny. A confidential report entitled 'Why do people harm animals? Children's and young people's perspectives', completed by Manchester Metropolitan University in 2001, found that the incidence of cruelty towards animals is 'higher than is generally understood to be the case' but suggested that 'links between violence to animals and future behaviour patterns apply only to a small minority of individuals at the severe end of the spectrum.' The correlation between domestic violence and animal abuse is currently being addressed directly in ongoing research by the RSPCA. In this respect, a letter from Linda Beattie on behalf of the RSPCA states: 'Current research has given rise to some indication of links between animal abuse and domestic violence/child abuse although no firm conclusions have yet been drawn. There would appear to be a number of different, but linked, threads in this particular issue. We have the issue of persons abusing both animals and children at the same time. There are the links between early instances of animal abuse leading to serious crimes of violence against humans in later childhood or adulthood. There is the impact and potentially permanent emotional and psychological scarring of children who witness cruelty to animals or who experience personal abuse, which may affect their long-term personal attitudes and behaviour towards animals and other human beings. And there is the suggestion that persons convicted of abuse towards humans or animals may be helped in the course of rehabilitation by learning to care for animals in a practical situation.' (Personal correspondence, 22nd February 2002). A striking instance of the pathology of the extension of sadism from animal to human victims is to be found in Iain

Banks's first novel, *The Wasp Factory* (1984).

⁵⁴ Argued, for example, by Henry Salt who is considered below, Chapter Nine.

⁵⁵ Wakefield, *Instinct Displayed*, pp. 288-89.

⁵⁶ Elisee Reclus, *Concerning the Awareness of Nature in Modern Society* [1866], in *Man and Nature*, trans. by Jack Grancharoff (Petersham, NSW, Australia: Jura Books, 1995), p. 33.

⁵⁷ Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 24.

⁵⁸ Wakefield, *Instinct Displayed*, p. 174 and p. 119.

⁵⁹ Ann Shteir notes that Wakefield's extensive travel writings were based on armchair study. See *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 314.

⁶⁰ Eugene C. Hargrove, *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), pp. 165-75. Hargrove gives the example of Turner Avenue, in Kentucky's Mammoth Cave National Park, a cave passage of such fragile beauty that any human activity would inevitably involve deterioration in the quality of the formation. The spectacle, however, was recreated through extensive photographic exhibition. Much of the pleasure derived from the exhibition, Hargrove contends, was conferred by the fact of the cave's existence nearby.

⁶¹ Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 71.

⁶² Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, introduction p. xix.

⁶³ LaFreniere, 'Rousseau and the European Roots of Environmentalism', pp. 41-43. Shaftesbury, named 'the father of romanticism' by Christopher Thacker, was a seminal figure in this area, especially given his ideas about nature and the sublime in *The Moralists* (1709). Christopher Thacker, *The Wildness Pleases: The Origins of Romanticism* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 12.

⁶⁴ T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann and trans. from the 2nd German edition (1972) by C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

⁶⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 93. Here Adorno is paraphrasing, with approval, the ideas of Karl Kraus.

⁶⁶ Pleasure in the sublime may be experienced when an aspect of nature being contemplated or encountered is particularly inscrutable and powerful in its autonomy while the perceiver retains a position of security and control when confronted by the presence of a natural force that could in other circumstances overwhelm or annihilate the human subject, for instance Shelley's 'Mont Blanc' or Blake's 'Tyger' viewed from a distance.

⁶⁷ Kellert, 'The Biological Basis for Human Values of Nature', in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, pp. 49-50.

⁶⁸ Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁶⁹ Artistic and expressive needs are developed from Maslow's basic physiological needs for food and safety. Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* [1975], rev. edn (Chichester: Wiley, 1996), pp. 62-67.

⁷⁰ See Judith H. Heerwagen and Gordon H. Orians, 'Humans, Habitats, and Aesthetics', in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, pp. 150-53. Marked gender biases are also apparent in animal-related activities, according to the evidence of research carried out on a representative cross-section of adult Americans by Stephen R. Kellert and Joyce K. Berry during the 1970s. Participation in activities that involved hunting and trapping animals was found to be significantly greater on the part of men rather than women. Women however, were more likely to participate in activities that involved observing or caring for wildlife. See 'Attitudes, Knowledge, and Behaviors Toward Wildlife as Affected By Gender', *Wilderness Society Bulletin*, 15.3 (1987), 363-71 (p. 364).

⁷¹ Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 66.

⁷² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 103-4.

⁷³ Charlotte Smith, *Minor Morals: Interspersed with Sketches of Natural History, Historical Anecdotes and Original Stories*, 2 vols (London: Sampson Low, 1798), II, pp. 36-37.

⁷⁴ Lewes, *Sea-Side Studies*, p. 14.

⁷⁵ John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691); William Derham, *Physico-theology, or a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from His Works of Creation* (1713); William Paley, *Natural Theology* (1802).

⁷⁶ Wakefield, *Instinct Displayed*, p. xi.

⁷⁷ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 167-69.

⁷⁸ T. H. Huxley, *Man's Place in Nature* [1863], (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1959), p. 71.

⁷⁹ Ruskin, *Modern Painters III*, in *Works V*, p. 365.

⁸⁰ Ruskin, *Praeterita: Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts Perhaps Worthy of Memory in Past Life* [1885-1889], *Works XXXV (Praeterita and Dilecta)*, p. 166.

⁸¹ Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, pp. 71-2.

⁸² E. O. Wilson, *Biophilia: The Human Bond with other Species* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 74.

⁸³ James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 10. James Hutton (1726-1797) was author of the *Theory of the Earth*. During the Romantic period the idea of the living cosmos as a developmentally unfolding and dynamic being was perhaps most fully explored by Friedrich Schelling, as an aspect of the radical vitalism and holism of German *Naturphilosophie*.

⁸⁴ Lovelock, *Ages of Gaia*, p. 218.

⁸⁵ Lovelock, *Gaia*, p. 132.

⁸⁶ Lovelock, *Gaia*, p. 148.

⁸⁷ A further influential, yet speculative, theory has been proposed by Rupert Sheldrake. Sheldrake's hypothesis of formative causation develops the idea – first put forward by nineteenth-century writers such as C. S. Peirce, Friedrich Nietzsche and William James – that the universe itself operates according to an evolutionary process. By drawing attention to a hiatus in late nineteenth-century science between the evolution of life forms and the fixed laws of physics within which they operated, Sheldrake notes the acceptance of the more dynamic idea of an evolutionary universe by mainstream science during the late twentieth century. Sheldrake's theory of morphic resonance reintroduces the notion of the inheritance of acquired habits as an evolutionary mechanism. Such an idea, initially associated with the eighteenth-century biologist, Jean Baptiste Lamarck, had long been scientifically unfashionable. Again, while using a biological explanation of human nature, Sheldrake's theories provide an alternative to essentialist and reductionist accounts of human culture, based on habit and tradition. Such an approach, if substantiated, might explain resonances between historically and geographically diverse schools of thought such as Western Romanticism, Eastern mysticism and quantum physics. Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature* (London: Collins, 1988).

⁸⁸ Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 152.

⁸⁹ Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities: Towards a New Politics of Citizenship* [1992], rev. edn (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 9.

⁹⁰ Bate's description of social ecology, most closely identified with Bookchin's ideas, as 'Marxism with ecology added on' (*Song of the Earth*, p. 38) is inaccurate. While Bookchin is well-versed in Marx's ideas and admiring of him as a critic of capital he is largely antithetical to Marxism. First, this is because of the libertarian critique of state socialism that runs through all social-ecologist writings. Second, and equally significantly in terms of my argument, the social-ecologist view of the relationship to the living world is very different from that of Marxism (and also capitalism) which views the non-human as, in Bate's own words 'the raw material for production' ('Romantic Ecology Revisited', p. 161). Bookchin, more in keeping with E. F. Schumacher than most Marxist writers, regards a respectful and non-antagonistic relationship to the natural environment as a valuable end for human well-being in its own right and as a progressive and regenerating cultural aspiration.

⁹¹ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1916), pp. 206-8. Carpenter argued that the evolution of a Universal Self which was based upon the understanding of the continuity of all things (he was familiar with Wordsworth's idea of the One Life) and would logically require the radical transformation of all aspects of life, social relations and indeed relations with other species – it would include 'friendship with the Animals'. The notion of a progressive evolution of self in nature was an idea that Carpenter developed in three of his major works: *Towards Democracy* (1882), *Civilisation* (1889) and *The Art of Creation* (1904).

⁹² Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). The first model (p. 5) traces the development of affiliation from self through family and other humans to the animate and finally the inanimate. The second model (p. 7) documents the legal expansion of rights from the feudal rights enshrined in the Magna Carta, to those that reflect the modern liberal rights discourse, quantifying the rights of women, ethnic minorities and finally nature in the American statute.

⁹³ Letter to the Secretary of the Humanitarian League, 10 April 1910. See Florence Emily Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1930), p. 141.

⁹⁴ In Kendall's 1880s poem 'The Lay of the Trilobite', for example, the narrator converses with a trilobite about the direction of modern civilization. *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 630-32.

⁹⁵ See *Victorian Women Poets*, ed. by Leighton and Reynolds, pp. 477-81. Peter Kropotkin's evolutionary writings are compiled in *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* [1902], (London: Freedom Press, 1987; 1993 rpt).

⁹⁶ Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 3 and *passim*. The idea is derived from the work of Carol Gilligan.

⁹⁷ The *phenomenological self* (a subject's interior monologue in the context of a social situation), the *interactional self* (the self as presented to and experienced by another), the *linguistic self* (an individual's reflective understanding of oneself based upon personal, biographical and emotional meanings), the *material self* (one's physical self and the total of the material possessions with which one identifies), the *ideological self* (totality of understanding of self in cultural and historical context in respect of relationship to others), the *self as desire* (self concept in respect to experience of bodily presence of other). Norman K. Denzin, *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies: The Politics of Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 26. See Jagtenberg and McKie, *Eco-Impacts*, pp. 137-8. Jagtenberg and McKie also suggest that it may be legitimate to add to these further categories of dream selves and, most significant to the present argument, the ecological self.

⁹⁸ Jagtenberg and McKie, *Eco-Impacts and the Greening of Postmodernity*, pp. 51 and p. 176. Furthermore, in recent decades the feminist and postmodernist insistence that the 'personal is political' has brought into sharper focus those multiple micropolitics of everyday life through which identity is at once constructed and expressed in the form of individual patterns of consumption and choice. One aspect of this interest has been the closer consideration of the environmental consequences of factors such as travel, dress or diet.

⁹⁹ Freya Mathews, *The Ecological Self* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 24.

¹⁰⁰ Mathews, *Ecological Self*, p. 32.

¹⁰¹ Mathews, *Ecological Self*, p. 24.

¹⁰² Mathews, *Ecological Self*, pp. 42-43. For an account of the claims that there is a verisimilitude between the insights of quantum physics and Eastern cosmological thought, see Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1975). Joanna Macy draws attention to the consonance between the ecological self, one 'co-extensive with other beings and the life of the planet', and the Buddhist tradition with the aspirations of its adherents to become *bodhisattvas*, attaining an all-encompassing sense of understanding and compassion at the cosmic level and insistence on the ephemeral, and ultimately illusory, nature of the egotistical self. See *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 1991), p. 183.

¹⁰³ Henry S. Salt, *Seventy Years Among Savages* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1921), p. 244.

¹⁰⁴ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1947], rev. edn, trans. by John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp. xi and p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ In a lecture entitled 'Reading Subjectivity According to the Biophilia Hypothesis', at the *Writing the Environment* Conference, 8 September 2000, University of East London.

¹⁰⁶ See Capra, *Tao of Physics*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Davies, *Romanticism and Esoteric Tradition: Studies in Imagination* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998). It was in the figure of Percy Bysshe Shelley, perhaps, that the more revolutionary importance of Wordsworthian nature worship was most clearly recognized as a part of the quest for human well-being in a secular cosmos. Kroeber writes:

Like Byron and Keats, Shelley is in good measure an important poet because he so fully realized that Wordsworth had decisively (in the modern phrase) raised his consciousness. Shelley fully understood that Wordsworth had opened the possibility of representing with an unparalleled intensity human experiences of natural phenomena, thereby offering opportunities to discover the best ways in which humankind could dwell in this world, how best we could act upon – and be acted upon by – natural circumstances.

(Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism*, p. 51).

¹⁰⁸ Mathews, *Ecological Self*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁹ See Worster, *Nature's Economy*, pp. 209-14.

¹¹⁰ Davies, previously cited lecture, 'Reading Subjectivity According to the Biophilia Hypothesis'. Davies discusses the direct significance of permaculture in an essay entitled, 'Cosmos as Metaphor:

Eco-Spiritual Poetics', in *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. By John Parham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 80.

¹¹¹ Mick Smith, *The Ethics of Place: Radical Ecology, Postmodernity, and Social Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2001), p. 39.

¹¹² Smith, *Ethics of Place*, p. 196.

¹¹³ Holmes Rolston III, 'Biophilia, Selfish Genes, Shared Values', in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, p. 384.

¹¹⁴ Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 56.

¹¹⁵ Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, pp. 56 and 61.

¹¹⁶ Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 58.

¹¹⁷ Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 30.

¹¹⁸ Rousseau, *Reveries*, p. 111. Admittedly, Rousseau's solitary visions do not always offer a plausible model for the wider love of humanity as his own peculiar bliss is one that consists not only in the affirmation of nature but also in the negation of human society: 'The pleasure of going to some lonely spot in search of new plants is combined with that of escaping from my persecutors' (*Reveries*, p. 117).

¹¹⁹ Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, p. 64.

¹²⁰ For example, Naess's recollection of encounters with local people in the mountainous Jotunheimen region of Norway echoes Wordsworth's memories of the inhabitants of the Lake District, in *The Prelude* (Book VIII) nearly two centuries before. Naess writes of 'my conviction of an inner relation between mountains and mountain people, a certain greatness, cleanness, a concentration upon what is essential, a self-sufficiency; and consequently a disregard of luxury, of complicate means of all kinds'. Originally published as 'Modesty and the Conquest of Mountains', in *The Mountain Spirit*, ed. by Michael Tobias (New York: Overlook Press, 1979), p. 16. Cited in Rothenberg, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 3.

¹²¹ 'Am I Not A Man And A Brother?' supplicated the slave on Josiah Wedgwood's china cameos of the 1780s in the British Museum. 'Am I Not A Slave And A Sister?', appealed the later female version. 'I hail thee Brother', added Coleridge in his fraternal verse addressed 'To a Young Ass' in 1794.

¹²² Bachelard makes derisory reference to the 'dialectical game of the I and the not-I', *Poetics of Space*, pp. 4-5.

¹²³ Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, p. 60 and p. 175.

¹²⁴ Biehl, *Finding Our Way*, p. 129.

¹²⁵ Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism*, pp. 151-52.

¹²⁶ See Davies, *Romanticism and Esoteric Tradition*, p. 174.

¹²⁷ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1996), p. 22.

¹²⁸ Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 19.

¹²⁹ See Jane Howarth, 'Phenomenology and the Environment', in *Environment and Philosophy* by Vernon Pratt with Jane Howarth and Emily Brady (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 53-80.



WORDSWORTH'S VISION OF MORAL IMPROVEMENT: 'LOVE OF NATURE LEADING TO LOVE OF MAN'

*Poets, who far their visionary sight
On sparrow's eggs in prospect of delight,
With fervent welcome greet the glow-worm's flame,
Put it to bed and bless it by its name;
Hunt waterfalls, that gallop down the hills:
And dance with dancing laughing daffodils [...]
(Mant, *The Simpliciad*)¹*

From Red to Green: Ecocritical Responses to *The Prelude*

Wordsworth's *Prelude* is the fruit of prolonged thought about the problem of human accommodation within the natural environment. His *magnum opus*, published only on his death in 1850, has come to exemplify that great contribution of the Romantic period, the notion of the sympathetic imagination.² That this faculty of human subjectivity should be so privileged at this historical moment is due to the close association of the idea of sympathy with twin topics that were central to Romantic enquiry. First, the nature of the individual self, and the preoccupation with its developmental narrative, scrutinized in the recently popularized genre of secular autobiography.³ Second, and the logical corollary of the former concern, is the extent to which the concept of the self as a discrete and coherent entity needs to be modified in the light of concerns about the epistemological relationship between the human subject and the extrahuman reality of the rest of the natural world (for example in Immanuel Kant's *Critiques*).

In his project to account for the 'growth of a poet's mind' Wordsworth reworked and re-envisioned the classical and neo-classical pastoral heritage. Most immediately, the impact of capitalism and industrialization upon rural communities called for a redefinition of the relationship between town and country. More personally, Wordsworth found it necessary to describe his own rural surroundings and community because he was concerned to demonstrate the precise environmental conditions that shaped his own psychological maturation. Wordsworth's attention to local distinctiveness brought about his revolt against the generalization of place or, to coin a phrase, locogeneric, description that was common to much eighteenth-century neo-classical literature. I have in mind the Augustan pastoral verse against which Romantic writers so often rebelled, such as that which is ostensibly loco-

descriptive but which could equally be applied to other localities, and generalized tributes to nature, for example John Dyer's 'Grongar Hill' (1726) or Joseph Warton's *The Enthusiast: or The Lover of Nature* (1744-8). Wordsworth was directly critical of Thomas Gray for his 'curiously elaborate' poetic diction, and, in the 1802 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads*, singles out Gray's 'Sonnet on the Death of Richard West' (1742) for hostile comment. In addition to the stylistic objection that such verse might have been equally well expressed as prose, Wordsworth is also keen to advance the argument that poetry should be naturalistic in its content, preferring he says to keep his 'Reader in the company of flesh and blood'. In this respect it is significant that the lines which he dismissively identifies as being without value, (by default because only the lines he italicizes are 'of any value'), are those that describe the natural world, thus indicating that Wordsworth is not only rejecting Gray's attempt 'to widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical composition', but also that Wordsworth perceived another gap between rarefied literary exposition and the language of direct observation:

In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,
And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire:
The birds in vain their amorous descant join,
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire.⁴

While Wordsworth prided himself on writing from the forceful inspiration of his immediate surroundings, Gray's descriptive lines are clearly written from the poetic trope of counter-reverdie. These allusions demonstrate that Gray exerted his eyes over the printed page, but not that he left the comfort of his room to observe the mating habits of wild birds.

Notwithstanding critical doubts about the self-representations and repressions in *The Prelude*, the work does offer insight into the process of a renegotiation and remapping of the relationship of 'man' with the natural world. Formed by an interaction with a countryside which, according to Oliver Rackham is, as we have seen, now lost to us, the perspective of *The Prelude* can inform the discursive quest of our own environmentally concerned generation.

The contribution of Romantic literary environmentalism was recognized with particular focus during the early 1990s, when the critical groundwork of Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991), and Karl Kroeber's *Ecological Literary Criticism* (1994), provided a rich tilth for the emergence of an ecocritical Romantic studies.⁵ Bate, in his green, revisionist account of Wordsworth's radicalism made a rather modest declaration that his book was:

Dedicated to the proposition that the way in which William Wordsworth sought to enable his readers better to enjoy or to endure life was by teaching them to look at and dwell in the natural world.⁶

However, a second assertion is more radical and controversial, claiming that there is a continuity between Wordsworth's pastoral 'love of nature', in the form of the Lakeland description in Book Eight of *The Prelude*, and the revolutionary politics and 'radical ardour' of Book Nine.⁷ As such, Bate explicitly sets out to redress the new historicist orthodoxy of literary critics writing during the 1980s, such as Jerome J. McGann, Alan Liu and Marjorie Levinson, according to whom the underlying class interests of the radical young Wordsworth caused him to turn apostate when disillusioned by the French Revolution's eventual outcome. The new historicist critics suggested that the elder Wordsworth, Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland, proponent of the death penalty, partisan for Church and state and Poet Laureate, was engaged in an ideological project to rework and erase youthful excesses. A narrative of Wordsworth as turncoat, was already familiar during his own lifetime and he was parodied as such by the younger generation of Romantics, notably Percy Bysshe Shelley, in 'Peter Bell' (1819), Byron, in *Don Juan* (1819-24) and Robert Browning in 'The Lost Leader' (1845). However, in his rehabilitation of Wordsworth as a conservationist with a social conscience, Bate identifies a different kind of social engagement and a continuity and maturation of the radical project. This shift from red to green is one that bears comparison with the apparent growth of the green movement at the expense of the traditional left, signified by the collapse of Eastern Bloc Communism and the electoral defeat and diminishing trade union base suffered by the social democratic labour movement at the time that Bate was writing *Romantic Ecology*. Whatever limits there may be to such a rehabilitation of Wordsworth as radical, aspirations to reinvigorate politics by linking environmental sensibility and social commitment remain in tune with today's green movement.

Bate suggests an affinity between the revolutionary ferment of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, and the collapse of the Iron Curtain regimes after the breach of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Published in 1991, *Romantic Ecology* was written during the heady days of the 'Velvet Revolution' and the demolition of the Berlin Wall.⁸ So, how does Bate's analogy affect our understanding of the politics of nineteenth-century Romanticism, in which Wordsworth is presented as an early Rudolf Bahro figure who shifts from red revolutionary to green radical?

There are difficulties in the prioritizing and reification of a particularly charged historical moment – the beginning of the 1990s. The emergence and development of ecocriticism was one specialist part of the growth of ‘green’ awareness. However there may be a danger that the close identification of the Romantic ‘environmental tradition’ with William Wordsworth and, to a lesser extent, Ruskin and Morris, in Bate’s first book on the subject (itself now a canonical text in Romantic ecocriticism) risks making ‘Romantic Ecology’ appear monolithic, thus under-representing other perceptions and approaches. During the early nineteenth century there are many possible complexities and pluralities in the relationship with the natural world. To delimit Romantic Ecology as synonymous with the Wordsworthian world-view, however original, ingenious and insightful such a vision might have been, is to conflate a particular subject position with the broader idea of an ‘environmental tradition’. There are unfortunate parallels here, I feel, with the difficulty evident, subsequently, in the other half of Bate’s analogy – the inability of the green movement of the early 1990s to fully capitalize on its momentary successes because it encountered obstacles in developing beyond a narrow social base to achieve mass support through the inclusion of broader class representation and ethnic diversity.⁹ Without such a hegemonic shift the greening of culture which Bate celebrates has met with mixed fortunes, reflected in the insufficiency of popular pressure to realize the optimism of the Rio Summit, resulting, a decade later, in the impasse of the Kyoto agreement.¹⁰

The Wordsworthian focus of *Romantic Ecology* is relinquished in Bate’s latest ecocritical work, *The Song of the Earth* (2000), in which he invites a broader reading of the themes and perspectives of environmental literature. Here, Bate considers not so much how ecopoesis continues the green politics of the concerned activist but how it occupies a distinct position within modes of environmental thought:

The poet’s way of articulating the relationship between humankind and environment, person and place, is peculiar because it is experiential, not descriptive. Whereas the biologist, the geographer and the Green activist have *narratives* of dwelling, a poem may be a *revelation* of dwelling. Such a claim is phenomenological before it is political, and for this reason ecopoetics may be properly considered as pre-political.¹¹

As such *The Song of the Earth* represents a shift in the intervening decade from a notion of green poetics as continuing a certain oppositional tradition in politics – Bate considers himself to be ‘more Morris than Marx’¹² – to a cautiously Heideggerian preoccupation (he is always conscious of and sensitive to the dangers of ‘blood and soil’ ideology) with what it means for postmodern and deeply encultured beings to dwell upon the earth. For Bate, the task of the environmentally aware poet is not to formulate a programme but to consider

deeply a mode of being, and he urges ‘the role of ecopoesis [...] is to engage *imaginatively* with the non-human’.¹³

However, *The Song of the Earth* remains androcentric, despite its greater diversity, examining only three women writers in detail – Jane Austen, Mary Shelley and twentieth-century American poet Elizabeth Bishop are (justly) admired – yet, together, these amount to a very small proportion of the book. The importance of gender and attitudes to gender as persistent factors in constructions of nature makes it relevant to explore other literary appreciations of the natural world and hence to extend Bate’s groundbreaking thesis by looking at the possible differences that may be identified when considering the greater diversity of subject positionings present in Romantic ecology. A legitimately selective focus upon Wordsworth’s writings establishes the ‘historical continuity of a tradition of environmental consciousness.’¹⁴ However, a broader sample of representative writers and genres inevitably reveals a number of historical shifts and contestations within nature representation and an emphasis upon a persistent ‘tradition’ should remain sensitive to this diversity. If the canon of Romantic and Victorian nature writing is opened up to less frequently represented authors, a richer diversity of the idea of the value of nature comes to the fore. If, as Lovejoy suggests (see Chapter One), it is most accurate to speak of Romanticisms, it may be equally necessary to pluralize Romantic ecologies.

The philosophical inclusion of non-human species, and indeed the natural environment in its entirety, within the parameters of moral consideration, is a process that has taken place at the outer limits of the modern struggle to extend claims for agency and subjectivity to those repressed and marginalized human categories designated as ‘other’, whether women, non-Europeans, the working classes or other socially and culturally disadvantaged groupings. To be aware of what culture brings to nature it is necessary to be sensitive to the nuances of difference in human identity. As Christopher Tilley writes in his study of the human experience of landscape: ‘Personal biographies, social identities and a biography of place are intimately connected.’¹⁵

Wordsworthian Nature and the Growth of the Mind

William Wordsworth’s stated theme, ‘to retrace the way that led me on/Through Nature to the love of human kind’, in Book VIII of *The Prelude* (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 587-88), encapsulates much about the Romantic approach and illustrates the way in which questions of human identity and culture are a continuous presence in writings about the natural environment. In this exploration of Romantic identity and the living world, the intention is

to move away from canonical writings to a broader exploration of Romantic writings about, and interaction with, the living world. While I make use of Wordsworth's expression as a core motif, I do not intend to place the main emphasis of my discussion upon Wordsworth's treatment of the natural environment, given that this has already been rather exhaustively explored, if not always with the same conclusions.¹⁶ Wordsworth inherited 'nature' with all its inconsistencies and imaginatively developed and transformed it in his own idiolect in a way that significantly influenced its cultural understanding thereafter.

Wordsworth's hope that 'the love of nature' might lead to 'the love of man' (1805 *Prelude*, subtitle to Book VIII.) posits the idea of a possible improvement of human nature brought about by situating the individual in an optimum natural environment. The edifying Christian belief that God may be known by his works ('thro' Nature' as Alexander Pope writes in his *Essay on Man* of 1744),¹⁷ becomes partially secularized in Wordsworth's work. The Wordsworthian claim is complicated by the extraordinary and well-documented evolution of *The Prelude*, which had the qualities of a palimpsest; an initially pantheistic text was overwritten by orthodox interventions that became increasingly Anglican in tone between the 1805 version and that of 1850.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in Wordsworth's narrative the growth of the mind – characterized as that transcendent unitary self critiqued by Keats and subsequent critics as the 'egotistical sublime' – continues to take place through an intimate and formative mediation with the natural environment. It is history and the natural environment that make up the sources of poetic inspiration:

[...] In our high-wrought modern narratives
 Stript of their harmonising soul, the life
 Of manners and familiar incidents,
 Had never much delighted me. And less
 Than other minds I had been used to owe
 The pleasure which I found in place or thing
 To extrinsic transitory accidents,
 To records or traditions; but a sense
 Of what had been here done, and suffered here
 Through ages, and was doing, suffering, still,
 Weighed with me, could support the test of thought,
 Was like the enduring majesty and power
 Of independent nature [...]
 (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 774-86)

In these lines Wordsworth cites the grandeur of 'independent nature' as a beneficial force along with what would now be called social history, privileged above the grand narratives of state politics. The reclamation of the history of everyday human existence is a project Wordsworth directly relates to the value that he conferred upon openness to the defining

influence of the natural world. It is immediate detail and personal engagement that shape individual perspective. The qualities of endurance in human suffering,¹⁹ and ‘independent’ (or noumenal) nature alike, are the true sources of poetic interest and inspiration.

In Book VIII, it is ironically the shock of the contrast with residence in London that inspires and consolidates Wordsworth’s love of the natural environment. There is no simple opposition between urban degradation and rural virtue. For Wordsworth, London street life was an experience marked by fascination, exhilaration and even awe. However, the charivari and colour of the city shows and markets was combined with that condition later known as *anomie*, a profound sense of uprootedness, lack of purpose and disorientation. This contrast assisted in the creation of a richer understanding and more mature appreciation of the surroundings familiar in his own upbringing:

With deep devotion, Nature, did I feel,
In that enormous City’s turbulent world
Of men and things, what benefit I owed
To thee, and those domains of rural peace,
Where to the sense of beauty first my heart
Was opened [...]
(1850 *Prelude*, VIII, 70-75)

Humanizing Landscapes

In his joyful recollection of childhood, Wordsworth is moved to describe the circumstances which might amount to the optimum conditions for human existence. The Lakeland environment of this youth was a populated landscape, not a wilderness area. In this apparent ‘paradise’ (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 144) the villagers are in harmony with the natural seasons, work and leisure are in balance, labourers enjoy autonomy and independence and exert themselves not only to meet their own needs but also those of the community (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 144-58). Although not utopian, (there are still beggars at the country fair; 1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 26) this community largely remains in that pre-industrial state the nineteenth-century German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies characterized as *Gemeinschaft*, a social structure based upon kin relationships and face-to-face communication. In such surroundings there is a plenitude of images, diversity and fullness so that the soul itself reaches a greater magnitude by the reception of multiple sensations, a psychological process of positive environmental conditioning.²⁰ This mental nurturing was fundamental to the ‘growth of a poet’s mind’ and such associations were able to feed the inner, psychic workings manifest in dreamstates:

[...] but a half-hour's roam through such a place
 Would leave behind a dance of images,
 That shall break in upon his sleep for weeks;
 Even then the common thoughts of the green earth,
 With the ordinary human interests
 Which they embosom, all without regard
 As both may seem, are fastening on the heart
 Insensibly, each with the other's help [...]
 (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 163-70)

Wordsworth appears to accept that aspects of the rural environment idealized in Book VIII are constructed; pieced together from literary influences, hearsay and remembrance:

[...] This, alas!
 Was but a dream; the times had scattered all
 These lighter graces, and the rural custom
 And manners which it was my chance to see
 In childhood were severe and unadorned,
 The unluxuriant produce of a life
 Intent on little but substantial needs
 Yet beautiful, and beauty that was felt.
 (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 203-10)

However, any such concession is no more than provisional, given the presence of a sustained interior dialogue between this acknowledgement of a nature sourced in text, and a thoroughgoing refusal to relinquish the importance of a vital noumenal nature, mediated by, but autonomously existing beyond, his own direct sensory apprehension. Wordsworth shifts between textual and discursive sources and a retelling of his own more direct autobiographical experiences of rural life: 'I myself, mature/In manhood then, have seen a pastoral tract./Like one of these' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 324-26).

He explicitly distinguishes between his own fond memories, and the classical literary inheritance of pastoral writers such as Theocritus and Virgil, and, later, Shakespeare and Spenser. Other images, such as the vivid – but unusually for Wordsworth, imported – comparison of a hill shepherd to 'a giant, stalking through the fog,/His sheep like Greenland bears' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 401-2) are sourced in fiction, travel writing or brought to mind by folk heritage. This eclectic intertextual confluence of personal and literary sources is present throughout Book VIII. While he is willing to draw upon the wealth of his literary heritage for analogies, (the solitary labourer, for example, is described as 'spiritual almost as those of books'; 1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 417-18), Wordsworth ultimately defies the reduction of the external world to the bookish imagination, declaring that: 'Ye who pore over the dead letter, miss the spirit of things' (1850 *Prelude*, VIII, 296-97). The authenticity of his own

earlier experience is consistently privileged above the rural harmonies of the pastoral golden age because, for Wordsworth, there must always be a creative engagement with the sources of inspiration, not merely imitation and reiteration. Furthermore, he intimates an awareness of the persistent tensions present in idealized pastoral writing which is so often produced by those disconnected from the realities of rural life by social position. Lawrence Buell argues that 'Historically pastoral has sometimes activated green consciousness, sometimes euphemized land appropriation. It may direct towards the realm of physical nature, or it may abstract us from it.'²¹

In *The Prelude* the illusory Arcadia of the classical golden age is explicitly contrasted with the rural community of the Lakeland which, notwithstanding the area's natural beauty, endured a precarious, though adequate, material subsistence in a harsh terrain. The structural freedom of blank verse chimes with the diversity of this open landscape. Wordsworth claims that it was the simplicity and integrity of the isolated shepherds and labourers, glimpsed on solitary expeditions among the contours of the rugged hills, that led him to a more inclusive love of human existence. The very presence of the human form, silhouetted in the landscape humanized that terrain by making it familiar to the eye. So close to the territory that they might be said to be living in the land not on it (the 'common haunts of the green earth' 'embosom' them), they work according to 'sovereign Nature's dictate' (1850 *Prelude*, VIII, 116-26). The bond of the rural labourers with the land, coupled with their shared humanity with Wordsworth himself, allows them to become the poet's intermediaries, providing him with a bridge to meet the gap between nature and culture. Through them he is vicariously tied to the land, and the power of memory to invoke such a time in part reclaims this bond.²² The landscape is further familiarized because it has a countenance and is described by use of the commonplace trope of the 'face of Nature' (1805 *Prelude*, I, 615).

Two difficulties arise, making such a strategy problematic. First, Wordsworth's working neighbours are silenced by the rendering of them as natural symbols, which partly reduces them to mute signifiers. They might be accorded respect for the virtues of 'simplicity/And beauty, and inevitable grace' but they are evidently unaware of their 'unthought-of' condition (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 157-58). There is also a hiatus between the socially privileged poet and his subjects, in as much as they are kept psychically as well as geographically remote; their idealization is achieved at the cost of being 'removed, and at a distance that was fit' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 440). Second, the conscious, self-reflexive love of humanity and nature is experienced by the adult poet, not the youthful adventurer for whom 'Nature herself was, at this unripe time,/But secondary to my own pursuits' (1805 *Prelude*,

VIII, 476-77). It was only in 'retrospect' after living in Cambridge, Paris and London that such a love came into being. As he affirms the role of nature Wordsworth implicitly makes a simultaneous acknowledgement of the power of education and urban culture as fundamental components in the narrative of the growth of individual cognition.²³

Wordsworth's own conscious awareness of such incongruities is turned to account, however, as it becomes resolved into the creative tension apparent in the way that this love for humanity developed from the love of nature; both are integral aspects of the development of a poet's mind. He acknowledges that in his childhood and youth his love of the countryside was secondary to his 'own pursuits/And animal activities.' 'Man' was 'subordinate' among his conscious preoccupations and even less attention was paid to other species:

[...] Far less had then
The inferior creatures, beast or bird, attuned
My spirit to that gentleness of love,
Won from me those minute obeisances
Of tenderness, which I may number now
With my first blessings.
(1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 490-95)

Wordsworth suggests that such seminal stirrings of philanthropy and nature sympathy stem from a process of a subtle interfusion of the world to his mind and a steady maturing of influence. He emphasizes the gradual emergence of a more sophisticated cosmology:

The human nature unto which I felt
That I belonged, and which I loved and revered,
Was not a punctual presence, but a spirit
Living in time and space, and far diffused.
(1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 761-64)

There is a frank acknowledgement that, although this was a natural development for Wordsworth, it was not a wholly innate faculty of mind but one manifest through cultural experience of the world. The influence of nature upon the mind that Wordsworth gestures toward therefore becomes difficult to locate and quantify. Stephen Gill warns:

In the 1805 *Prelude* Wordsworth presents a teleological account of the formative years of his life. With this interpretative key everything can be seen as contributing to his growth into what he was already destined to be, a great poet of a particular kind. But we must resist the proffered key. The magnitude and grandeur of Wordsworth's own attempt to shape the understanding of his life will only be recognized for what it is when it is acknowledged that it is not the only way of shaping or understanding it.²⁴

In the first instance it was when he turned his mind to poetry that the real influence of nature began to instil a freshness and authenticity of direct experience upon which Wordsworth was able to draw as an inner resource, emancipating the verse from an excessive reliance upon a purely literary tradition. In his assertion that the human imaginative faculty is enriched and sustained by sensory apprehension of the external world, Wordsworth begins to engage with the work of the 'dear friend' to whom these passages are addressed, Coleridge, who later made the critical distinction between faculties of fancy and imagination central to the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). For Coleridge, the imaginative faculty 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify'.²⁵ Whereas imaginative verse is forged in the crucible of the unconscious, the poetry of fancy is a mere blending together and juxtaposition of 'fixities and definites' by the ordinary memory using the 'empirical phenomenon of the will'.²⁶ Fortified with this distinction, Wordsworth attempts to transform the tension between immediate and textual influence into a positive confluence in which there is a creative resolution between the human mind and the external environment.

Images and sensations gleaned from Wordsworth's own personal experience of the natural environment stimulate the creative process, enabling nature to invigorate the words, that is make them shine, illuminate and radiate, in a way that a stale reassemblage of stock phrases from pastoral literature could not. In this way bare stylisms are avoided and poetry, the Lake poets averred, becomes interfused with that sense of freshness and authenticity that complements the earlier declaration, in the 1802 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads*, that it should reflect 'the real language of men'. The description of such a process amounts to a recapitulation and development of the arguments for truth to outer experience, initially rehearsed in the *Lyrical Ballads*, and the famous emphasis upon the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling recollected in tranquillity'. There is strong sense of the reciprocity of external nature and text:

[...] Nature and her objects beautified
These fictions, as in some sort, in their turn,
They burnished her [...]
(1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 523-25)

Farce and Presumption: Some Doubting Voices

However, such an ideal was not instantly achieved; Wordsworth himself concedes that much of the poetry of his apprenticeship was risible. His self-mockery is in accord with the derision of Hazlitt, who claimed that the Lake Poets:

were surrounded, in company with the Muses, by a mixed rabble of idle apprentices and Botany Bay convicts, female vagrants, gypsies, meek daughters in the family of Christ, of idiot boys and mad mothers, and after them 'owls and night-ravens flew.'²⁷

Wordsworth laughs at the pretensions with which he filled his early verse as he learned his poetic craft. If a foxglove were depicted losing its bell flowers he was sure, he jokes, to place a vagrant mother weeping with her starving children beneath it, such was his assumption that melodramatic human interest was necessary to make his lines compelling (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 511-605). As Bate notes, 'a little pleasing peasant poverty is a necessary prerequisite for the picturesque'.²⁸

Nevertheless, the development of confidence that lines about natural scenery and flora and fauna can hold attention in their own right came about as a part of a broader process of poetic maturation and the understanding that an element of human interest is sustained by the theme of personal interaction with external nature. External nature enabled a transformation from poetic fancy – a rather mechanical juxtaposition of images, to the creative faculty of imagination that could truly affect a metamorphosis of such images by resolving them into a whole. Whereas the faculty of fancy merely engrafts images together, the 'gleam' (1850 *Prelude*, VIII, 472) of later verse echoes the motif of burnished verse already present in Book VIII. For Wordsworth, powerful verse, like the creative imagination itself, progresses by means of 'sinuous ways' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 453) analogous to its subject matter; mutually confirming echoes exist between human outpouring and the natural world. The mimicking exchanges of hoots between the young boy and the owls in Book V and the redoubling effect of the human voice echoing around the Lakeland valleys (1805 *Prelude*, V, 389-413) are metaphors of such a process. Just as he projected his presence onto the surrounding area, he is equally receptive to 'the voice of mountain torrents' which 'has carried far into his heart'.

In accordance with these organic conceptions of holistic creative literary imagination, sympathy takes on a central importance as a bond between the human and the natural world. Wordsworth also constantly engages with the epistemological riddle of the inner

(phenomenal) and outer (noumenal) world: 'That aught *external* to the living mind/Should have such mighty sway!' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 701-2). Humanity can only have knowledge of 'godhead' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 639) it is suggested, in the context of the natural universe. Wordsworth's grandiloquent image of an anthropocentric humanity is humbled by a sense of the one life of all species as 'kindred'. The colossal sense of cosmic irony is archetypal:

In the midst stood Man,
Outwardly, inwardly contemplated,
As, of all visible natures, crown, though born
Of dust, and kindred to the worm;
(1850 *Prelude*, VIII, 485-88)

Book VIII is close to the centre of the poem as it was constructed (although not, of course, of the larger *Recluse* project) yet, as it deals with the beginning of his life, constitutes a retrospect and thus, in a cursory sense, disrupts the chronology of the narrative progression. The immediate, often anecdotal, retrospect upon childhood and rural life is framed within the broader consequence of the ontogenesis of the creative mind. Such an appropriation of the natural world and rural communities to the construction of the individual self, famously prompted both Keats's accusation of the presence of the egotistical sublime in Wordsworth's work and also Ruskin's strictures upon the 'pathetic fallacy'. A distinction arises between a self open to sympathetic connection with aspects of the non-self and naked self-aggrandizement. Elizabeth Barrett Browning feared that the impulse to connect and illuminate with the natural world readily slipped into an appropriation in Wordsworth's verse:

A minute observer of exterior nature, his humanity seems nevertheless to stand between it and him; and he confounds those two lives – not that he loses himself in the contemplation of things, but that he absorbs them in himself, and renders them Wordsworthian. They are not what he wishes, until he has brought them home to his own heart. Chaucer and Burns made the most of a daisy, but left it still a daisy; Mr. Wordsworth leaves it transformed into *his* thoughts. This is the sublime of egotism, disinterested as extreme.[...] To use the language of the German schools, he makes a subjectivity of his objectivity.²⁹

This points to the central complexity and contradiction at the heart of *The Prelude*. Wordsworth demonstrates a self-conscious awareness of the distortions inherent in viewing the natural world through a kind of predefined literary claustrum which imposes an artificial unity and harmony upon rural life. Wordsworth insists that it was actual experience of community support and mutual aid that steeled him against those 'deformities of crowded life' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 465) and the harshness and the selfishness of the city. However, while Wordsworth rejects the preconceptions of the pastoral tradition, some contemporaries

questioned his own assumptions and analysis of the actual conditions of the Lakeland community and economy. Harriet Martineau's comic mockery at Wordsworth's expense calls into doubt the purity of the Lakeland people and hence his capabilities as a social observer:

I, deaf, can hardly conceive how he, with eyes and ears, and a heart that leads him to converse with the poor in his incessant walks, can be so unaware of their moral state. I dare say you need not be told how sensual vice abounds in rural districts. [...] While every Justice of the peace is filled with disgust, and every clergyⁿ with (almost) despair at the drunkenness, quarrelling and extreme licentiousness with women, – here is good old Wordsworth for ever talking of rural innocence, and deprecating any intercourse with towns, lest the purity of his neighbours sh^d be corrupted!³⁰

However unreliable Wordsworth's narrative might be, Book VIII nevertheless offers some useful starting points for thinking about the ways in which 'love of nature' might lead to 'love of man'. The 'Nature' in the title is explicitly distinct from humanity; nature and culture, however, are mutually defining. Book VIII is a complex organic synthesis of components of external landscape and the gradual transformation of the inner mind. These components may be distinguished but there is a sense in which they overlap, merge and form a mutually sustaining category, based on sympathy and reciprocity, and constitute the organic whole that is essential to Wordsworth's argument.

Wordsworth celebrates the aesthetic pleasure of being alive in a vibrant, responsive world. The repose felt in this benign nature is a pleasing contrast to the city which throws into relief his own environment which Wordsworth 'favoured no less' than fabled paradises and found 'more to every sense delicious' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 146-47). It also affords an opportunity for beneficial exercise and outdoor physical pursuits. The purely selfish and hedonistic joy of 'trivial pleasures' eventually 'died away' until he found 'Nature did/For her own sake become my joy' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 479-80) and became enlivened with a more mature and conscious appreciation of the natural environment, natural history and humankind. The stimulation of his youthful imagination by this countryside made him fully flourish as a human being. He developed sharpened physical faculties and was thankful that

[...] an eye so rich
As mine was through the chance on me not wasted
Of having been brought up in such a grand
And lovely region [...]
(1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 595-99)

Wordsworth was thus open to insight which enabled him to optimize the benefit and pleasure conferred by his surroundings. For Wordsworth it is through an active engagement with the natural environment that the imaginative and creative potential of the human mind is energized and replenished; qualities of subjectivity peculiar to the human vision find their expression in dialogue with the non-human. Such a concept moves Wordsworth to the central topos of Book VIII:

[...] Thus sometimes were the shapes
Of wilful Fancy grafted upon the feelings
Of the Imagination, and they rose
In worth accordingly. My present theme
Is to trace the way that led me on
Through Nature to the love of human kind;
Nor could with such object overlook
The influence of this Power which turned itself
Instinctively to human passions, things
Least understood [...]
(1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 583-92)

As well as the natural environment it is an engagement with the particular that absorbs and focuses the poet's mind. Within the landscape of his home region, the rural community offered an example of humans living in rhythm with the seasons and who cherished a proud sense of individual autonomy which complemented their social responsibility (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 155-56). In such a small community, surrounded by familiar faces, it was easy to develop an attachment to others, or at least so Wordsworth's narrative implies.³¹ This matured into a more inclusive affection for humankind. Also, this was not a gentle bucolic existence, but a life lived against the awful power of nature. For Wordsworth, the magnitude of the terrain and hostility of climate lends to the stature of the hill-dwellers. This enlarged conception of them as individuals was a lesson in the virtues of fortitude and steadfastness: a model for a robust role as husband, father and learned man (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 424). Wordsworth argues, Martineau's doubts notwithstanding, that this grounding of his first experience of humans fortified him against the 'deformities of crowded life' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 465) that he was to encounter as an adult in the cities. The presence of human figures in a landscape makes it familiar and humanizes the terrain, so that nature and humanity are complementary aspects of the environment, each improved by the presence of the other.

This dwelling in the landscape identified by Wordsworth attains an ontological significance for understanding the human situation in the universe in two complementary, yet contradictory senses. First, contextualization within such a landscape lends to the human

the dignity of existing as a part of a larger magnitude of being. *The Prelude* is a text suffused with the transcendent imagery of 'sanctity' and 'godhead' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 639) and which rejoices in a burnished visionary world of lustre and gleams. The grandeur of this context teaches humanity self-esteem. The observation of connections in the natural environment, apparent in Wordsworth's own Lakeland, leads to an understanding of cosmic sympathy, conceptualized as a 'vital pulse', (1850 *Prelude*, VIII, 480):

The pulse of Being everywhere was felt,
When all the several frames of things, like stars,
Through every magnitude distinguishable,
Were half confounded in each other's blaze,
One galaxy of life and joy. Then rose
Man, inwardly contemplated, and present
In my own being, to a loftier height,
As, of all visible natures, crown [...]
(1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 627-34)

This perception contrasts with a second, more immanent, understanding of the human presence in the cosmos, one that instils a sense of humility. This is a vision of an accommodated humanity, in which we are rendered natural beings, 'kindred to the worm' (1850 *Prelude*, VIII, 488), forever living in a state of 'dependency sublime' (1805 *Prelude*, VIII, 640). Such contemplation of the natural world is an antidote to the arrogance of hubris.

At the centre of *The Prelude*, therefore, Wordsworth summarizes and brings together some of the ways in which humanity benefits from an interaction with the natural world. Physical health is maintained by outdoor exercise and there is pleasure to be enjoyed in the aesthetic beauty of the natural environment. This in turn develops sharpened sensory faculties and awareness and inspires the creative capabilities. Furthermore, an engagement with the non-human instils an ontological sense of what it means to be a human being. Wordsworth's observation of harmony of existence in a rural context develops his human sympathy, and the fortitude in the face of suffering made necessary in living off the land elevates his conception of human endeavour. Wordsworth's account of the natural world's value, despite its social implications, is ultimately about a solitary encounter with that world and is one which finds its ultimate purpose in developing Wordsworth's own *unitary* self as experiencing subject. While the benefits that Wordsworth describes are spoken from the culture of his time and the responses he cites are pleasures and experiences common to many, in another sense they are illustrative of the mental processes of one of the most exceptional figures of the nineteenth century. It is to other cultural versions of the benefits of nature, other narratives of improvement and other Romantic ecologies to which I would now like to turn.

¹ Richard Mant, *The Simpliciad* [1808], lines 94-99 (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991), pp. 13-14.

² The 1850 revision of *The Prelude* was first published in July 1850, after Wordsworth's death. The 1805 version was not available in print until the Oxford University Press published Ernest de Sélincourt's edition in 1926. I have mostly developed my argument with reference to the 1805 version, in keeping with Jonathan Bate's choice, given my discussion of Bate's approach to the poem and the closer association of the earlier more 'pantheistic' version with proto-environmentalist thought than that of the later version, revised in the context of Wordsworth's shift towards a more orthodox Anglican faith.

³ A word first used by Robert Southey in the *Quarterly Review* in 1809.

⁴ Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, p. 736.

⁵ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991); Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Tony Pinkney dates a seminal literary ecology to the 1970s and identifies ecocriticism's coming of age, following the publication of Bate's book and the foundation of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1993. See 'Romantic Ecology', in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 412.

⁶ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 4.

⁷ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 10.

⁸ However, any anticipation of an exponential breakthrough and coming triumph of a reformist green movement within capitalist parliamentary democracy at this time was to prove premature. The significant representation for Die Grünen in Germany and support for environmental organizations in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, and the achievement of a 15% share of the vote for the Green Party in England and Wales during the 1989 European elections proved to be something of a high tide mark in party fortunes. In both Britain and other Western European states, momentum and progress was impeded by the political incorporation and neutralization of the 'realist' wing of the movement, coupled with the appropriation of its ideas by conventional parties and to schism and recrimination among 'fundamentalist' Greens. The formerly 'anti-party' party of Die Grünen has become indistinguishable from other liberal democratic parties, while the extra-parliamentary movement, though flourishing, has yet to attract mass popular support. The lack of progress in the implementation of the hopes of the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 in particular has channelled green activism into an increasing emphasis upon anti-capitalist opposition to globalization.

⁹ The collapse of the fortunes of the British Green Party after 1990 was particularly rapid. From a high point of 18,500 in July 1990, membership had dropped to less than 5,000 by Summer 1993. See Wolfgang Rüdiger, Mark N. Franklin and Lynn G. Bennie, *Green Blues: The Rise and Decline of the British Green Party*, Strathclyde Papers on Government and Politics (no. 95) (Glasgow: Department of Government, University of Strathclyde, 1993), p. 1. The class composition of the British Green Party has been heavily weighted towards middle-class membership. Of those that selected a class identification, 72.9% chose the middle-class category, while only 27.1% placed themselves in the working-class category in 1989. This disproportion is revealed by comparison with figures from the *British Households Survey* (1989) that records figures of 29.4% and 65.5% respectively. Among middle-class Green Party members those considered as professionals in 'caring occupations' were found to be significantly dominant. See Wolfgang Rüdiger, Mark N. Franklin and Lynn G. Bennie, *Green Party Members: A Profile* (Green Politics Research Group Reports (no. 1) (Glasgow: Department of Government, University of Strathclyde, 1991), pp. 28-9.

¹⁰ A trend that is continued in the pervading pessimism about the potential outcome of the second Earth Summit at Johannesburg which is forthcoming at the time of writing.

¹¹ Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 266.

¹² Jonathan Bate, 'Romantic Ecology Revisited', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 24.3 (Summer 1993), 159-62 (p. 160).

¹³ Bate, *Song of the Earth*, p. 199.

¹⁴ Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 9.

¹⁵ Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p. 27.

¹⁶ Kroeber, in *Ecological Literary Criticism* and earlier works such as 'Home at Grasmere: Ecological Holiness', *P.M.L.A.*, 89 (1974), 132-41, and *Romantic Landscape Vision: Constable and Wordsworth* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); Geoffrey Hartman, 'A Poet's Progress: Wordsworth and the *Via Naturaliter Negativa*' in *Wordsworth The Prelude: A Casebook*, ed. by W. J. Harvey and Richard Gravil (London: Macmillan, 1972).

See the sole bliss Heav'n could on all bestow!
 Which who but feels can taste, but thinks can know:
 Yet poor with fortune, and with learning blind,
 The bad must miss; the good, untaught, will find;
 Slave to no sect, who takes no private road,
 But looks thro' Nature, up to Nature's God;
 Pursues that Chain which links th'immense design,
 Joins heav'n and earth, and mortal and divine;
 Sees, that no being any bliss can know,
 But touches some above, and some below;
 Learns, from this union of the rising Whole,
 The first, last purpose of the human soul;
 And knows where Faith, Law, Morals, all began,
 All end, in LOVE OF GOD, and LOVE OF MAN.
 ([1744], Epistle IV, Lines 327-40)

Pope: *Poetical Works* [1966], ed. by Herbert Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 277.

¹⁸ *The Prelude* was the title given by Mary Hutchinson, to this section of her husband's greater, though never completed, poetic project, *The Recluse*. See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 73.

¹⁹ The idea of the determining influence of suffering upon identity is one Keats famously expounded in his description of 'The vale of Soul-making'. See letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 21 April 1819, *Letters of John Keats*, a new selection ed. by Robert Gittings (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 249-50.

²⁰ While Wordsworth believed in the importance of environmental sensations and experience upon the construction of the thinking self, he did not however, fully endorse the kind of associationist philosophy most often connected with David Hartley during this period. Wordsworth's ontology was one that considered the interchange of mind and environment to be dynamic in its emphasis rather than mechanistic.

²¹ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 31.

²² The life of the Lakeland community that features in *The Prelude*, a local economy of primary producers, is rounded by labour, ritual and custom. The cyclical existence of local people is marked by veneration for the natural world in the form of ceremonies of seasonal change. Wordsworth's awareness of the cohesive power of myth, folk tale and custom surely stem from his own personal fascination with accounts of such pre-Christian ceremonies as well-dressing, maypole dancing and carrying the may (the hawthorn is still superstitiously kept out of some homes due to its pagan associations). Rousseau described the earliest human communities in a similar fashion in the *Discourse Upon Inequality*: 'They accustomed themselves to assemble before their huts round a large tree; singing and dancing, the true offspring of love and leisure, became the amusement, or rather the occupation, of men and women thus assembled together with nothing else to do.' Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality', *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. by G. D. H. Cole, rev. and augmented by J. H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall (London: Dent, 1973), p. 90. It was in the rural domain of his upbringing that Wordsworth established attachment to the familiar faces in the small community around him.

²³ The difficulties encountered in returning to a rural community are later explored in a succession of Hardy's novels: for Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native* (1878), Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders* (1887) and Jocelyn Pierston in *The Well-Beloved* (1897).

²⁴ Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 7.

²⁵ *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* [1817], ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols, Bollingen Series (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), I, p. 304.

²⁶ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, p. 305.

²⁷ Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets, Complete Works*, V, pp. 162-3.

²⁸ Bate, *Song of the Earth*, p. 128.

²⁹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'William Wordsworth and Leigh Hunt' in *A New Spirit of the Age* [1844], ed. by R. H. Horne, 2 vols (facsimile reprint New York: Garland, 1986), I, p. 312.

³⁰ Letter from Harriet Martineau to Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, 8 February 1846, in *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett*, ed. by Elvan Kintner, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 462.

³¹ Later I shall suggest that earlier Romantic authors, such as Hazlitt and Wollstonecraft, shared Martineau's doubts about the amiability and natural virtue of rural dwellers.



OTHER ENCOUNTERS: **SHARING GREEN SHADOWS WITH INTIMATES**

What the Brontës cared for and lived in most were the surroundings of nature, the free expanse of hill and mountain, the purple heather, the dells, and glens, and brooks, the broad sky view, the whistling winds, the snowy expanse, the starry heavens, and the charm of that solitude and seclusion which sees things from a distance without the disturbing atmosphere which lesser minds are apt to create. For it was not the seclusion of a solitary person, such as Charlotte endured in after days, and which in time becomes awfully oppressive and injurious. It was solitude and seclusion shared and enjoyed with intelligent companionship, and intense family affection.
(Nussey, *Reminiscences of Charlotte Brontë*)¹

The Romantic 'I': Some Female Glances

During the eighteenth century the Baconian encouragement to dominate nature was increasingly contested by an affirmation, inspired by Shaftesbury and Rousseau, that 'man' attained his finest presence when his mode of living was most natural. This reconfiguration amounted to an appropriation of 'nature', a space to which Western philosophy had formerly consigned women and non-Europeans. Furthermore, restrictive 'natural' roles for women – those in Rousseau's *Emile* are a prominent example – reveal that, in practice, reverence for Mother Nature in the abstract may do little to enhance the cultural prestige of actual women. The prevailing assumption that women in particular had a duty to conform to 'nature' was an enduring one. Women, designated natural beings innately and biologically closer to nature, were expected to live within prescribed roles. Richard Polwhele (1760-1838), for instance, objected:

[...] The woman who has no regard to nature, either in the decoration of her person, or the culture of her mind, will soon 'walk after the flesh, in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government'.²

By 1800, however, liberal critics such as Wollstonecraft, Catharine Macaulay and Olympe de Gouges challenged the essentialism of such conventions through the emancipatory discourse of the rights of women, predicated upon the possibility of cultural change. Women's Romantic literature has therefore become a discursive focus for the gender dynamics of the valorization of nature. Mellor contrasts the 'masculine Romantic ideology that affirmed the rights of the natural man', with the idea of the 'rational woman', promoted by Romantic women writers. In doing so she alleges that the feminization of nature by masculine poets sustains a powerful masculine subject identity at the expense of a

suppressed feminine object and (ultimately) militates against the expressive force of feminine discourse.³

As a figure of discrete individualistic subjectivity, the Wordsworthian solitary wanderer was complementary to the idea of a bounded ego, appropriate to an enfranchised masculine psyche, yet, as most of the adult population was excluded from political representation, a difficult model for society at large. Susan Levin's critical distinction between masculine and feminine Romanticism and the resistance in the latter to the appropriation of nature to sustain self-enhancement is supported by such evidence:

Various romantic constructs – most obviously that of the appropriating self – are frequently alien to these women. The work of male romantic writers often involves the subject's coming to knowledge of the self through conscious appropriation of the object or through a pained recognition of the total otherness of the subject. Either way, the primacy of individual selfhood is insisted upon. The way romantic women describe themselves in nature – and what is more of a romantic topic than the 'I' and the natural world? – does not project this 'usual,' or perhaps it is just masculine, dialectic of self and other. They do not assault the natural world.⁴

Anna Seward attacks the literal reshaping of the natural world to promote masculine self-enhancement in her 1790 poem, 'The Lake; or, Modern Improvement in Landscape'.⁵ Perhaps with an eye to events unfolding in France, Seward's verse laments the destruction of the established environment to create an artificial picturesque landscape, in keeping with the dictates of a feminized personification, that 'gaudy despot', (l.15) – Fashion. Ironically, the fashionable taste for the picturesque appeared to impact destructively upon the very nature it ostensibly revered. In order to create the lake – in Seward's opinion 'stagnant, mute, unvarying, cold, and pale' (l.58) – a formerly 'sparkling' (l.29) and 'loquacious' (l.32) brook becomes a 'forced flood', and a valley is 'o'erwhelmed' (l.52). Ancient 'guardian oaks' (l.78) are sacrificed by axes to fulfil the ephemeral pleasure of an open prospect. Once selfish desires are imposed upon landscape, the virtues of organic growth, slow maturation, liveliness and variety are destroyed: a triumph of the egotistical over the ecological. Ironically then, 'modern improvement' leaves a profound emptiness in which, now that 'every varied charm boon Nature gave' (l.88) has fled, romantic beauty is reduced to an austere lifelessness by the 'fantastic power' (l.84) of the owner's domination of his surroundings. The landscape is literally disenchanted as, along with the loss of the woodlands, hedgerows and meadows (these no doubt once planted and sown), the *genius loci* is driven out.⁶

Several women nature writers maintained that natural history was not only an important study for the creation of strong, integrated and sensitive human beings of both sexes, essential to the development of the mind, but also a source of retreat from difficulties in the cultural sphere.⁷ What emerges in the following texts, especially those by Charlotte Smith, Priscilla Wakefield, Helen Maria Williams and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are representations of a more mutual engagement with the natural environment. The emphasis is less upon isolated spots of time in a sublime setting than on shared moments and experiences that strengthen immediate interpersonal relations and affective bonds.

Since Sherry B. Ortner's essay, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' (1974),⁸ many feminist critics have examined the effect of the dualistic perspective that associates cultural characteristics with masculine qualities, while designating women as more natural beings.⁹ The historical legacy of this gendered opposition between culture and nature in Cartesian thought, which underpins modern patriarchy, problematizes women's aspirations to inclusion in a liberal humanist model of individualism. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), Val Plumwood argues that the unitary self has been asserted and affirmed through the conceptual repression and exclusion of difference. Therefore a challenge to the Cartesian dualism that sustains the liberal autonomous subject would be a project which logically entails the exploration of more relational notions of identity. However, if a challenge of this nature were to be extended to other species it would also call into question a way of understanding the world that is so deep-rooted and integral to 'classical logic' that its ideological content is rendered invisible.¹⁰

This abstract dilemma is specifically evident in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century nature/nurture arguments, and in today's debates about attitudes towards the natural world together with the literature that describes that world. The question of identity has, for example, revealed a disruptive tension in ecofeminist narratives about identification with the natural world. Some ecofeminists – Janet Biehl particularly instances Andrée Collard, Susan Griffin and Charlene Spretnak¹¹ – have celebrated a corporeal, even sensual, affiliation with nature and identified with the cyclical modes of being, fertility and generative force of Mother Earth. However, critics, most prominently Biehl and Plumwood (dismissive of the aspiration to become an 'angel in the ecosystem'),¹² believe that the notion that Mother Earth is a forceful and positive image, able to unite women's struggle against patriarchy with the struggle against environmental degradation, is a mistaken one. Suspicious of essentialist and 'irrationalist' presuppositions of this kind, they have rejected the identification of women with nature as an effect of gendered difference that reflects the very patriarchal power structure that it seeks to challenge.¹³ William C. Snyder (1992) argues that

there was an opposition to the woman-nature association among Romantic women writers themselves.¹⁴ In particular, the gendering of the sympathetic faculty became a significant dimension to discussions about nature, nurture, emotion and reason rehearsed by eighteenth-century writers, such as David Hume and Charlotte Smith (see Chapter Ten).

Inevitably, an author's social identity and life experience are embedded in the point of view that informs and structures any literary text. Gender is a significant attribute in this sense, as it combines with other determinants such as class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and belief systems, which together influence the context for linguistic expression.¹⁵ The socio-economic disparity between men and women has been reflected in textual discourse, given that, historically, more legal, political and cultural obstacles have confronted women than men.¹⁶

Indeed, literary fame itself was an aspiration of doubtful promise for many women. Often, a female author's identity was screened behind the anonymity of 'A Lady', for example on the frontispiece of Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778).¹⁷ Charlotte Brontë was amused that an acquaintance might 'as soon, indeed, suspect me of writing a book – a novel – as he would his dog'.¹⁸ The idea of a separate domestic sphere appropriate for women accounts for Southey's polite, yet deflating, response to Brontë's request for the Poet Laureate's opinion of her verse in 1837:

Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation.[...] But do not suppose that I disparage the gift which you possess; nor that I would discourage you from exercising it.[...] Write poetry for its own sake; not in a spirit of emulation, and not with a view to celebrity [...]¹⁹

Anna Laetitia Barbauld also feared that she had 'stepped out of the bounds of female reserve in becoming an author'.²⁰ And there is no reason to believe that the popular and successful Felicia Hemans was being falsely modest when she penned 'Woman and Fame' (first published 1839), in which she rejected the necessity of fame for a woman writer, preferring private 'home-born love' to the 'green laurel leaves' of public renown.²¹

Such objections notwithstanding, the production of literature remained one way that women *could* find a public voice and participate more fully in cultural life beyond the confines of the private sphere. While critical tradition has focused upon male Romantic poets there has been a significant redressing of this gender imbalance.²² Besides the greater availability of prose works from this period, there has been a substantial re-publication of

Romantic women's poetry during the 1990s; a posthumous recognition of their literary presence at the centre of current critical debates about Romanticism rather than in the footnotes.²³

The Natures of Mary Wollstonecraft

Wordsworth's intuition that the direct apprehension of the natural environment was central to the programme for human well-being and regeneration was written out of a literary culture in revolt against the perceived stasis of imitative Augustan nature imagery. John Aikin (1747-1822), Joanna Baillie (1762-1851) and Mary Wollstonecraft had all previously advocated the use of 'natural' diction in literature to describe a more directly and particularly observed natural environment. When natural imagery featured in earlier neo-classical poetry its purpose was normally to create representative *impressions*, to form the background to human concerns. The Romantic emphasis was one that elevated the natural environment in literature and art to increasingly expressive representations of a more intimate relationship to the human. For all its artificiality, and Ruskin's objections to its 'falseness', the Romantic device of the pathetic fallacy was a metaphor deployed to express what was believed to be truth in the sense of an underlying continuity between the human and the natural world.

Wollstonecraft's representations of sensibility in *Mary* (1788) anticipate Wordsworth's ideas about the improving qualities of direct experience of the natural world. The natural environment was a primary source of that sensibility which could heal the human soul and raise the spirit in contrast to the woes experienced in the bleakness and confinement that characterized habitations in poor urban districts. The eponymous Mary walks out 'from a dreary chamber' to visit some poor neighbours, a kindly and benevolent act that distinguishes her from other unsympathetic, selfish characters in the novel. Feeling bound to 'her fellow creatures' by a combination of personal recollections and sympathy, Mary writes the following 'rhapsody on sensibility':

Sensibility is the most exquisite feeling of which the human soul is susceptible: when it pervades us, we feel happy; and could it last unmixed, we might form some conjecture of the bliss of those paradisaical days, when the obedient passions were under the domination of reason, and the impulses of the heart did not need correction.

It is this quickness, this delicacy of feeling, which enables us to relish the sublime touches of the poet, and the painter; it is this, which expands the soul, gives an enthusiastic greatness, mixed with tenderness, when we view the magnificent objects of nature; or hear of a good action. The same effect we experience in the

spring, when we hail the returning sun, and the consequent renovation of nature; when the flowers unfold themselves, and exhale their sweets, and the voice of music is heard in the land. Softened by tenderness; the soul is disposed to be virtuous.²⁴

The affinity that 'bound' her to other species, the practical sense of neighbourliness and the need to express her experiences through literature are all interlinked qualities.

Wollstonecraft therefore works out in a fictional context some of the ideas more fully formulated in her later essay, 'On Poetry' (1797).

Wollstonecraft's description of the human enjoyment of the natural world is liberating and empowering, blending a social conscience (Mary helps the villagers without condescension) with an aesthetic appreciation of the sublime. Mary's humane propensity to connect with others through empathy and her capacity to assist them improves her own quality of life. The cultivation of mind, which here unites the 'passions' and 'reason', is at one with the cultivated sensibility towards the natural world. Paul Davies suggests that 'compassion is the link between the mystical and political wings' of Romanticism.²⁵ At its finest, Romantic art aspires to the imaginative resolution of aesthetic beauty and social purpose.

Returning to London in later years, Mary is horrified by metropolitan depravity and yearns for her former rural dwelling, in keeping with a pastoral tradition (which, as we shall see, Wollstonecraft reworks and often contests in her later writings, *A Short Residence* and 'On Poetry'):

She then perceived that great part of her comfort must arise from viewing the smiling face of nature, and be reflected from the view of innocent enjoyments: she was fond of seeing animals play, and could not bear to see her own species sink below them.²⁶

Indeed, it is the loss of the ability to respond positively to the visual impulses of the natural world that marks the depths of Mary's emotional desolation at the novel's close:

The road was pleasant – yet Mary shut her eyes; – or if they were open, green fields and commons, passed in quick succession, and left no more traces behind than if they had been waves of the sea.²⁷

Wollstonecraft's autobiographical travelogue, *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), like *The Prelude*, is in part concerned with solitary engagement with the natural world. Here, Rousseau provides an immediate model for the trope of the solitary

walker.²⁸ However, while Rousseau, and the fashion for sensibility and the pastoral, had inspired *Mary*, eight years later Wollstonecraft moved towards a more critical engagement with these former influences. By 1796 her attitudes towards rural communities are deeply ambivalent:

Talk not of bastilles! To be born here, was to be bastilled by nature – shut out from all that opens the understanding, or enlarges the heart [...] I felt my breath oppressed, though nothing could be clearer than the atmosphere. Wandering here alone, I found the solitude desirable; my mind was stored with ideas, which this new scene associated with astonishing rapidity. But I shuddered at the thought of receiving existence, and remaining here, in the solitude of ignorance, till forced to leave a world of which I had seen so little; for the character of the inhabitants is as uncultivated, if not as picturesquely wild, as their abode.²⁹

Wollstonecraft is stimulated with ‘astonishing rapidity’ by the experience of a solitary stroll in the natural world, and by the images that would impress themselves upon the inner mind.³⁰ At the same time however, this passage explicitly modifies, and rejects, the idealization of rural life. While occasional solitude may have a beneficial effect upon the human mind, it is coupled with ‘ignorance’ in this passage and associated with the limitation rather than the expansion of individual vision. In an approach antagonistic to that of Wordsworth, Wollstonecraft suggests that rural life cannot be intrinsically efficacious, because the true value of wild nature is most fully appreciated and cherished by the mind cultivated with sensibility, which is most likely to be developed and refined in the social milieux of larger towns. Paradoxically, those that are ‘bastilled’ within wild nature take care to shut out its harshness most determinedly. The rural environment affects character in a negative way that directly contradicts pastoral conventions. The local inhabitants seem compelled to anaesthetize themselves against the outside world, preferring rather to escape into a claustrophobic, hermetically sealed existence:

What, indeed, is to humanise these beings, who rest shut up, for they seldom even open their windows, smoking, drinking brandy, and driving bargains? I have been almost stifled by these smokers.³¹

Such comments are redolent of puritan disdain for ‘unimproving’ pleasures and the luxuries of alcohol and nicotine, and tinged with a characteristic distaste for trade. Wollstonecraft’s contemplation of the prospect of living among unenlightened provincialism in such districts inspires in her something approaching outright horror. Her abhorrence for the behaviour of the rural poor is accentuated when her sensibility is offended by the ‘infernal appearance’ of a country fair, a place leading inevitably she fears to ‘gross debauch’.³² Again

Wollstonecraft's antipathy anticipates Martineau, who as we have seen, later observed that 'sensual vice abounds' in rural communities when she mocked Wordsworth in the 1840s.

Wollstonecraft was an acute observer, quick to offer a critique of the effects of capitalism upon human sensibility and to recognize the potential conflict between the drive for economic return and the conservation of the natural environment.³³ For centuries mining, forestry and other economic activities had inevitably altered such scenery but now it appeared that the new dynamism in European commerce was accelerating the destructive impact:

The views of the Elbe, in the vicinity of the town, are pleasant, particularly as the prospects here afford so little variety. I attempted to descend, and walk close to the water edge; but there was no path; and the smell of glue, hanging to dry, an extensive manufactory of which is carried on close to the beach, I found extremely disagreeable. But to commerce every thing must give way; profit and profit are the only speculations – 'double - double, toil and trouble.'³⁴

This dilemma, a singularly modern conflict, was one that disturbed Wollstonecraft profoundly. She found herself at once eager to embrace industrial and technological progress as an emancipatory force with the capacity to ameliorate the human condition, yet filled with fascinated horror when confronted with the material reality of the industrial landscape. Despite her Promethean enthusiasm, Wollstonecraft is candid enough to voice dismay at the physical despoliation entailed in such enterprises. Although it appears to be out-proportioned by its surroundings, the construction of the new canal at Trollhattan in Sweden represented an insolent intrusion upon the landscape for Wollstonecraft leaving her to regret that 'such a noble scene had not been left in all its solitary sublimity'.³⁵

In *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782), Rousseau was likewise astonished to chance upon a stocking-mill while botanizing among alpine precipices so remote that he had imagined himself the first man to tread there, in a state of primal solitude. This shock of the unexpected has a mythic, machine-in-the-garden quality, as Rousseau realizes the ubiquity of industry. An initial surge of joy at human connection immediately yields to a sense of abomination as he succumbs to a claustrophobic paranoia, assuming the mill to be peopled by his imagined persecutors. He finds himself unable to 'express the confused and contradictory emotions which this discovery stirred up in me', and it appears that much of his unease is caused by the idea of humanity as a profane and unwelcome presence in a pristine nature. Indeed, this is an early intimation that, increasingly, the idea that nature existed anywhere without human impact was no longer viable; a tradition that finds its more recent trajectory in what American critic, Bill McKibben regrets as *The End of Nature*

(1990).³⁶ This unease, directly imported from theological distinctions between the sacred and the profane, becomes an integral component in future debates about wilderness and conservation.

Wollstonecraft's final essay, 'On Poetry and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature' (1797), illustrates a late eighteenth-century writer's awareness of the importance of subject position in the experience and representation of the natural world. Again adopting the pose of the solitary walker, she both anticipated Wordsworth's programme for 'natural' diction and pointed to a number of different forms and qualities of engagement and 'relish' for nature.

Wollstonecraft's meditation begins with an acerbic observation that casts some doubt upon those that flaunt their propensity for rural delights. She notes with heavy irony that while wandering alone in the countryside she invariably met no one but the occasional labourer, yet on her return found that 'when I joined the social circle, every tongue rang changes on the pleasures of the country'.³⁷ This point underlines her scepticism towards the drawing-room dilettantes who might earnestly eulogize the picturesque but in reality avoid the stinging nettles, dishevelled and twigged hair and muddy boots that inevitably accompany country rambles. Wollstonecraft's sharpness clearly indicates that by this period there is some social capital to be gained from publicly displaying an affection (or rather affectation) for nature, ironically often in the absence of any actual engagement with it. The objects of Wollstonecraft's disdain have an urban perspective, as 'those, who leave, for a season, the crowded cities in which they were bred' ('On Poetry', p.7). Such sensibility towards the natural world, as a luxury object of choice, is made possible because there is no longer any necessity to directly work the land which exists as a source of revenue and retreat; a sensibility that therefore reflects rather a degree of *disassociation* from the natural world. The critique of this perspective, characterized as 'artificial', rather than a 'real perception', and contrasted to the 'trudging' of the 'labouring man' ('On Poetry', p. 7), is continuous, therefore, with the strictures against the luxurious, indolent and inauthentic, characteristic of *Vindication of the Rights of Women* and other writings in Wollstonecraft's oeuvre.

Notwithstanding such scepticism, Wollstonecraft places real value upon the beneficial experiences to be gained in natural surroundings and goes on to outline a tripartite schema for possible depths of response to the countryside, thus elucidating a number of different subject positions that might be engaging with the natural world. There are some that merely learn fashionably sublime phrases to impress in society, others that can enjoy the

countryside if it is mediated through an artist's eye and, finally, those that respond authentically and directly to nature.

In the first category are those, dismissed as 'witlings', whose primary aim in learning about nature is 'to enable them to talk' ('On Poetry', p. 11). Such characters recall the would-be wits of William Congreve's dramas who merely attempt to cultivate the appearance of refinement by learning a selection of *bon mots*. Men, in particular, who learn about natural history to impress were indeed occasionally satirized in women's novels at this time. In Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788), Bellozane, a Swiss suitor who initially found his Aunt's plants the 'most boring subjects in the world', quickly begins to study botany when he discovers Emmeline's interest.³⁸ Jane Austen captured the type precisely in her unfinished final novel, *Sanditon* (1817), in which Charlotte Heywood, though temporarily amused, quickly becomes bored by Sir Edward Denham's enthusiasms:

He began in a tone of great taste and feeling to talk of the sea and the sea shore – and ran with energy through all the phrases employed in praise of their sublimity, and descriptive of the *undescribable* emotions they excite in the mind of sensibility. – The terrific grandeur of the ocean in a storm, its glassy surface in a calm, its gulls and its samphire, and the deep fathoms of its abysses, its quick vicissitudes, its direful deceptions, its mariners tempting it in sunshine and overwhelmed by the sudden tempest, all were eagerly and fluently touched; – rather commonplace perhaps – but doing very well from the lips of a handsome Sir Edward [...]³⁹

The second category of nature appreciation Wollstonecraft identifies is made up of those whose appreciation for nature is unfeigned, but who lack the capacity for direct spontaneous response. These, 'from the want of a lively imagination', require a poet or painter to mediate and concentrate pleasing views into picturesque prospects to enjoy the countryside.⁴⁰

Wollstonecraft laments the dearth of direct nature observation and in doing so echoes John Aikin's earlier complaint that 'the grand and beautiful objects' of nature which 'are the most obvious store of new materials to the poet', are, in practice, 'the store which of all others he has most sparingly touched'.⁴¹

Wollstonecraft more vigorously objects that images from nature are consequently all too often rendered 'disgusting, because they have been servilely copied by poets'.⁴² 'Servile' is a politically charged word and there are echoes of the Platonic condemnation of imitation in this denunciation. The balance between outer nature and inner expression is a delicate one in Wollstonecraft's argument. While, she suggests, it is permissible, indeed unavoidable and natural, if human concerns should arise in the mind during the course of the contemplation of nature, natural description that is primarily informed by the stock

diction and recycled representations often associated with later mimetic Augustan literature is rendered sterile, uninteresting and lacking the spontaneity that Wollstonecraft commends.⁴³

Finally, there are those rarer individuals able to respond to nature forcefully and spontaneously. Wollstonecraft, by identifying herself as someone who takes part in 'solitary rambles', asserts her own individualist subjectivity and implicitly numbers herself among them. Powerful nature poetry, it is suggested, should be the product of a more direct encounter with natural sublimity. Written in 1797 and thus contemporaneous with the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wollstonecraft's essay foreshadows the Wordsworthian conception of poetry as powerful feeling, able to express emotions that are not reducible to analytical reason. This is in keeping with later Romantic criticism and further grounds the currency of the ideas of fancy and imagination later to be made the centrepiece of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*: 'The silken wings of fancy are shrivelled by rules; and a desire of attaining elegance of diction, occasions an attention to words, incompatible with sublime, impassioned thoughts.'⁴⁴ Such lines reveal a commitment to the expression of a visionary feeling for nature, one at odds with the supposedly puritanical tone of cool intellectualism that urges the repression of passion in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Wordsworth's reminder, that the task of the poet to record the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' should be 'recollected in tranquillity', closely glosses Wollstonecraft's advice that 'effusions' ought to be 'softened or expunged during the cooler moments of reflection' ('On Poetry', p. 8). A tension is apparent here which must be resolved if Wollstonecraft's explanation of the 'relish for the beauties of nature' is to be logically coherent. Given that evidently 'a poet is rather the creature of art, than of nature', the idea of nature as a human textual construct is a paradoxical and troubling one if the positive and substantive aspects of Wollstonecraft's argument are to be sustained.⁴⁵ The latter are threefold. First, that the relish of the natural environment is both a manifestation of, and the occasion to further exercise and develop, a lively and discriminating mind. Second, the idea that the love of nature leads to devotion to the creator (an argument drawn from natural theology with its Protestant emphasis upon individual accommodation with God). Finally, the possibility that nature can address ennui and alienation because it has the capacity to whet the understanding and to 'bring back the feelings to nature' ('On Poetry', p. 11) in a civilization in which popular taste has been impaired by sensual overindulgence. Aikin had suggested that there were strong parallels between accuracy of representation and a philosophical truth on the part of the poet and further associated elevated taste with the integrity of empirical experience:

Taste may perhaps be fixed and explained by philosophical investigation; but it can only be *formed* by frequent contemplation of the objects with which it is conversant.⁴⁶

Conceding, in a parenthetical aside, that '*natural* is a very indefinite expression' ('On Poetry', p. 7), Wollstonecraft indicates that she was conscious that the word was a slippery signifier. It is suggested that the true appreciation of nature is best enjoyed by the poet for whom 'the understanding has been enlarged by thought, and stored with knowledge' ('On Poetry', p. 7), a criterion that she realizes may lead to a paradox because it is dependent upon what the human mind can bring with it to nature from culture. The greatest depth of feeling and felicity of expression exists in those that have educated and cultivated themselves, factors that militate against the broader emphasis upon direct experience and spontaneity, and inconveniently imply that the love of nature is *not* natural, at least in the sense of a straightforwardly innate and universally experienced process. There is an optimistic claim that the individual self can be enlarged by an act of will through the accumulation of knowledge, of which the direct experience of the natural environment is but one dimension. In her suggestion that 'the poetry written in the infancy of society, is most natural', Wollstonecraft hypothesizes a purity of encounter with the natural environment, an idea which again, is problematized by her own acknowledgement of the semantic instability of 'natural' as a 'very indefinite expression'.

Such a potential contradiction in the love of nature, however, is addressed by analogy to the nature of love. Wollstonecraft consistently employs metaphors of sexual heat and coolness to create a curiously libidized effect in 'On Poetry', contrasting the fickle feeling of the landscape libertine or voluptuary with the quieter yet more enduring 'ardour' of the true aesthete and faithful lover of nature. In human relationships the promiscuous and relentless search for extraordinary stimulation leads to an unsatisfactory and frivolous absorption in surface forms:

[...] Gross minds are only to be moved by forcible representations. To rouse the thoughtless, objects must be presented, calculated to produce tumultuous emotions; the unsubstantial, picturesque forms which a contemplative man gazes on, and often follows with ardour till he is mocked by a glimpse of unattainable excellence, appear to them the light vapours of a dreaming enthusiast, who gives up the substance for the shadow.⁴⁷

It is the true poet, who profits from inner growth and a deeper understanding, that is best able to relish the subtleties and nuances of experience and emotion when enjoying the countryside. Such an argument extends the purlieus of Wollstonecraft's early morning stroll

in the countryside out to the parameters of her more expansive personal cosmology. True education is a faculty that exists to sharpen critical discrimination and bring about self improvement. The quality of the enlarged potentiality of the human imagination is preferred to the quantity of knowledge; this being the ability to ground the universal in the particular or to extrapolate the eternal from the immediate, to be attentive to the broader context of knowledge, and to prefer longer term purpose and content to ephemeral desire. True nature poetry is produced by a dynamic interchange between the poet of discrimination and the directly experienced countryside and not by the encyclopaedic learning of stock phrases, correct diction and mechanical rhyming schemes.

This idea that too much artificial green verse may jade the senses recalls familiar strictures upon the excesses of sexual appetite as a consistent theme in Wollstonecraft's prose. In a letter from Sweden about the manners of country girls she writes 'as the mind is cultivated, and taste gains ground, the passions become stronger, and rest on something more stable than the casual sympathies of the moment'.⁴⁸ Wollstonecraft's passion for the countryside may likewise be more accurately interpreted as emphasizing the concentration rather than the dissipation of human energies rather than the alleged repression of the sensory.

It is apparent then that Wollstonecraft's ideas about the 'beauties of nature' are interwoven with social concerns. She makes use of metaphors of sexuality and intimates significant variation in the responses of different socio-economic groups to the natural world, reflecting the specific habitus that she attributes to these categories. The celebration of the civilizing consequences of an individual accommodation with the natural environment is articulated through a meritocratic sentiment which critiques both the preoccupations of a leisured urban class, that devalues the countryside as a site of retreat and relaxation, and the imitative sycophancy of mass taste. Written for the largely non-conformist readership of the *Monthly Magazine*, Wollstonecraft's commendation of the natural world in 'On Poetry' is one of an active engagement that demands effort. There is an identity of form and content in the essay which, setting out from a regret that the taste for nature popular with her contemporaries is not grounded in 'real perception', takes a discursive explanation of different tastes before circuitously returning to its point of departure and to closure with an insistence that 'the understanding must bring back feelings to nature'. It is fitting then that, as Wollstonecraft's last published essay, 'On Poetry' itself perhaps amounts to an unintended coda to the rest of her work.

The Natural History Dialogues of Charlotte Smith and Priscilla Wakefield

Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) and Priscilla Wakefield (1751-1832) each wrote five natural history dialogues, which occupied a specialist literary niche within the mass market for books of instruction and conduct.⁴⁹ By the end of the eighteenth century this improving genre was associated with female writers, mostly writing for the development and edification of children.⁵⁰ By child-rearing or writing children's books, women, disenfranchised as political subjects, could influence wider social behaviour through the education of the next generation. The image of nature that is presented in these dialogues is one that is diverse, accessible, beneficial, educative, beautiful, sometimes vulnerable to human abuse, yet as a Divine creation, ultimately of a magnitude beyond human experience. Nature study is considered to be improving, entertaining and humanizing.

Charlotte Smith demonstrates not only a self-awareness of the difficulties of Romantic women's writing about the countryside but was also a powerful advocate for the benefits of such an endeavour.⁵¹ In common with Wollstonecraft, Smith's optimistic representations of nature are a consistent antidote to the unhappiness of her own life experience and stress the positive sense of value and gratification to be enjoyed through contact with the natural world. Few women writers have been faced with Charlotte Smith's desperate domestic situation. After her wedding she was transplanted from the cherished Sussex countryside of her childhood to live an emotionally isolated existence in Cheapside in 'one of the narrowest and most dirty lanes in the city'.⁵² One consequence of Smith's disastrous marriage was confinement in the King's Bench debtor's prison, to accompany her husband, Benjamin. Rarely has the sense of imprisonment in a patriarchal relationship appeared so literal. In such circumstances, she emerges as an author who wrote not in spite of, but under compulsion of, destitution. Eventually, Smith made a pragmatic decision that her moral duty to her twelve children outweighed any loyalty due to the ever profligate Benjamin.

The following, from the memoir of her sister, Mrs Dorset, is an extract taken from a letter of 1782, written on the occasion of Smith's release from prison. She rejoiced not only in reunion with her children and but also in her return to the countryside of her beloved Sussex downlands. There can be no clearer documentation of the sense of the natural environment's capacity to offer consolation in contrast to the worst urban situation:

For more than a month I had shared the restraint of my husband in a prison, amidst scenes of misery, of vice, and even of terror.[...] After such scenes and such apprehensions, how deliciously soothing to my wearied spirits was the soft pure air of the summer's morning, breathing over the dewy grass, as (having slept one night on the road) we passed over the heaths of Surrey! My native hills at length burst upon my view. I beheld once more the fields where I had passed my happiest days, and, amidst the perfumed turf with which one of those fields was strewn, perceived with delight the beloved group, from whom I had been so long divided.⁵³

Smith's beloved 'native hills' are remembered not for solitary rambles but for the associations they have with her happy upbringing and present family. As such they represent a desirable continuity in her life, after the radical disjunction of the prison regime which substituted 'terror' for kinship and friendship. This is not a genteel rural retirement from a life of routine but a more euphoric sense of liberation. Love of place is intimately linked here to love of family; both types of affective bonding become mutually reinforcing. Celebration of local distinctiveness and love of place was a characteristic aspect of the Romantic antipathy towards the universalizing tendencies of the Enlightenment. Texts such as Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne* (1789) and Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village* especially reflect this focused preoccupation with the particular and the local. Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* and prose writings, illustrate her particular affection for the qualities of her native Sussex.

Smith invariably looked back to her upbringing in rural Sussex as an idyllic contrast to the pollution and sense of alienation she had suffered in London. Familiar images of the country directly recall more settled times and, anchoring youthful memory, represent continuity and psychic reassurance. In the *Natural History of Birds*, Smith closely associates affection for the natural environment with the remembered artefacts and beings of a happy childhood, and family bonds. The sound of rooks triggers a positive mental association that accounts for her fondness for them:

Perhaps my predilection, is owing to my having lived from my first recollection in houses, near one of which there was a long avenue of elms leading from it, and the other had many high trees around it, where Rooks were encouraged; and their cawing was one of the sounds, which, when I awoke in the morning of the first holydays; reminded me most pleasantly that I was at home. How many of our attachments to sights and sounds, as well as our aversion to others might be traced to impressions received in infancy!⁵⁴

This passing observation was theorized in more detail by William Hazlitt who shared Smith's suggestion that natural objects can ground attachment to place. In 'On the Love of the Country', he argues that this phenomenon of mental attachment best explains human

sympathy for the non-human natural environment, and furthermore that we are often not only attached to the beautiful and graceful aspects of nature but equally 'the most insignificant and rudest objects are often found connected with the strongest emotions'.⁵⁵ This, Hazlitt urges, is chiefly explained by familiarity with such natural phenomena enjoyed since childhood. The juxtaposition of such highly selective retrospective images consists of experiential material that forms the building blocks of the self, forged and sustained by autobiographical memory. Early memories made durable by persistent recall – especially those highly charged epiphanic moments that Wordsworth designates 'spots of time' in 'Tintern Abbey' – form an essential component of the construction of the biographical dimension of the linguistic self. Hazlitt suggests:

It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes its attention; with change of place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends: it is because they have surrounded us in almost all situations, in joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain; because they have been one chief source and nourishment of our feelings, and a part of our being, that we love them as we do ourselves.⁵⁶

Hazlitt critically extends his associationist argument further. He speculates that whereas we respond to natural objects by connecting them with their generic class, by contrast we associate humans with individuality and so experience a greater variety of possible modes of engagement. However, it is precisely this propensity to extend our love for the particular natural object or place to all aspects of the natural environment that is significant in sustaining a reassuring sense of continuity and familiarity derived from interaction with the natural world. There is a remarkable predictability about the natural environment, Hazlitt suggests. Hazlitt's ideas are deeply influenced by Wordsworth, and he not only quotes the 'Immortality' Ode but offers his own version of the one life:

There is that consent and mutual harmony among all her works, one undivided spirit pervading them throughout, that, if we have once knit ourselves in hearty fellowship to any of them, they will never afterwards appear as strangers to us, but which ever way we turn, we shall find a secret power to have gone out before us, moulding them into such shapes as fancy loves, informing them with life and sympathy, bidding them put on their festive looks and gayest attire at our approach, and to pour all their sweets and choicest treasures at our feet.⁵⁷

While the nature that is experienced is constructed by the human mind therefore, it is also a dynamic interchange in which Hazlitt was quick to recognize the benefits of the beauties of the natural world in grounding personality. Primroses,⁵⁸ lambs, squirrels or heaths are all valued, he argues, because they offer a reassuring instance of continuity in a changing

world. The particular and the generic somehow seem to collapse in upon each other and do not trouble the soul with challenging or uncertain alterations. So, in an autobiographical sense, the common scenes and objects of nature offer us something vital in sustaining identity.

However, while Hazlitt's primroses may appear identical, they do not, of course, exist out of context. There is a particular concatenation of elements that creates the uniqueness of a specific experience as a confluence of person (or organism), time and place. Hazlitt sets up a tension between the plasticity of human constructions and the dependability of the raw materials of naturalistic inspiration. Variables of human identity and natural context therefore ensure that the specific relationship with the natural environment, unlike Hazlitt's 'December snows', is never frozen, but phenomenologically affected by the experiencing subject. It follows that Smith's rooks could equally have been figures of distaste or terror if associated with some negative childhood experience. Both Smith's rooks and Hazlitt's primroses help to anchor memories of home and allow minds to travel back to the realm that Bachelard termed 'the land of Motionless Childhood'.⁵⁹

In her rural dialogues, Smith's primary endeavour was to encourage a further exploration of nature writings from classical times to her own day, and indeed, to promote an appetite for all literature. The introduction to *A Natural History of Birds*, expresses this instructive intention:

It is a study that, wherever you are placed, will afford you a source of amusement; but it is of greater consequence, as being often of great utility in the conduct of life. The philosopher and the poet should both be naturalists.⁶⁰

The dialogues attempt to make such material accessible, while also 'levelling' standards upwards in terms of technical understanding. A clear, though informal, division is set up in the relationship between the adult voice of experience that inculcates knowledge and the inexperience of youthful but attentive questioners. Nevertheless, Smith's demands upon her young readers are ambitious in their expectations and the tone of the dialogues is not patronizing or condescending (for example, French, Italian and Latin are quoted without translation). The knowledge of natural history becomes part of a pedagogical strategy to affect social change through the domestic sphere by exercising and stretching the capacity of young minds:

I do not apprehend, Edward, that you or your brother will object to the first part of my plan through the fear of being required to remember what some boys of your age and his might call *hard names*. [...] You will both endeavour to assist Emily,

by explaining to her anything she may not understand. Orders, classes, species, are so far from being burdensome to the memory, that they greatly assist it; and serve to give a precise and determinate idea of the objects we desire to understand.⁶¹

Such a methodological grounding gained by studying natural history is a means to structuring a child's knowledge of the outer world and developing skills in categorization and logic. Dialogues of a didactic nature were a conventional and popular genre during the Georgian period, dating from Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1783), and were contemporaneous with a widespread debate about the efficacy and content of female education and the development of cheaper publishing for the mass market. In his study of such dialogues,⁶² Greg Myers (1989) notes the strong association of the genre with a radical and dissenting tradition that sought social reform through rationalist systematizing and individual improvement. These tracts personalized and dramatized natural history and other sciences, in Myers phrase, by 'introducing a fiction to teach about facts' to transform the textual representation of such information in order to popularize and interest a broad audience, often or usually of children and women.⁶³

In Smith's dialogues, despite the division of experience and youth, there is a strong sense that learning is a supportive, not isolated, process, creating affective and intellectual bonds both between children, and between children and adults.⁶⁴ This spirit of reciprocity balances Smith's reformist agenda which frequently infuses her books for younger readers with didactic purpose. Urban snobbery is quickly challenged in *Rural Walks* when Caroline is disabused of her prejudice that 'the country [...] was still a blank and the people she had hitherto seen were all twaddlers and quizzes'.⁶⁵ Like the literary bildungsroman, in these narratives young characters develop qualities which are formed through incidents that occur as they travel. A chance encounter with a 'frightful beggar' who initially strikes terror into the girls – ('suppose he should want to hurt us!') – subsequently provides the occasion for the more worldly Mrs Woodfield to teach a lesson in liberal kindness and anti-Malthusian charity.⁶⁶

Charlotte Smith stressed that natural history is pleasurable, not just for children but for all, claiming, for instance, that affection for flowers, 'the loveliest of nature's productions' is a response 'in some degree common to almost all the human race'. Botany has a particular propensity to elevate the human spirit, Smith suggests, because of the near universal appreciation of plants, even in the most unpromising circumstances: 'the humblest inhabitant of a garret has a few sprigs of mint or angelica, faintly attempting to vegetate in his wretched abode in some narrow alley, where it is hardly possible to breathe'.⁶⁷

Botany in particular has practical benefits for humanity that both Charlotte Smith and Priscilla Wakefield are keen to record, for example the economic use of plants as providers of foodstuffs, medicines, ornaments, dyes and other household goods. Botany, it is suggested, is a particularly appropriate and acceptable study for young women because it does not involve killing sentient species,⁶⁸ and is preferable to gossiping about the neighbours.⁶⁹ Furthermore, drawing plants is a more acceptable occupation than sketching figures which would inevitably involve studies 'which are not proper for a young woman', namely human anatomy.⁷⁰

The practice of botany as a physical and mental activity becomes a metonym for a more fundamental distinction between improving or deteriorating influences upon personal development and individual well-being. A creatively engaged and occupied mind that enjoys contentment, stability and mental health, is contrasted with intellectual torpor and the fear that inactivity might be enlivened with more dangerous diversions. Charlotte Smith, singling out botany in particular, urged that an interest in nature study absorbs mental and physical activity that might otherwise be taken up by less benign pursuits. It prevented dissipation such as the seductive distractions of the card table, cruelty and even 'vice'. To accompany Mrs Belmour for one moment as she commends botany to the children in *Minor Morals* as 'a resource' against:

The *tedium vitae*, or *ennui*, than which a greater evil can hardly be felt. The young person, who, tired of her work, and without any book that may be amusing or instructive to hand, can go into the garden and shrubbery, or among the meadows and hedges, and bring back a bouquet of flowers; who can either describe them singly with their various parts (of stalks, leaves, calyx, corolla, stamen, pistil, anther, and stigma, with the pollen or dust), or who can arrange them in a pleasing form together, and give her composition correctness and relief, need never give way to that mawkish indolence, that inanity of mind, which, if indulged, will render her burdensome to herself, and uninteresting to others. But a taste for the culture of flowers, or for copying the beauties our situation may not admit us to raise ourselves, is particularly adapted to women, is soothing to their mind, and refines their taste, while it prevents them from suffering from that want of motive to go into the air, and from yielding to that torpid ignorance which hurts alike the body and the mind.⁷¹

For Charlotte Smith, ever sensitive to the nuances of class habitus, this is a disease of 'affluent fortune' that again more frequently affects young women confined to sedentary lifestyles. However, she also advocated the broader study of natural history as suitable for the improvement of masculine qualities:

Young men in the army are rarely taught to have a taste for natural history, and consider every thing of that sort to be childish and useless. It would be well if they could be convinced, that what leisure they have [...] would be very advantageously applied to this branch of science, which is neither effeminate nor expensive, but leads to much of the best knowledge that man in any rank or profession can acquire.⁷²

Her care to stress that natural history is not 'effeminate' conveys Smith's suspicion that young soldiers did perceive the study in this way. This was a common late eighteenth-century perception; John Bennett, author of *Letters to a Young Lady* (1789), commended the study of natural history which he conceived to be 'particularly *feminine*'.⁷³ Smith's concern to redress the stigmatizing of concern for other species as effeminate is a consistent theme in several dialogues in which she challenges conventional constructions of masculinity. A typical episode which reverses such conventions occurs in *Conversations Introducing Poetry*, in which two boys, Harry and George, represent contrasting sensibilities. Harry mocks George for his refusal to take part in bloodsports. The hunting, fishing and shooting enthusiast, Harry, ridicules objections to badger-baiting: 'this is cruel, and t'other thing is cruel – why George, since you have been so much at home, you are become an absolute milksop! Just like a man milliner'.⁷⁴ Harry explicitly attributes George's weakness to spending too much time in the feminized domestic sphere of the home. However, Mrs Talbot makes it clear that Harry's boyish bravado is an indication that he will be a weak and ineffective human being who will 'probably become an ignorant dissipated man of fashion, who would be despised were he not rich; and will, like many other such people, blaze for a day, and be forgotten'. It is in the actual responses to life experiences that strength of character is demonstrated and when they are interrupted by the news that a little girl is drowning, it is George that takes charge of the situation and demonstrates bravery and humanity while Harry holds back, refusing to hurry to save 'a beggar's brat'. Such episodes exemplify the theory of desensitization as a central theme in the literature of sensibility; that childhood cruelty to animals is a rehearsal for cruelty to humans in adult life. The development of sympathy demonstrates true humanity and is therefore the real mark of manhood.

The familiar progression, via desensitization, from cruelty to animals to cruelty to humans was popularized in Hogarth's prints and theorized by Kant. In this sense the progressive development of a sympathetic self, one which is based upon humanity and reason, is a part of a wider educational project to which Smith, Wakefield and other contemporaries make a contribution in their influence over the morals of literate children. Whereas for Wordsworth the relationship with the natural world was primarily a dimension

of an exploration of the individual's growth and maturation, in the natural history dialogue personal, inter-relational and social aspects form more central concerns. Direct perpetration or acquiescence in animal cruelty in the marketplace has consequences for domestic relations between people, thus affecting society at large. Conversely, the improving cultivation of more sensitive children was held to benefit social harmony.

Wakefield had considerable success in publishing; no less than seventeen titles were published during her career.⁷⁵ Many young readers found the popular combination of narrative interest, anecdote and extraordinary facts in her natural history books compelling. Wakefield had a particular eye for the exceptional and unfamiliar; *Instinct Displayed*, for instance, features a tame badger that catches salmon and delivers them to his master and a cat that suckles leverets. Wakefield was also keen to convey the aesthetic beauty of the natural world:

The pleasures of sight delight us from our earliest years; and the whole visible world seems formed to gratify the eye. What beautiful effects are produced by the combination of the seven primary colours, displayed in the various tribes of animals and vegetables that surround us on all sides. From these seven colours proceed innumerable tints and shades, of exquisite beauty, and infinite variety [...]⁷⁶

However, Wakefield is careful to draw a distinction between the sensual pleasures available to all animals and the cerebral pleasures unique to humanity. She sets up an opposition between those 'chiefly corporeal pleasures, [...] enjoyed by man, in common with the inferior orders of animals' and those higher faculties attributable to the work of 'our beneficent Creator':

Man is a being of mixed nature, and derives his principal satisfaction from sources of a higher kind. The delights peculiar to him are intellectual: the pleasures of remembrance, the anticipations of hopes, the pursuits of the understanding, the intercourse of friendship, the consolations of sympathy, the union of satisfaction with the exercise of virtue, especially the social and benevolent virtues; and above all, the inexpressible recompense of a good conscience.⁷⁷

Shteir argues that Wakefield was motivated by a combination of a shrewd practicality in supplying the new and flourishing market for juvenile literature and fashion for natural history, together with a desire, influenced by her Quaker background, to impart the spiritual and moral improvement that she believed could be derived from a study of nature.⁷⁸ Kathryn Sutherland similarly suggests that Wakefield combined practical economics and social purpose in her writings, and, together with successful writers such as Wollstonecraft, Smith and Radcliffe, frequently attempted to bring to public notice the discrepancy between the

bourgeois ideal of femininity and the 'mounting concern that society cannot honour its commitment to the virtuous domestic icon of its own ideological construction'.⁷⁹ Such writers were forever conscious of both their own economic situation and the circumstances of countless unpartnered and working women who lived outside the protective embrace of the separate spheres presented in conduct books. In keeping with this broader conception of good conduct, the virtues Wakefield identifies in her books link the types of personal improvement to be gained through the study of the natural world to principled behaviour and well-being in human relationships.

Terror and Refugia in the Letters of Helen Maria Williams

Charlotte Smith's exhilaration upon reaching the Sussex countryside following incarceration in the debtor's prison was matched by Helen Maria Williams's (1761?-1827) account of consolation and refuge in the rural environs of Paris after being released from the confines of the Luxembourg Prison during the Terror. Smith described the beauty of the natural world, as a 'soft, pure' and 'soothing' space away from the 'terror' suffered in prison. For Williams too, the natural world existed as a place of familiarity and sanctuary in sharp contrast to the oppressive realities of city life. Williams's autobiographical account, published as one of the *Letters from France*⁸⁰ is factual yet dramatized and even, according to Angela Keane, set within a 'romance frame'.⁸¹ Williams recollected the extreme terror and panic of the moment of her arrest only as partially connected details which, in retrospect, she curiously visualized like a picturesque landscape in spots of time:

Sometimes, under the pressure of a great calamity, the most acute sensations are excited by little circumstances which form a part of the whole, and serve in the retrospect of memory, like certain points in a landscape, to call up the surrounding scenery: such is the feeling with which I recall the moments when, having got out of our apartments, we stood upon the stair-case surrounded with guards [...]⁸²

Williams subsequently used the figure of a beautiful landscape to come to terms with her embittered experiences of prison life. In a striking letter of 1794 she recounts how a picturesque tapestry inspired her to contemplate the beauties of the natural world and so gain some small respite from her captivity through the power of the imagination:

To be seated at the foot of those sheltering hills which embosomed some mimic habitations, or beneath a mighty elm which rose majestically in the fore-ground of the piece, and spread its thick foliage over a green slope, appeared to me to the summit of earthly felicity.⁸³

Unfortunately, the process of association and the imaginative consolation caused by this 'pleasing illusion' became inversely mirrored long after Williams had attained her freedom. So persistent was the effect of this tapestry, that Williams found that, because her imagination had become 'disordered', she responded to scenes of natural beauty in Switzerland by recalling her incarceration.

When describing her release immediately following six months of imprisonment, Williams sets up a polarized contrast between the pastoral space to which she retreats outside the city, and zones which still held danger because of their proximity to the ongoing violence of political persecution. Williams undertakes a sustained engagement with Burke in which she explores the implications of the revolutionary events themselves through figurative representations of the sublime and the beautiful.⁸⁴ Two highly charged spaces are opposed in a series of substantial distinctions; never has the contrast between city and country been so extreme. The defilement of humanity and sense of horror in the city woods is sharply counterpointed to the open pastoral terrain to which Williams escapes.

Enclosed woodland environments are often more threatening spaces for women, and again in this instance there is a familiar gendered distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. These woods are associated not only with the terror of the dangerous characters that inhabit them but directly with the Terror as a historical and political moment:

[...] We no longer dared, as we had done the preceding year, to forget awhile the horrors of our situation by wandering occasionally amidst the noble parks of St. Cloud, the wild woods of Meudon, or the elegant gardens of Bellevue, all within an hour's ride of Paris. Those seats, once the residency of fallen royalty, were now haunted by vulgar despots, by revolutionary commissaries, by spies of the police, and sometimes by the sanguinary decemvirs themselves. Often they held their festive orgies in those scenes of beauty, where they dared to cast their polluting glance on nature, and tread with profane steps her hallowed recesses. Even the revolutionary jury used sometimes on a decadi, the only suspension from their work of death, to go to Marly or Versailles; and, steeped as they were to the very lips in blood, without being haunted by the mangled spectres of those whom they had murdered the preceding day, they saw nature in her most benign aspect, pleading the cause of humanity and mercy, and returned to feast upon the groans of those whom they were to murder on the morrow.⁸⁵

The former Royal estates are emphatically personified as female nature. Once 'noble', 'wild', and elegant', they have now been subjected to the violation expressed by the syntactic antagonism between 'profane' and 'hallowed'. The physical presence of the 'despots' is impressed upon the degradation and disenchantment of a now fallen countryside, itself a victim toppled by the sweep of history as surely as any political

dynasty.⁸⁶ Steven Blakemore suggests that Williams might be inferring a 'repetitive link between the Jacobins and the Old Regime'.⁸⁷

It is quite clear that, however beautiful nature may be, in such an extreme political situation it is human presence that defines nature; nature does not have the transformative power to change sensibility or lead to the love of humankind. Although the regime's functionaries might still enjoy the opportunity for repose in the parks, they have become so desensitized that their response is limited and they are not open to the moral and humanitarian benefits of nature that is the Romantic standard of the civilized being. Ironically, it is Williams's personified nature that pleads the cause of humanity because such inhumane humans are no longer unable to do so.

By contrast, the open country to which Williams retreats with her family is safer, although they continue to endure rigorous surveillance. This more open terrain is bucolic, 'unfrequented', though not unpopulated because of the presence of a single shepherd. Williams's delight at reaching such a countryside is not the abandoned experience of the solitary wanderer but pleasure in finding a space subject to less official control in which she can enjoy stolen and shared moments with her mother and sisters. Williams's contradictory feelings and anxieties about the course of revolutionary events are displaced onto the natural environment in sharply defined dystopian and utopian spaces. The space of refugia is constructed in terms of the beautiful and is described in terms such as: 'charming variety', 'unfrequented', 'soothing', 'graces', 'congenial', 'delicious fragrance', 'stillness', 'soft rustling'. The environs of Paris, safer than the city centre, are constructed as a place where the self, suffering a psychic pain that would now be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress syndrome, can grieve, recuperate and begin to heal:

The hills were fringed with clouds, which still reflected the fading colours of the day; the woods were in deep shadow; a soft veil was thrown over nature, and objects indistinctly seen were decorated by imagination with those graces which were most congenial to the feelings of the moment. The air was full of delicious fragrance, and the stillness of the scene was only disturbed by sounds the most soothing in nature, the soft rustling of the leaves, or the plaintive notes of the wood-pigeon. The tears with which the spectacle of the guillotine had petrified with horror now flowed again with melancholy luxury.⁸⁸

This description of being lulled and immersed or enfolded in nature is suggestive of a foetal cocooning, an effect enhanced by the sibilance of words such as 'soothing', and the repetition of 'soft'. In an exploration of female metaphors of landscape in American literature, Annette Kolodny, while conscious of the limitations of such representations of

women as nature, argues that 'the mother's body, as the first ambience experienced by the infant, becomes a kind of archetypal primary landscape to which subsequent perceptual configurations of space are related'.⁸⁹ Williams's sense of a comfortable, though temporary and provisional dwelling in the land recalls, again in Kolodny's words, 'the parameters of the original home, the maternal embrace (or even, perhaps, the womb)'.⁹⁰ This primal sense of physical security and well-being is given great emphasis in Bachelard's discussion of human hiding-places and homely dwellings that echo nests and burrows in which 'physically, the creature endowed with a sense of refuge huddles up to itself, takes to cover, hides away, lies snug, concealed'.⁹¹

Williams's demonstration of her own continued ability to respond sensitively and imaginatively to the natural environment implicitly enables her to distinguish herself from the bloodthirsty excesses of the Terror and the state apparatus in a society riven by class conflict. Able to weep once more, her humane response elevates her as a moderate in touch with the sights, scents and sounds of the hills and woods, and thus morally distanced from the violence and corruption of Robespierre's regime. The space enables Williams to become human again, not frozen with terror as she had earlier been as an eyewitness of political executions. Williams's refusal to leave France and to lapse into reaction and Francophobia, despite her profound disillusionment with this regime, leads to the doubling of a sense of exile. She had betrayed her origins according to nationalist discourse, because she was situated on the opposite side of an embattled geographical and political boundary. Williams adapted the conventionally private genre of the letter into a public form, and so faced accusations by critics at home, such as Laetitia Hawkins that, as a woman, she was transgressing propriety by speaking out as a political commentator on public events.⁹² She was also exiled in the countryside within France itself through her critical and hence vulnerable position outside the power structure of the new body politic.

Williams's political discourse about nature, which makes use of a language that opposes defilement to purity, became an emblematic displacement of the torments of social division and conflict. Jack Fruchtman notes that the often-gendered pairs of oppositions in Williams's prose, which rhetorically divide nature and anti-nature, reflect the author's commitment to the Girondins rather than the Jacobin faction of the Convention.⁹³ However, such oppositions can be fluid and, just as the reason and passion of revolutionary *vertu* may overflow into atrocity, Williams's new found rural idyll remains dangerously adjacent to the barriers of the city. Even while she, and her close female relatives, experience intense pleasure in spending time in the countryside they are aware that their movements are monitored by the state and that they are fugitives who could only risk a return to Paris 'on

forfeiture of [their] heads'. Furthermore, the pre-lapsarian reaches of the pastoral countryside themselves geographically eclipse the perilous liminal space of the despot-haunted woods.

It was not until overthrow of the Triumvirate (Robespierre, St. Just and Couthon), and the momentary political relaxation of the Directory, that both Williams and the French population were able to emerge from the frozen and barren underworld of the Terror. Regeneration became possible in the blighted land, as if Demeter were allowing the resurgence of seasonal change as *Ventôse* finally gave way to *Germinal*:

Upon the fall of Robespierre, the terrible spell which bound the land of France was broken; the shrieking whirlwinds, the black precipices, the bottomless gulphs, suddenly vanished; and reviving nature covered the wastes with flowers, and the rocks with verdure.⁹⁴

The Green Shadows of Elizabeth Barrett

The sense of a shared pleasure in the presence of the natural world is evident too in a very different expressive letter from Elizabeth Barrett to Robert Browning. In Barrett's love letter, written shortly before their wedding and elopement to Italy, a powerful individual experience is transformed into an occasion for emotional bonding. The gesture is not weakened by Barrett's recognition that her partner might not be able to fully empathize with her own deep personal connection with the 'green shadow' which so profoundly affected her sense of beauty and imagination.

On 29 May 1846 Elizabeth Barrett stole a flower from the botanical gardens and enclosed it with the letter in which she wrote:

What I enjoy most to see, is the green under the green [...] Where the grass stretches under the trees. *That* is something unspeakable to me, in the beauty of it. And to stand under a tree and feel the green shadow of it! I never knew before the difference of the *sensation* of a green shadow and a brown one. I seemed to feel that green shadow through and through me, till it went out at the soles of my feet and mixed with the other green below. Is it nonsense or not? – Remember that by too much use we lose the knowledge and apprehension of things, and that I may feel therefore what you do not feel. But in everything I felt *you* and always, dearest beloved, you were nearer to me than the rest.⁹⁵

In Barrett's description there is a mystical and visionary sense that in certain rare and highly charged moments the boundaries of her self are mutable and can intermingle with something living beyond her own bodily limits. In distinction to the Wordsworthian approach which formed the framework of her inheritance for literary descriptions of the natural environment,

Barrett does not make her surroundings herself, but somehow allows them to pass through her and exist unaltered. Barrett criticized Wordsworth as a writer who similarly absorbed nature, but only as a part of an imaginary transformation by which it was compulsively reshaped in his own mind's image. In this passage the green shadow that goes 'through and through' her is left unaltered: it is Barrett herself that is touched by the experience. Her identification of her own life force and vitality (elevated from chronic illness by her new relationship with Browning) with that of a tree, had been an affiliation already described in a letter to her close friend, Mary Mitford: 'I have been growing & growing just like the trees – it is miraculous, the feeling of sprouting life in me & out of me.'⁹⁶

There is, however, an anxiety about the authenticity of her own response. This uncertainty is evident in her wish to ground her sensation in another, and to verify the experience through him. She feels confident that Browning will be able to respond to her sensation as a soul mate and be interested even if he proves unable to directly share the experience; partly of course because he is not physically present and can only experience the moment vicariously through her evocation of it and her love token, the now dried and pressed flower. There may be also a distrust of the excessive intellectualism that can cause one to 'lose the knowledge and apprehension of things', again a call for direct sensory experience. Her theft of the flower adds a sense of misdemeanour and transgressive thrill, which doubly bonds him to her as an unwitting accomplice.

Natural subjects then are beneficial in enhancing mental performance by developing methodical habits for structuring experiences of the physical world and encouraging a diversity of aesthetic impulses that stimulate the creative faculties to optimal responses. However, some of these literary examples indicate that it has been understood by many writers and artists that the psychological value of other species resides in the emotional value afforded by creating occasions for the forging of interpersonal bonds. A large part of the Romantic value of nature has been associated with the absence of other people and refuge from the threat they represent. However, such experience of nature is deeply gendered. A broader reading reveals that Romantic and Victorian writing about the natural world invites a range of different representations of interpersonal partnerships: empathy between friends, romantic and erotic assignations, bonds of kinship and intellectual alliances.

¹ Ellen Nussey, 'Reminiscences of Charlotte Brontë', *Scribner's Magazine*, (May 1871), 18-31 (p. 31).

² Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females: A Poem* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), p. 6. Biblical allusion to II Peter 2. 10.

³ Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, especially p. 33 and p. 19. There is an underlying ambivalence in feminism's twin aspirations. The struggle of liberal feminists for empowerment within the existing hierarchical power structure coexists with a contrary volition on the part of socialist and radical feminists to deconstruct and disperse the prevailing political system altogether, given the historical complicity of this structure in the marginalization of the political and moral status of women designated as 'other', more natural beings. On the one hand there is a necessary aspiration towards personal autonomy, a liberating and progressive impulse, but at the same time recognition of its limits, given the fictive nature of autonomy as a (patriarchal) delusion.

⁴ Susan M. Levin, 'Romantic Prose and Feminine Romanticism', *Prose Studies*, 10.2 (September 1987), 178-95 (p. 193).

⁵ *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward, with Extracts from Her Literary Correspondence*, ed. by Walter Scott, 3 vols (Edinburgh: John Ballantyne, 1810), III, pp. 34-38.

⁶ Seward was likely to have been familiar with Elizabeth Carter's poem, 'To a Gentleman, on his Intending to Cut Down a Grove to Enlarge his Prospect' which may be read as a companion poem on the same theme (from *Poems on Several Occasions* [1738]). The Bluestocking poet condemned 'the sacrilegious hand' that would 'violate the shade'. In Carter's poem the feminine plea of a 'weeping Hamadryad' mourns the threat to her trees. The more subtle human benefits of 'contemplation' and 'thought' are counter to the urge to dominate the landscape, to gain an omniscient perspective and to indulge 'sensual taste'. For Carter, the grove, with its classical associations, represents qualities of mind and longevity against the sensory and transient pleasure of the gaze. This poem is sometimes cited as 'To Dr Walywn: On His Design of Cutting Down a Shady Walk'.

⁷ Although home and hearth were sanctified as feminine space in innumerable Christian tracts of the age, in reality the domestic realm was often an insecure retreat from the encroachments of the world. Among the prominent Romantic women writers, Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson both spent several months accompanying their husbands in debtors' prisons, while Helen Maria Williams, being a Welsh national, was, as we shall see, taken from her home and detained in captivity in France and Anna Laetitia Barbauld was attacked with a knife by her mentally delusional and ultimately suicidal husband, to whom she remained devoted.

⁸ Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', pp. 67-87 in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974).

⁹ Notable contributions to this debate are the following: Lynda Birke, *Women, Feminism and Biology: The Feminist Challenge* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Press, 1986); Janet Biehl, *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1991); Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993); Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993); Kate Soper, *What is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

¹⁰ Plumwood, in particular, explores 'classical logic' (p. 2) in the form of the dualistic inheritance of Plato and the influence of Descartes on Enlightenment thought in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.

¹¹ Biehl, *Finding Our Way*, p. 13.

¹² Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 9.

¹³ Biehl critiques the shortcomings of ecofeminism extensively in *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*. She argues that there is a central confusion over the issue of the social construction of nature among contributors to the key ecofeminist collections, *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. by Judith Plant (London: Green Print, 1989) and *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. by Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1990). See *Finding Our Way*, p. 17.

¹⁴ William C. Snyder, 'Mother Nature's Other Natures: Landscape in Women's Writing, 1770-1830', *Women's Studies*, 22.2 (1992), 143-62.

¹⁵ Without committing oneself to an analytical quest for an essential *écriture féminine verte*, embodying universal qualities to be made lucid by textual revelation, an author's social identity and life experience are inevitably embedded in the point of view that informs and structures any literary text.

¹⁶ See Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 3. The fact of exclusion from the electoral system prevented women, and men without the franchise, from intervening directly in the political events of the day, and necessitated more oblique commentary upon political issues. It was held to be more appropriate for women to influence wider society through the domestic sphere and immediate community rather than through public activity. See Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 3.

¹⁷ Mitzi Myers ironically suggests that 'the period's most prolific fictionist was surely "A Lady"', 'Sensibility and the "Walk of Reason" – Mary Wollstonecraft's Literary Reviews as Cultural Critique', in *Sensibility in Transformation – Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics: Essays in Honor of Jean H. Hagstrum*, ed. by Syndy McMillen Conger (Rutherford: Fairleigh University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1990), p. 122. The title-page of *Frankenstein* omitted Mary Shelley's name altogether, until the second edition (1823); reviewers widely assumed that a man had penned the novel.

¹⁸ Letter to W. S. Williams, 21 September 1849. Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* [1856], ed. by Alan Shelston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 383.

¹⁹ Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 173.

²⁰ *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 300.

²¹ Mrs. [Felicia Dorothea] Hemans, *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans*, reprinted from the early editions (London: Frederick Warne, 1891), p. 523.

²² In company with William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron. The long-term critical selectivity which placed a primary emphasis focus upon male poets was particularly consolidated by M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1958). Such a focus obscures the fact that women poets often secured a substantial readership during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the most published poet during the nineteenth century was Felicia Hemans. See Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 182.

²³ Substantial recent anthologies are the following: *Romantic Women Poets 1788-1848*, ed. by Andrew Ashfield, 2 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); *Women Romantic Poets 1785-1832: An Anthology*, ed. by Jennifer Breen (London: Dent, 1992); *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology*, ed. by Paula F. Feldman (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); *British Women Poets 1660-1800: An Anthology*, ed. by Joyce Fullard (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1990); *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). The expansion of access to such material made possible by new media such as the internet may also, as David S. Maill suggests, provide a further substantial and lasting challenge to canonical obstacles to availability. David S. Maill, 'Electronic Romanticism: The CD', in *Romanticism on the Net*, 1 (February 1996). (World wide web, accessed 24 January 1997: http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/rom_cd.html). It remains to be seen what adjustments to the corpus of Romantic texts currently scrutinized might be called for by the broader exploration of non-canonical and decanonized male writers following the great expansion of interest in John Clare. In speaking of decanonized writers I am thinking of those such as Robert Southey (who might be disappointed to discover that his most frequently read text is now 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'), William Cowper, William Hayley or the widely mocked Henry James Pye, who, despite considerable prominence during their own lifetimes, are now less fashionable Romantic writers.

²⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Mary*, pp. 53-54.

²⁵ Davies, *Romanticism and Esoteric Tradition*, p. 91. A century earlier Kropotkin had affirmed:

Compassion also means a considerable advance in general intelligence and sensibility. It is the first step towards the development of higher moral sentiments. It is, in its turn, a powerful factor of further evolution.

(*Mutual Aid*, p. 62).

²⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Mary*, pp. 48-49.

²⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Mary*, p. 66.

²⁸ In the Penguin edition, Richard Holmes notes that *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* was one of Wollstonecraft's favourite books and that the epistolary *Short Residence* was in part modelled on its

confessional tone. Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence*, p. 282. The recipient of Wollstonecraft's letters was Gilbert Imlay.

²⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence*, p. 131.

³⁰ She was accompanied on her tour by her young daughter Fanny and her maid Marguerite.

³¹ Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence*, p. 132. William Hazlitt provocatively satirized parochial attitudes in an essay entitled 'Character of the Country People' (1819). In particular he despised the lack of cultural feeling for natural beauty he experienced in Wordsworth's own Lake District, predicting that not one among 'the united counties of Westmorland, Cumberland, and Durham [will] subscribe to lighten the London warehouses of a single copy of the *Excursion*'. He further added, anecdotally, 'An artist who was making a sketch of a fine old yew tree in a romantic situation, was asked by a *knowing hand*, if he could tell how many foot of timber it contained?' *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, XVII, p. 68.

³² Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence*, p. 156.

³³ For which Wollstonecraft gently but sincerely chides Imlay, in Letter Twenty-Four (*Short Residence*, p. 191).

³⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence*, p. 194. Wollstonecraft was effectively Imlay's commercial representative on this journey. Mary Jacobus suggests that her increasing distaste for commerce was based on painful personal experience of corruption, dishonesty and vicious competition and was symptomatic of her own ailing relationship with Imlay, which by this time had proved to be a poor emotional investment. See *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 76-77.

³⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence*, p. 160.

³⁶ Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

³⁷ 'On Poetry and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature' (1797), *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* VII, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1989), p. 7.

³⁸ Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle* [1788], ed. by Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (London: Open University Press, 1971), pp. 359-60.

³⁹ Jane Austen, *Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon* [1817], ed. by Margaret Drabble (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 184.

⁴⁰ Wollstonecraft, 'On Poetry', p. 10.

⁴¹ Aikin, *Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry*, p. 4.

⁴² Wollstonecraft, 'On Poetry', pp. 8-9.

⁴³ Aikin likewise mocked the 'ordinary versifier' of his day for being incapable of describing the morning 'without rosy fingers and dewy locks, or Spring without flowers and showers, love and groves' (*Essay on the Application of Natural History*, p. 6).

⁴⁴ Wollstonecraft, 'On Poetry', p. 9.

⁴⁵ Wollstonecraft, 'On Poetry', p. 9. The title indicates Wollstonecraft's direct debt to Aikin who spoke of the 'relish for the beauties of poetry' in his *Essay on the Application of Natural History*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Aikin, *Essay on the Application of Natural History*, p. 154. When William Wordsworth commended direct experience of the natural world as a means of burnishing the more abstract nature derived from books, he was describing a process that was in keeping with an already established critical tradition.

⁴⁷ Wollstonecraft, 'On Poetry', p. 10.

⁴⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence*, p. 83.

⁴⁹ Namely, Charlotte Smith's *Rural Walks: In Dialogues: Intended for the Use of Young Persons* (1795); *Rambles Farther: A Continuation of Rural Walks* (1796); *Minor Morals: Interpreted with Sketches of Natural History, Historical Anecdotes and Original Stories* (1804); *Conversations Introducing Poetry: Chiefly on Subjects of Natural History. For the Use of Children and Young Persons* (1804); *The Natural History of Birds: Intended Chiefly for Young Persons* (1807). Priscilla Wakefield's *Mental Improvement: or, the Beauties and Wonders of Nature and Art* (1794-7); *An Introduction to Botany* (1796); *Domestic Recreation: or Dialogues Illustrative of Natural and Scientific Subjects* (1805); *Instinct Displayed* (1811); *An Introduction to the Natural History and Classification of Insects* (1816).

⁵⁰ Elizabeth A. Fay attributes the development of children's literature as a literary genre to writers such as Charlotte Smith, Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Mary Lamb. See *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998), p. 22.

⁵¹ Charlotte Smith is a member of that disparate group of non-canonical writers that could be called the major-minor Romantics. Smith's position in literary history has been secure but marginal. The

standard biography by F. M. A. Hilbish has now finally been succeeded by the publication of Loraine Fletcher's *Critical Biography* which reawakens interest and consolidates her presence in literary heritage. Florence May Anna Hilbish, *Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist (1749-1806)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941). Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). Smith's reputation now rests upon her part in the revival of the sonnet as a poetic form. See Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 30-31). She was acknowledged as an influence by Wordsworth (see *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest de Sélincourt, 2nd edn, rev. by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), I, p. 381) and Coleridge. Her most popular novels *Emmeline* and *The Old Manor House*, continue to be read and admired today. Over the past decade, the feminist critical project to reclaim women's literary history has generated a fresh interest in this writer who was respected as a leading poet and novelist in her day. Recent anthologies of Romantic women poets have brought examples of her verse back into print and the substantial re-publication of her poetry makes her work again readily available for critical attention (*The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Stuart Curran (New York: Open University Press, 1993).

⁵² Mrs. [Catherine Ann Turner] Dorset [1750?-1817?], 'Charlotte Smith', published in Sir Walter Scott, *The Lives of the Novelists* (London: Dent, 1929), p. 307. In *Beachy Head*, Charlotte Smith recalled:

[...] I compar'd
With the polluted smoky atmosphere
And dark and stifling streets, the southern hills.
(lines 290-91)

⁵³ Cited by Mrs. Dorset, 'Charlotte Smith', p. 315. A century later, in circumstances less extreme but perhaps equally wretched, Edward Carpenter, like Smith, found his 'favorite refuge' in the rolling countryside of the Sussex Downs:

How can I describe, how shall I not recall, the thoughts which came to me as I wandered, towards the close of my school time, over these same hills – the brooding ill-defined, half-shapen thoughts? The Downs were my escape; even in their most chill and lonely moods they were my escape from a worse coldness and loneliness, which, except for a few boyfriends at school, I somehow experienced during all that time. Nature was more to me I believe, than any human attachment, and the Downs were my Nature. It was among them at a later time that I first began to write a few verses.

(Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, pp. 26 and 27-28).

⁵⁴ Charlotte Smith, *Natural History of Birds*, pp. 45-6.

⁵⁵ William Hazlitt, 'On the Love of the Country', *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, IV, p. 18.

⁵⁶ Hazlitt, 'On the Love of the Country', p. 18.

⁵⁷ Hazlitt, 'On the Love of the Country', p. 20.

⁵⁸ In *The Rainbow* it is this particularly familiar and evocative species that prompts Lydia Lensky to recall, with some unease, younger and happier times: 'Primroses glimmered around, many of them and she stooped to the disturbing influence near her feet, she even picked one or two flowers, faintly remembering in the new colour of life, what had been [...]' D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* [1915], ed. by Mark Kinkead-Weekes in *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters and Works of D. H. Lawrence*, 30 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 51.

⁵⁹ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 5. At the same time, anything one is attached to in such a way makes one vulnerable and able to be exploited as such. Matilda, the unhappily married narrator of Sophia Lee's novel, *The Recess*, finds that the 'surrounding woods' of her youth are cut down by her husband not only to improve the prospect and to make profit from their value as timber but to:

[...] deprive me of an inanimate object of affection, of which Lord Arlington still entertained a jealousy as excessive as preposterous. This proposition met the strongest opposition from me on every account; it was dreadful to think of annihilating every trace of my youth; every object which could remind me I had ever been beloved or connected.

The Recess, or a Tale of Other Times, 3 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1785), II, pp. 283-84.

⁶⁰ Charlotte Smith, *Natural History of Birds*, p.3.

⁶¹ Charlotte Smith, *Natural History of Birds*, p.5.

- ⁶² Greg Myers, 'Science for Women and Children: The Dialogue of Popular Science in the Nineteenth Century', pp. 171-200 in *Nature Transfigured: Science and Literature 1700-1900*, ed. by John Christie and Sally Shuttleworth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).
- ⁶³ Myers, 'Science for Women and Children', p. 176.
- ⁶⁴ David W. Orr suggests that biophilia requires the active guidance of caring adults if it is to be instilled and developed in children in 'Love it or Lose it: The Coming Biophilia Revolution', *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, ed. by Stephen R. Kellert and Edward O. Wilson, p. 428.
- ⁶⁵ Charlotte Smith, *Rural Walks in Dialogues: Intended for the use of Young Persons*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1795), I, p. 32.
- ⁶⁶ Charlotte Smith, *Rural Walks*, I, p. 50.
- ⁶⁷ Smith, *Conversations Introducing Poetry*, I, p. 67. No doubt Smith was in part recalling her own unhappy experiences of London life.
- ⁶⁸ Smith, *Conversations*, II, pp. 64-65.
- ⁶⁹ Smith, *Rural Walks*, I, p. 151.
- ⁷⁰ Charlotte Smith, *Minor Morals: Interspersed with Sketches of Natural History, Historical Anecdotes and Original Stories*, 2 vols (London: Sampson Low, 1798), I, p. 32.
- ⁷¹ Charlotte Smith, *Minor Morals*, I, pp. 37-39.
- ⁷² Charlotte Smith, *Natural History of Birds*, p. 116.
- ⁷³ John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady, On a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects, Calculated to Improve the Heart, To Form the Manners, and Enlighten the Understanding* [1789], 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell, junior, and W. Davies, 1795), I, p. 198.
- ⁷⁴ Smith, *Conversations Introducing Poetry*, I, p. 22.
- ⁷⁵ Ann B. Shteir writes about Wakefield in 'Priscilla Wakefield's Natural History Books', *From Linnaeus to Darwin: Commentaries on the History of Biology and Geology. Papers from the Fifth Easter Meeting of the Society for the History of Natural History 28-31 March, 1983, 'Natural History in the early Nineteenth Century'*, ed. by Alwynne Wheeler and James H. Price (London: Society for the History of Natural History, 1985), pp. 29-36 and *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughter's and Botany in England 1760 to 1860* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 83-89.
- ⁷⁶ Wakefield, *Instinct Displayed*, p. 185.
- ⁷⁷ Wakefield, *Instinct Displayed*, p. 186.
- ⁷⁸ Shteir, 'Priscilla Wakefield's Natural History Books', p. 34.
- ⁷⁹ See Kathryn Sutherland, 'Writings on Education and Conduct: Arguments for Female Improvement', p. 38 in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*, ed. by Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- ⁸⁰ Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, eight volumes in two, facsimile reproductions with an introduction by Janet M. Todd. (Delmar, NY: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975). Photoreprint of the 5th ed. (1796) of Letters written in France, published by T. Cadell, London: and of the 1795-96 ed. of Letters containing a sketch of the politics of France, published by G. G. and J. Robinson, London).
- ⁸¹ Angela Keane, 'Helen Maria Williams's *Letters from France*: A National Romance', *Prose Studies*, 15.3 (December 1992), 271-94 (p. 280). In Williams's terrorized woods enchantment is destroyed by sacrilege 'the fairy scenes have been polluted, the wizard bowers profaned', (*Letters from France*, Vol. 2, III, 85). Williams records that she had been in a 'fairy land' evoked by a conversation with the novelist and naturalist, Bernardin, about his beautiful new home, when she was interrupted by news that foreign nationals were to be arrested by state decree. After a sleepless night a sense of bathos set in as Williams assumed that, together with her mother and sisters, Persis and Cecile, they were to be spared as female *citoyennes*. The call from the commissaries of the revolutionary committee therefore dealt a second shock of the unexpected the following night.
- ⁸² Williams, *Letters from France*, Vol. 2, I, p. 9.
- ⁸³ Williams, *Letters from France*, Vol. 2, I, p. 37.
- ⁸⁴ See Steven Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press and London: Associated University Presses, 1997), Chapter 11.
- ⁸⁵ Williams, *Letters from France*, Vol. 2, II, pp. 2-3.
- ⁸⁶ Simon Schama records that many French woodlands were decimated during the Revolutionary Wars. The relaxation of the old customs and codes of the *ancien regime* left the woods vulnerable to the uncontrolled grazing of livestock and caused the boles of the trees to meet the blades of a rural populace desperate for fuel. See *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 180.

⁸⁷ Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation*, p. 189.

⁸⁸ Williams, *Letters from France*, Vol. 2, II, p. 9.

⁸⁹ Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 156.

⁹⁰ Kolodny, *Lay of the Land*, p. 152.

⁹¹ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 91.

⁹² Laetitia Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind* (1793). See Keane, 'Helen Maria Williams', p. 287.

⁹³ Jack Fruchtman, jr, 'Public Loathing, Private Thoughts: Historical Representation in Helen Maria Williams' *Letters from France*', *Prose Studies*, 18.3 (December 1995), 223-43 (pp. 228-29).

⁹⁴ Williams, *Letters from France*, Vol. 2, II, p. 190.

⁹⁵ *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett 1845-1846*, 1, pp. 740-41.

⁹⁶ Letter of 21 June 1845. *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford 1836-1854*, ed. by Meredith B. Raymond and Mary Rose Sullivan, 3 vols (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 1983), III, p. 120.



WANDERING LONELY: WOMEN'S ACCESS TO THE ROMANTIC COUNTRYSIDE

I was asking a girl this morning if she still took her long walks; and she said she was as fond of them as ever, but that they could only walk in the town now – the field or country walks were not safe for ladies alone. Indeed, I fancy the girls lose all care for, or knowledge of the spring or the summer – except as they bring new fashions into the shop windows.
(Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*)¹

The Hedging-in of Women's Terrain

William Wordsworth famously 'wandered lonely as a cloud', and his 'Daffodils' perfectly exemplifies the Romantic peripatetic poem. One can imagine his steps pacing out the metrical feet of the poem's iambic pentameters as he meanders in an apparent ecstasy of abandon. Wordsworth's 1802 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads* sets out his universalizing claim for the poet to be a 'man speaking to men'.² Feminist critics, such as Ellen Moers, have long since deconstructed the masculinist assumptions of such a declaration so there is no need to retread this ground here.³ However, Wordsworth's aspiration to write 'out of repeated experience and regular feelings' does raise the question of whether the opportunity to wander the countryside was a pleasure open to everyone.⁴ How safe *was* it to wander 'lonely as a cloud' in the countryside of 1804?

Access to the countryside cannot be assumed to be enjoyed equally and unproblematically by all members of society. Clearly, women could not always benefit from the same opportunities to wander the countryside alone as men. Several impediments existed for women enjoying uninhibited rambling by themselves and therefore difficulties were encountered in meditating, finding consolation and writing about the natural world on the Wordsworthian model. Cultural conventions and prohibitions concerning appropriate female conduct expressed underlying assumptions about gender difference. This difference specifically framed the literary dynamic of the solitary wanderer, often troped as a binary opposition between masculine sublimity and feminine beauty. Such considerations were accompanied by more immediate physical difficulties, including the legal interdictions of class legislation and the perils of sexual attack.

It is significant, given the central importance of solitary musing as the creative inspiration for poetry during the Romantic period (indeed, John Stuart Mill defined poetry as 'the natural fruit of solitude and meditation'),⁵ that such defining moments of Romantic

sensibility were less available to women. Much masculine Romantic poetry of solitary wandering incorporates a notion of the sublime and pivots upon a struggle with, and transcendence of, nature, figuratively gendered as female. The association between women and nature operates according to a dualistic perspective that also sets women in opposition to culture. Within the conventions of this dominant perspective, women are held to be inherently closer to 'nature' than men. This identification can weigh against women's subjective literary expression as poets in as much as to be designated nature is to be aligned with the antithesis of culture – and hence poetry itself – according to the dynamics of the paradigm within which such a metaphor operates. In the words of Margaret Homans (1980), 'Mother Nature's not a helpful model for women aspiring to be poets. She is prolific biologically, not linguistically, and she is as destructive as she is creative.'⁶

Physical obstacles to wandering included the enclosure of the land, a process largely completed by the mid-nineteenth century. Landowners restricted access in order to protect property, safeguard their interest in blood sports and preserve the privacy of their estates. Enclosure represented a substantial extension of the proprietary grip upon what was formerly common land. For women, sexual harassment was a possibility, perhaps restricting the areas and times in which it was considered safe to wander. Furthermore, there was a risk that unaccompanied forays into the countryside could violate codes of propriety regarding gender and social status. For most rural labourers, lacking educational opportunities and available leisure time, recreational musing was an improbable luxury.

In practice, the Romantic trope of the solitary wanderer, which looked to human improvement through the expression of elevated, direct encounters with the natural world, was determined by cultural context and less readily translated to the experience of women writers. The Romantic convention of the melancholic, peripatetic poet quickly reveals problematic gender issues. The pleasure of a meditative stroll along rural byways, whether in open or enclosed countryside, cannot be taken for granted because the issue of access to the countryside is a complex one. Historically, geographical space, both rural and urban, has always been contested: factors such as class, gender and age all intersect to determine who may wander where. The largely invisible boundaries to spatial mobility were enforced by custom, convention and legal restraint.

The Allure of Languor: Sedentary Lives and the Enclosure of Woman

The convention of the separate spheres, most fully defined in Rousseau's *Emile* (1762), held it to be 'natural' for men to act in the public, outside world and for women to be confined to the private and the domestic realm. His insistence upon the distinct but complementary nature of the sexes is based upon the social implications of a difference that is initially biological. Rousseau exaggerates such difference in his discussion of Sophie and Emile. The desire to wander and a love of outdoor activity becomes an issue of gender, conflating the female with the feminine. For Rousseau, woman is more biologically determined and her 'proper purpose' is to produce children.⁷ She therefore 'needs a soft and sedentary life to suckle her children', while men, he believes, will always be characterized by more robustness in outdoor pursuits. He asks rhetorically: 'will she suddenly go from shade, enclosure, and domestic cares to the harshness of the open air [...]'.⁸ Rousseau enforces a gendered polarity by contrasting the physical suitability of the male body for masculine exertions. It is Emile who is eager to escape enclosure within the home and wander the countryside:

To reduce him all of a sudden to a soft and sedentary life would be to imprison him, to enchain him, to keep him in a violent and constrained state. I do not doubt that his disposition and his health would be equally corrupted. He can hardly breathe at his ease in a well-closed room. He needs fresh air, movement, toil. Even when he is at Sophie's knee, he cannot prevent himself from sometimes looking at the countryside out of the corner of his eye and desiring to roam it with her.⁹

Rousseau accentuates his construction of gendered difference by using the same phrase, 'soft and sedentary' that he used to describe women earlier in Book V. Clearly, a 'sedentary' existence is opposed to one that wanders and roams. Equally, to be always identified in relation to partner and children is to be denied the possibilities of solitary experience. Furthermore when, later, solitary women feature in Romantic poetry, they often become so as a consequence of misfortune, not choice. Martha in 'The Thorn', Margaret in 'The Ruined Cottage' and the nameless woman in 'The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman' are examples of women in sedentary solitude in Wordsworth's verse, and one might recall also Keats's 'Isabella' and Tennyson's study of wistful abandonment, 'Mariana'.

Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) notes that 'in the Nineteenth Century there was no question that sports were the "natural" domain of the man and that to be good at them was to be essentially "masculine"'.¹⁰ Indeed, it was fashionable for women not to endure any bodily

exertion to prove that the family was wealthy enough for them not to have to undertake work. A piquant hint of Burkean frailty and a cultivated pallor became positively *de rigueur*:

The physical benefits of exercise were ignored: rude health was considered to be vulgar, whereas frailty and lack of appetite were viewed as attractive and normal.¹¹

Historically, factors of social status have brought about fluctuating aspirations for lithesome or curvaceous appearances in women's body image; preferences for both enervating, frail or by contrast, plump appearance have been considered desirable because they connoted a sedentary lifestyle free of the drudgery of physical labour and indicative of wealth and leisure. Class differences, only complicated such gender constructions. Such conceptions of feminine desirability did not apply to all females; obviously languor could never be commendable in labouring women. Some commentators, such as Priscilla Wakefield, argued that robust women would give birth to sturdy, vigorous children,¹² insisting that 'the free use of air and exercise' was essential and compatible with separate spheres:

[...] but how often has an anxiety for the delicacy of her complexion, or the apprehension of her becoming a romp, restrained a girl from the indulgence of enjoying either, in a degree sufficient to secure her from that feeble, sickly, languid state, which frequently renders her not only capricious, but helpless through the whole course of her life. There is no reason for maintaining any sexual distinctions in the bodily exercises of children; if it is right to give both sexes all the corporeal advantages which nature has formed them to enjoy, let them both partake of the same rational means of obtaining a flow of health and animal spirits, to enable them to perform the functions of life. Let girls no longer be confined to sedentary employments in a nursery, or at best permitted to take a gentle walk in a garden, as an apology for more vigorous exertions; whilst their brothers are allowed the unrestrained enjoyment of their active powers, regardless of soiling their clothes, or the inconvenience of the various seasons.¹³

Despite Wakefield's objections, however, this passage makes it clear that, due to the convention of the separate spheres, sports and other outdoor pursuits were predominantly masculine activities during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Beautiful Landscapes and Sublime Wildness

A number of masculinist assumptions implicit in the representation of the solitary wanderer compounded problems of physical access to the countryside for women. The aesthetics of the natural sublime made certain kinds of rural description problematic. Within this convention, it is usual for a male poet to wander within a feminized natural world. This was

apparent from the inception of such writing, for example in Shaftesbury's gendered description in *The Moralists* (1709):

The wildness pleases. We seem to live alone with Nature. We view her in her inmost Recesses, and contemplate her with more Delight in these original Wilds, than in the artificial Labyrinths and wildernesses of the Palace.¹⁴

Often, the elevated sensibility of the male poet contrasts with the material and corporeal qualities of a feminized landscape, an opposition which inscribes a particular inflection of gender. To write within this trope implicated a woman writer in a partial effacement of subjectivity because such a convention identifies the feminine with qualities opposed to mindfulness. The solitary wanderer typically embraces a logic that inhibits a woman's creative power as an author in so far as it was a pose, shaped by eighteenth-century notions of sublimity. The unitary self of the Romantic author is ultimately predicated on a separation and transcendence of feminized nature.¹⁵ Psychologist Carol Gilligan argues that there is a gendered difference between male experience, in which selfhood is forged through separation, and female development, in which self-development is envisioned through attachment.¹⁶ The forging of the manly poetic self is facilitated by a solitary quest which is a metaphor for the process of constructing literary narratives. Given that such constructions are achieved by an engendering that substitutes masculine imaginative power as an agent of reproduction of self, such a conceit is not readily assimilated to the female perspective.

Several critics have examined the gendered oppositions in Burkean representations of the sublime.¹⁷ For Tim Fulford (1999), Burke's evocation of the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (2nd ed. 1759) is associated with a struggle for self-assertion and individual transcendence, troped as a masculine discourse of power. The sublime is a force in the universe able to overwhelm, dominate and disrupt the cohesion of the individual self; a force greater than the finite individual.¹⁸ Mellor argues, in *Romanticism and Gender*, that women writers specifically challenged such representations of the sublime as masculine empowerment over female nature. Instead, they emphasized the interpersonal connection and sympathy that militates against the projection of self in masculine Romantic discourse:

[...] Female nature is not an overwhelming power, not even an all-bountiful mother. Instead nature is a *female friend*, a sister, with whom they share their most intimate experiences and with whom they cooperate in the daily business of life, to the mutual advantage of each.

Hence the experience of the sublime for this tradition of women is rarely solitary. If alone, the female protagonist feels comforted, even addressed by, female

nature, with whom she communes either in words or in song. More often, the protagonists share their experience of the sublimity of female nature and the heightened sensibility it stimulates with another person, most often a cherished lover.¹⁹

Moreover, if Wordsworthian nature is enjoyed, ultimately, through its transcendence, it is therefore partially at the cost of the displacement and negation of its immediate physicality. In Kantian terms, there is a privileging of the subjective, phenomenal world over the objective, noumenal world in the mind-landscape trope. In spite of Wordsworth's apotheosis of nature, *The Prelude's* concluding lines privilege constructions of the human mind over any possible physical world that may objectively exist:

[...] The mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine.
(1805 *Prelude*, XIV, 446-52)

Wordsworth persistently demonstrates his awareness of the epistemological difficulties inherent in a 'common-sense' view of the natural world which the poet cannot verify (though it may 'still remain unchanged') other than through the human senses. Yet to privilege subjective human apprehension over any extrahuman physical existence is to lean towards that self-centred mode of perception that Keats famously characterized as the 'egotistical sublime'.²⁰

Hazlitt, and many critics since, have argued that Wordsworth's mind-landscape trope ultimately led him to write about himself rather than external nature:

It is less a poem on the country, than on the love of the country. It is not so much a description of natural objects, as of the feelings associated with them, not an account of the manners of rural life, but the result of the Poet's reflections on it.²¹

In 'Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' (1798), Wordsworth had conveniently settled upon the human experience of nature as an equal accommodation of subject and object:

Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world

Of eye, and ear, – both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.
(lines 102-11)

Wordsworth invests the explicitly and consistently feminized ‘nature’ in ‘Tintern Abbey’ with profound ontological significance as an essential ‘anchor’ for grounding and confirming the self. However, in distinguishing itself from nature, the unitary Wordsworthian self, if it is to be sustained and durable, must detach itself from the material, whether this be the human body, or external nature, both subject to perpetual change, in order to endure as a substantial entity. Mellor identifies a contradiction here. This Wordsworthian self is ‘a Kantian transcendent ego, pure mind or reason, standing as the *spectator ab extra*, the detached observer of Nature’, which is necessarily a fictional pose given the situation of humans as material beings, immanent within nature.²² It may be argued that, in such instances, Nature, over which Wordsworth is ultimately triumphant, is built up in order to confer magnitude on his own transcendent self.

However, the extent to which Wordsworth appropriated the matter of the natural world in order to explore his own interior self-consciousness remains a contentious issue as it was for Keats, Hazlitt and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Kroeber, an ecocritic, challenges new historicist critics for undervaluing ‘romantic counterconceptions of the individual self as fully existent in relation to other selves, and of human nature as significantly determined by the natural environment’.²³ So, despite the apparent egotism underlying Wordsworth’s perception, it might be a mistake to exaggerate the extent to which he believed his own subjective vision was able to transcend the material world that structured it. In his defence, Kroeber proposes that Wordsworth took a dialectical or what now might be termed phenomenological approach. It is by provoking the contemplation of these ontological and epistemological complexities that such poetry retains its interest and vigour.

Judith Pascoe, in ‘Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith’ (1994), suggests that one feminine strategy to address the generalizing abstractions of the transcendental egotistical sublime was to particularize the gaze in scientific observation, grounding the natural world through meticulous attention to detail.²⁴ The idea of the sublime is inverted so that it is located in a sharper focus upon the diminutive and circumscribed. Hence it is in the microcosm of the locally distinctive that the infinite is located. Through such an approach, Pascoe argues, the ostensibly confined or limited female vantage-point can be transformed

into a more absorbing and liberating exploration of the ‘infiniteness of particularity’.²⁵ This is also in keeping with Snyder’s suggestion that Romantic women writers tended ‘to privilege intimacy over spectacle’.²⁶ Such a vision reflects a more circumscribed existence and is therefore gendered according to women’s experience of the domestic and the private. Nevertheless, the subject positioning is not exclusively female; exemplars of such a closely observed perspective are Gilbert White, John Clare and Mary Russell Mitford, all of whom produced writing rooted in a cherished locality. Jeremy Hooker (1999) identifies an important tradition of microscopic attention to local natural history knowledge as ‘Ditch Vision’.²⁷

**Legal Impedimenta:
Enclosure, The Game and Trespassing Laws,
the Vagrancy Acts**

The process of enclosure was a factor that significantly served to limit solitary wandering. The years of Romanticism are coextensive with transition from a predominantly open field agricultural system to one characterized by a more thoroughgoing enclosure of the land. While piecemeal enclosure had been occurring for centuries, the implementation of the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts accelerated and largely completed this process. Informal and customary possibilities for wandering were lost alongside the opportunities to cultivate previously marginal land, later brought into the confines of those more sharply defined legal entities, the private estate and park. The enclosed countryside was a more regulated space, in which tighter legal jurisdiction diminished less official wastelands and reduced access, as common lands dwindled in an incremental shift of power and space. In ‘The Mores’ (written between 1821 and 1824), John Clare bitterly lamented the incursions of enclosure in his beloved Helpston:

These paths are stopt – the rude philistines thrall
Is laid upon them and destroyed them all
Each little tyrant with his little sign
Shows where man claims earths glows no more divine
On paths to freedom and to childhood dear
A board sticks up to notice ‘no road here’²⁸
(Lines 65-70)

The far-reaching agrarian transformation that took place in the period of my survey brought about a profound redefinition of territory and shift in the relationship to the land. Physical access became easier for the ‘through’ traveller; much of pre-enclosure England had been impassable due to the presence of thick and impenetrable woodlands and quagmires. The

open field system was often accompanied by an undrained and often unmapped terrain through which threaded innumerable smaller byways and tracks, established and maintained according to customary usage.²⁹ As walking for recreation became a more accessible possibility for many it gradually lost what Robin Jarvis terms its 'aura of quixotry', in *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (1997).³⁰

Social and economic tensions contributed to a climate of intensified class antagonism and sharpened the anxiety of the landowning class about trespassing and pilfering upon private property. Humphry Repton, a prominent theorist of landscaping and 'improvement', recorded his doubts about exclusion and the loss of access in 1816:

The old mossy and ivy-covered pale was replaced by a new and lofty close paling; not to confine the deer, but to exclude mankind, and to protect a miserable narrow belt of firs and lombardy poplars: the bench was gone, the ladder-stile was changed to a caution about man-traps and spring-guns, and a notice that the footpath was stopped by order of the commissioners.³¹

A transport revolution took place in which road surfaces improved, travel became more comfortable, reliable and faster, and a wider area of the country was drained and charted. Other factors, however, made the freedom to roam more difficult. A proliferation of anti-trespassing by-laws, turnpike tolls, Game Laws and the regularization of nightwatch patrols all restricted the free mobility of non-propertied walkers.

The notorious Game Laws were perhaps the most harsh and bitterly divisive of all class legislation, made increasingly ferocious throughout this period. Social historian, Harry Hopkins records the 'dark red thread' of conflict that made up this continuous slow war fought across the chases of old England in *The Long Affray* (1985).³² In 1821 Sydney Smith ironically pointed up the contradiction between quaintly alliterative descriptions of picturesque countryside and the reality, which often more closely resembled a militarized zone:

There is a sort of horror in thinking of a whole land filled with lurking engines of death – machinations against human life under every green tree – traps and guns in every dusky dell and bosky bourn [...].³³

Whether one was looking for nature to put into poetry or the pot, such devices did not discriminate between the nature lover and the trespassing poacher. Again, John Clare resented the harassment he received while botanizing, complaining 'what terryfying rascals

these wood keepers and gamekeepers are they make a prison of the forrests and are its jaolers'.³⁴

While the provisions of the Game Laws had long placed the right of violent redress in the hands of landowners and magistrates, a new rigour of enforcement sharply intensified rural conflict at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Shelley, (who spoke from, but scarcely for, the landed gentry), objected that:

Persons of great property nurture animals on their estates for the sake of destroying them. For this they banish, for this they imprison, for this they persecute and overbear their feebler neighbors, for this they lay in train the whole horrors of that devilish machinery which the law places with the grasp of the wealthy to grind the weak to the dust of the earth. For what? – that they may kill and torture living beings for their sport.³⁵

While the Game Laws were widely transgressed and a minority of poachers was ever apprehended, it is estimated that crimes against their provisions accounted for a seventh of all convictions in England by 1827.³⁶ While further acts in 1831 and 1862 slightly mitigated the punishment for poaching, the zest for enforcement was unabated. Harriet Martineau assured readers that her *Forest and Game Law Tales* (1845), 'though bearing the form of fiction' were 'essentially true'. This marked a woman's intervention in a highly contentious issue. She implicitly, though modestly, aligned herself with pressure for reform:

It appears to be generally thought that some change must take place with regard to the Preservation of Game, and the administration of the Game-laws. It is thought by some that such change might be made in a more wise, easy and amicable manner if a clear knowledge of the operation of the present system on all the parties concerned were more general than it is found to be. It has been represented to me that this last object might possibly be promoted by such a work as I am therefore proposing to offer. Under such a representation, I could not but venture to offer it.³⁷

Lonely Lanes and Imprudent Encounters

If non-property owners, both men and women, were confronted by obstacles to rambling by landed interests, other factors more specifically prevented women from roaming the countryside and writing from the perspective of the solitary wanderer during the Romantic period. It would be possible to exaggerate the point and I do not wish to overstate my case. What I wish to suggest is that there existed inhibitions that placed constraints against women's access to the countryside, particularly in remote or wooded areas, rather than outright prohibitions.

Wollstonecraft liked to ramble alone and, in Norway, a ‘solitary evening’s walk’,³⁸ in the manner of Rousseau, was a habitual part of her daily routine:

The steeple serves as a land-mark. I once or twice lost my way, walking alone, without being able to inquire after a path. I was therefore obliged to make to the steeple, or wind-mill, over hedge and ditch.³⁹

However, such forays ‘over hedge and ditch’ were suspect and unconventional behaviour for a bourgeois woman. Wollstonecraft’s lifestyle was certainly atypical and one widely regarded as irredeemably eccentric, if not scurrilous, as anti-Jacobin sentiment gained ground (as we shall see in Chapter Six).

Dorothy Wordsworth and Emily Brontë found time to wander alone when not preoccupied by domestic chores. Certainly neither of these women was too insecure to walk out unaccompanied. It is not possible to sustain the argument, and it would be condescending to suggest, that women were too timid to venture out alone. Lily, in Anthony Trollope’s *Last Chronicle of Barset* (1866-67), makes the point with spirit and defiance:

We are not helpless young ladies in these parts, nor yet timorous [...] We can walk about without being afraid of ghosts, robbers, wild bulls, young men, or gypsies. Come the field path, Grace.⁴⁰

A good trustworthy dog could make all the difference, even though it might sometimes interfere with the direct appreciation of the local flora and fauna. Emily Brontë was inseparable from Keeper and Mary Russell Mitford invariably shared the excursions recorded in *Our Village* (1832) with a greyhound named Mayflower.⁴¹

Nevertheless, constraints upon free mobility remained. By contrast, and perhaps more typically, the evidence of a letter to her sister, Cassandra, suggests that Jane Austen almost never walked by herself:

I enjoyed the hard black Frosts of last week very much, and one day while they lasted walked to Deane by myself.– I do not know that I ever did such a thing in my life before.⁴²

Charlotte Brontë too, undertook solitary expeditions into the wild moorland around Howarth with greater trepidation than her elder sister. Ellen Nussey remembered:

A spell of mischief also lurked in [Emily] on occasions when out on the moors, she enjoyed leading Charlotte where she would not dare go of her own free-will [...] ⁴³

Furthermore, there remained the rarely mentioned but ever-present possibility that the Arcadia of the Romantic and Victorian countryside was peopled by potential rapists. The fear of sexual attack could restrict unaccompanied wandering. The limited evidence that exists suggests that there was a lower incidence of opportunist sex crime against unknown women during the eighteenth century than there is today, even accounting for the vast discrepancy in population.⁴⁴ Social historian Frank McLynn comments upon the marked absence of women's fears about such threats in eighteenth-century fiction: 'Heroines traversing country fields worry that their gowns will be dirtied, not that they will be raped'.⁴⁵ However, such literary evidence must be treated with some caution as it may tell us more about the sensitivities of authors than about the genuine concern of contemporary women. Characters rarely blow their noses, urinate or take off their shoes in eighteenth-century novels but it would be wrong to infer that they never did. Given the ignominy of a sexual attack, the crime often went unreported, and women's legal status made it difficult to initiate a successful prosecution.⁴⁶ The available evidence for the frequency of such crime during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is in fact contradictory. It should not be assumed that any dangers that might exist today were of the same magnitude two hundred years ago.⁴⁷

A reading of Romantic women writers suggests that they *were* conscious of such a threat. I would like to return to the word 'lonely' in William Wordsworth's 'Daffodils'. The first point to make is that Dorothy Wordsworth accompanied her brother on the walk so he was not solitary on this occasion. Indeed, it was Dorothy Wordsworth's recollection of the golden 'host' – which she jotted down in a journal entry for 15 April 1802 – that provided the inspiration for the lines written two years later.⁴⁸ This is an instance of the marked difference in descriptive emphasis between the closely observed, detailed attention to immediate particulars in Dorothy Wordsworth's diaries and journals and the more symbolic, idealized terms of William Wordsworth's poetry, that seems to count for more than the transition from prose to verse. Whereas in the erasure of his sister's presence, William Wordsworth looks to the power of an unmediated encounter with natural phenomena, the context of the encounter within the terms of the relationship to her travelling companions, be they her brother, Coleridge or Joanna Hutchinson, is a defining factor in the experience for Dorothy Wordsworth.

There is a further instability in the use of the word 'lonely' that deserves attention. It appears to have two figurative readings that are very different in their inferences. For

William Wordsworth, the word carries a sense of personal freedom, of being unencumbered by the presence of other people who might distract his thoughts from the surrounding landscape. Such an intrusion would affect his direct appreciation of the natural world.⁴⁹ This is not the suffering loneliness of isolation. At the same time another reading of the word 'lonely' is possible because, ironically, it has a different and contradictory nuance in women's rural writings. 'Lonely' is frequently used as a euphemism for fear of physical attack, suggesting a terrain in which it is dangerous to wander. This sense of a threat is hinted at but quickly dispelled in *The Prelude*, where lonely roads represent an opportunity to witness all human life in microcosm:

Awed have I been by strolling Bedlamites;
 From many other uncouth vagrants (passed
 In fear) have walked with quicker step; but why
 Take note of this? When I began to enquire,
 To watch and question those I met, and held
 Familiar talk with them, the lonely roads
 Were schools to me in which I daily read
 With most delight the passions of mankind [...]
 (1805 *Prelude*, Book XII, 158-65)

By contrast, the many appearances of the word 'lonely' in descriptions of dangerous situations suggests that its use is not incidental but almost invariably encodes spaces in which there is a potential for attack in women's writing. Susan Levin (1987) draws attention to an entry in the *Journal of my Second Tour in Scotland* (1822), in which Dorothy Wordsworth is rebuked by her fellow traveller, Joanna Hutchinson, for her extreme imprudence in speaking to a tramp ('a big strong old man') in the 'lonely' Vale of Clyde. Not only did it seem that they 'had never been in a place so lonely', but the women continued to be menaced by the presence in the area of two other male strangers with 'a rattling wild air and demeanour' during their subsequent stay. The doubtful intentions of the men immediately translate the opportunity for travel into the occasion for trauma and 'trepidation'.⁵⁰

There is a similar intonation in *Our Village* (1832), in which Mitford's emphasis clearly implies her awareness of a threat:

[...] The road thither is smooth and dry, retired, as one likes a country walk to be, but not too lonely, which women never like, leading past the Loddon [...] and terminating at one of the prettiest and most comfortable farm-houses in the neighbourhood.⁵¹

Again, according to the conventions of the 'Gothick' novel, when a heroine wanders alone a disempowering fear for personal safety frequently counterbalances any empowering sense of personal freedom that she might otherwise enjoy. Adeline experiences a sense of panic in Ann Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest* (1791) that is clearly provoked by fear of sexual threat:

The spreading dusk at length reminded Adeline [...] that she had her way to find through a wild and lonely wood: she bade adieu to the syren that had so long detained her, and pursued the path with quick steps. Having followed it for some time, she became bewildered among the thickets, and the increasing darkness did not allow her to judge of the direction she was in. Her apprehensions heightened her difficulties: she thought she distinguished the voices of men at some distance, and she increased her speed till she found herself on the sea sands over which the woods impended.⁵²

It is significant perhaps that 'the syren' in this passage is a nightingale. Not only was this species one that male writers from Ovid to Milton, and Romantic poets including Coleridge, Keats and Clare, described listening to alone in the woods, but the nightingale, as Philomel, is also a species with a strong association with sexual violence in classical legend.⁵³ Adeline's appreciation of the bird's melody is tellingly interrupted by a sudden awareness of the physical vulnerability of her situation. When Radcliffe's heroines experience moments of reflection and melancholy reveries in the natural world (especially forests), they are almost invariably the occasion for interruption by unexpected encounters with men. These are sometimes welcome, such as Julia's meeting with her lover, Hippolitus, in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), but more often threatening, such as the surveillance by her father's spies, as he attempts to force an unwanted marriage upon her.⁵⁴ In the same novel the connection between being alone in the natural world and women's vulnerability to male aggression is explicit. Julia, threatened by the 'furious passions' of her hated suitor, the Duke de Luovo, fears that she is particularly susceptible in such a situation in which 'the loneliness of the spot he had chosen, enabled him to perpetrate any designs, however violent'.⁵⁵

Corisande similarly experiences panic and terror in the woods, in Charlotte Smith's *Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1800), where 'equipped like the son of a vigneron, or labourer', she found herself alone at an hour of the evening when she had never been out before, unless protected by the retinue which at that period attended the families of noblemen'. Nervously looking behind her:

All the dread with which the Marquis de Champignac and her uncle inspired her on one hand, and, on the other, that ardent desire she had to find her father, were hardly sufficient to support her courage. Proceeding, however, unmolested on the

road, or rather path Donat had directed her, she hoped to reach by night-fall a house where he told her a woman lived, who [...] would receive her for the night.⁵⁶

It is clear from the passage that such wandering is regarded as masculine behaviour. It is the uniqueness of the experience that makes this a charged situation for Corisande. Like the cross-dressed women in Shakespeare's comedies,⁵⁷ dramatic effect is created by the explosion of gender and class convention and the tension between surface and actuality as, forced by the necessity of circumstance, Corisande experiences something of an alternative identity. At the same time she is unable to overthrow the vulnerability of her situation as a woman alone.

In Charlotte Smith's novel of sensibility, *The Old Manor House* (1793), the constraint of female space is a central theme.⁵⁸ The narrowly confined life of the heroine, Monimia, an orphaned niece who works as a domestic servant, encodes the intense compression of her emotional space at Rayland Hall, an anachronistic microcosm of the feudal order. Monimia's restrictive existence, increasingly quartered in a garret to avoid contact with Orlando, the doting heir of the estate, prevents that contact with the countryside so necessary to a heroine of sensibility.

On one rare occasion on which she is given leave to walk through the woodland to the town, accompanied by fellow-servant Betty, Monimia quickly falls prey to the unwelcome attentions of the neighbouring *nouveau riche* gentry. Orlando rigorously defends the bounds of the estate against such incursions and so, upon his timely appearance, an altercation ensues with his principal adversary, Sir John Belgrave, about the violation of the game preserves. Throughout the novel, food production and consumption are activities with an extensive social and political resonance. Eating habits are at once defined by the social order and constitutive of an understood discourse signifying precise gradations in property relations and status and expressing beliefs about national identity. The eating of dark pheasant flesh therefore connotes a sacramental entrée into the upper echelons of the English landed classes. While it is clear that the feud between Orlando and Sir Belgrave is actually about Monimia and Betty, and conveniently displaced onto the unfortunate, totemic pheasants, it is also apparent that, in the fundamental issue of property and control, the women and the semi-captive birds are readily interchangeable, according to the exigencies of territorial honour. Indeed, this point is emphasized through Sir John's enjoyment in gleefully embellishing on the theme of Monimia as a bird to be chased and hunted. Any future attempts at excursions on the estate are consistently thwarted by the predations of the

lust Sir John for whom unattached women wandering the countryside are understood to be sexually available.

Charlotte Smith and the 'Lunatic'

One of Charlotte Smith's most frequently anthologized *Elegiac Sonnets*, 'On being Cautioned against Walking on a Headland Overlooking the Sea, Because it was Frequented by a Lunatic' (1797), directly foregrounds and addresses the dangers of wandering lonely. However, the poem questions such prescriptions in so far as much of the verse's force lies in Smith's refusal to respond with stock horror.⁵⁹

The very title is a reminder that the Romantic tradition of peripatetic poetry, written while roving and musing among wild nature, is less open to women than to male poets such as William Wordsworth who was to be 'awed [...] by strolling Bedlamites'. Both the immediate implication of a physical threat and the social and cultural prescriptions about women in public spaces are in play in this sonnet. The 'wildly wandering' 'lunatic' of Smith's imaginings is largely a caricature – he is 'a solitary wretch', muttering aloud 'with wild and hollow eyes'. He is an unindividualized embodiment of otherness and irrationalism who, it appears, has a mythologized status for members of the local community who have displaced their fears about disorder, wildness and violence onto him.

As a woman writer with a precarious financial and social status, Smith seeks points of connection with this distracted and alienated individual. Such sympathy is partly a convention of eighteenth-century sensibility, but her sense of self-identification, I feel, goes beyond this.⁶⁰ She makes an imaginative leap that makes for a curious and unexpected response: 'I see him more with envy than with fear.' Smith envies the psychic freedom of the 'lunatic' as well as the physical liberty to wander that he possesses. The rocky, gale-battered shore is also a projection suggestive of freedom so the hazardous nature of the 'giddy brink' is both actual and a figurative allusion to the precarious nature of mental stability. While he may be in a physically perilous situation upon the cliff edge, psychologically the 'lunatic' is invulnerable in his oblivion.

The extended opening question in Charlotte Smith's 'lunatic' sonnet, 'Is there a solitary wretch...?', is ambivalent. It may be a rhetorical question because it is understood that there is a psychotic man on the headland, or there may be some genuine doubt as to his existence. In either interpretation this is a poem that indicates the dangers of wandering among nature and is in marked contrast to idealized celebrations of pastoral nature. Unpredictable, with a

daily existence and behaviour that is without structure, the lunatic's rumoured presence constitutes 'giant horrors', threatening because, although he is never positively sighted, he appears actualized and not fictional. Immediately there is a seeming contradiction in his behaviour. 'Hies' is an archaic word for moving quickly but 'slow' testifies to a more erratic kind of movement. Likewise the rather methodical, calculating process of 'measuring' is set against the fact that he is 'uncursed with reason'. He is at once associated with and dissociated from nature. In one sense he is in a natural setting and is exiled from the society that cautions against him, yet at the same time nature, partially personified in the phrase 'frequent sighs', is hostile to him and 'chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf'. While his 'murmuring responses' are made to the 'dashing surf' there is no real sense of connection or communion with the elements. His situation is therefore a kind of purgatory between the natural and the human.

The identification of the 'lunatic' with nature is conveyed primarily by the fact that he is inarticulate. 'Uncursed with reason', his 'hoarse, half-utter'd lamentation' sets him firmly apart from culture so that he is made a mouthpiece for unreason and all that is anathema to cultural sensibilities. Reason is accompanied by self-consciousness and, most ironically, in the absence of this faculty that the 'lunatic' can attain a rather unlikely kind of liberation. In this sense Smith confers a positive quality upon this very unawareness as a psychic space that, while apparently deeply troubled, is from the poet's perspective a refuge from suffering. This is a freedom of the most desperate kind. However, the notion of oblivion as refuge is fully consonant with the despair registered in several of the *Elegiac Sonnets*. Furthermore, in alluding to a distrust of reason and self-consciousness, the sonnet is in keeping with a broader Romantic tradition that Abrams identifies:

Man's primitive happiness and psychic health consisted in his instinctual unity with himself; 'consciousness,' because it strikes a division between the knowing self and its fragmented objects and between the thinking self and its activities, is equatable to evil and disease; and the replacement of 'unconsciousness' by these modes of self-consciousness, in the first stages of philosophy and science, is the historical truth embodied in the fable of Adam's loss of paradise.⁶¹

Through her implicit sympathy, and perhaps even empathy, with the 'lunatic', Charlotte Smith gestures towards an awareness of the contradictions in her own existence and posits the idea of cultural obstacles to the expression of her own perspective. Jeffrey C. Robinson (1995) asks suggestively 'does this doubling of mood – hers and that projected onto the "lunatic" – invert itself into an open space of linguistic possibility?'⁶² As a woman writer Charlotte Smith faced two difficulties. First, given the exclusivity of education and the political and legal system, she was confronted by inhibitions against projecting herself in the

public domain. Second, decorum required that she articulate her voice within certain bounds – the genres and subjects that were deemed suitable.⁶³ As a single parent with many dependants, the threat of economic destitution compelled Smith to write material that was both marketable and in keeping with public taste.⁶⁴ While she benefited from a high standard of education, Smith may have felt figuratively inarticulate because of the lack of cultural context for a woman's utterance which must pay attention to decorum, and that involved not speaking out on political or unseemly matters.⁶⁵

Indeed, the sonnet form itself was held to be a particularly feminine genre (even if penned by male poets), because it is crafted with an inflection through which the poet appears to confide in the reader, by contrast to the more declarative and effusive tone of the ode. Philip Cox notes 'the domain of the sonnet as feminised, a domestic, private and "natural" environment opposed to the more "masculine" world of public affairs and loftier literary genres', and draws attention to Coleridge's introduction to *A Sheet of Sonnets* (1796) in which the poet conceives of the sonnet not only in terms of its distinctive structure but as a form characterized by a particular content and mood:

We require a development of some lonely feeling [...]. Those sonnets appear to me most exquisite, in which moral Sentiments, Affections, or Feelings, are deduced from, and associated with, the scenery of Nature.⁶⁶

However, while Smith's sonnet shares Coleridge's attention to sentimental feeling, any apparently intended meditation upon the natural environment is interrupted by the intrusion of the threat posed by the 'lunatic' and the essential compromise enforced by social sensibilities.

Like her subject, Smith, as a writer of sonnets must be set apart from society to enjoy the private introspection that the genre demands; however, in contrast to him she is unable to ignore the sensibilities that society imposes upon the individual. The 'lunatic' is a ventriloquist for all that is anathema to cultural sensibilities: unstructured, incoherent, contradictory and irrational. With reason comes self-consciousness and it is in the absence of this faculty that he derives his freedom.

There is an extralinguistic aspect to the 'lunatic' who is imagined to be muttering and incoherent to human ears and engaged in a dialogue with the crashing, rhythmic sea-waves. And so Smith feels, an extraordinary choice of word in this context, 'envy'. The 'lunatic', at least in the construct of her imaginings (for there is no evidence that she has encountered him first hand), thus renders her some comfort. In common with several of her other bleak

Elegiac Sonnets, Smith posits death or madness as almost desirable counter-states which contrast favourably with her own dismal situation.

If the writer refused to take notice of the caution about wandering on the headland, and successfully evaded hazard at the hands of the allegedly dangerous male presence, she could reclaim a space foreclosed to her by obedience to such prescriptions. By physically rambling beyond society's '*nice felicities*',⁶⁷ she could also figuratively walk away from the constructs and constraints that society placed upon her – albeit for her own protection. However, the perils of wandering lonely are insistent and the italicized emphasis upon the pronoun '*he*' in line 11, strongly implies that Smith must, by contrast, take heed of the warning and pay attention to personal safety. Consequently, she self-consciously regrets that she has become a prisoner of those very constraints that have been formulated to protect her. Charlotte Smith has to obey the decorum of '*nice felicities*' and pay attention to her own personal safety and security when walking on the headland. So, while the choice of the word '*envy*' might seem improbable in this context, it ultimately suggests resignation and not defiance. For women writers, possibilities to explore the predominantly masculine trope of the solitary wanderer are problematized by the confines of a more bounded existence and are more sharply contingent upon cultural expectations and local circumstances.

The precise location of the headland in this sonnet is not specified, and indeed it is loosely described with the indefinite article as '*a headland*'. However, given Smith's topography as a Sussex poet, it is reasonable to suppose that the '*tall cliff*' is in the vicinity of Beachy Head. Beachy Head with its 165 metre sheer cliff face, is the most accessible experience of sublimity available on the chalk downs of southern England. The three principal elements in this sonnet, namely the geographical wildness of this sublime cliff-top, the madness of the '*lunatic*' and those aspects of Smith's own psyche that prompt her improbable response of mingled horror and fascinated desire, are juxtaposed in such a way as to make the inference that they are counterparts irresistible. The probability that Smith's sonnet almost certainly refers to Beachy Head or its environs is strengthened by the fact that her slightly macabre fascination for this sheer rock face, long notorious for suicides,⁶⁸ is explicitly recorded in her lengthy, but unfinished poem, called *Beachy Head*.

Ann Radcliffe, Smith's contemporary, shared something of her sense of personal threat and disorientation at Beachy Head. In a diary entry, written after visiting there with her husband, William, the pre-eminent novelist of '*Gothick*' horrors, dubbed by Thomas De Quincey the '*great enchantress*',⁶⁹ appears to be strangely intimidated by her encounter with

the sublime. When William temporarily leaves her, Radcliffe is left alone near the ‘great cliff’:

Almost frightened at the solitude and vastness of the scene, though *Chance* [Radcliffe’s favourite dog] was with me. Tide almost out; only sea in front; white cliffs rising over me, but not impending; strand all around a chaos of rocks and fallen cliffs, far out into the waves; sea-fowl wheeling and screaming; [...] the white precipices beautifully varied with plants, green, blue, yellow and poppy. Wheat-ears flew up often from the beach; *Chance* pursued them. At length William returned, having been nearly, but not quite, in front of the great promontory. Slowly and laboriously we made our way back along the beach, greatly fatigued, the day exceedingly hot, the horizon sulphurous, with lowering clouds; thunder rolled faintly at a distance.⁷⁰

Again, it is clear that, for a solitary woman writer, an open space was not necessarily a site of liberation. This journal entry for 1800 is closely contemporaneous with Smith’s ‘lunatic’ sonnet, written three years earlier. Radcliffe’s uneasy perspective, in which her aesthetic appreciation is tempered by an ambivalent but unspecified discomfiture during her moment of solitude, reinforces the sense of mystique surrounding the vertiginous cliffs.

Mobility and Social Mobility

Besides the direct threat of harassment that discouraged women from rambling alone in the countryside, there also existed more subtle, though no less compelling, considerations of correct conduct. For middle and upper class women in particular, cultural anxieties about the propriety of encountering men or the labouring classes socially could result in the imposition of a *cordon sanitaire*; a prophylactic against the contamination of reputation. This was a very real imposition which impeded women’s country rambles.

So, there were powerful inhibitions against women wandering alone that imposed restrictions related to both gender and class. Such conventions could only be transgressed by those women strong-willed enough to risk damage to their public reputation, feminine identity and to that social respectability which was all important in less mobile communities.

If class prejudice was not enough to dissuade women from striding out on solitary excursions, even more dangerous to the reputation were the opportunities that such movements, if not policed by a chaperon, might afford to consort and flirt with men. However, the accompaniment of a chaperon was, of course, hardly compatible with free communing with nature.⁷¹ Anne D. Wallace (1993) notes that ‘special difficulties faced

women walkers, especially if they walked alone, because their peripateia translated as sexual wandering'.⁷²

Ethelinde, the eponymous heroine of Charlotte Smith's novel, faces just such an accusation. She is encountered alone in the woods by Sir Edward who warns that his wife would find such conduct suspicious: 'Lady Newenden would say that young ladies who have such a passion for rocks and woods, always associate with them the idea of some gentle swain'.⁷³ Subsequently, Ethelinde's attachment to Montgomery, a man without fortune, is met with disapproval.

That co-ordinated mechanism whereby the body is propelled by the alternation of leg muscles and bone movements that we now know as walking has taken place since the first semi-amorphous life forms began to find it more convenient than a slither. However, the walk in its fullest aesthetic meaning, was a creation of the Romantic period. Indeed, in *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, Robin Jarvis notes that the word 'pedestrian' was not recorded in its modern sense until the zenith of the Romantic period in 1818.⁷⁴

As Wallace observes, walking had long been stigmatized as an inferior method of transport, undertaken by vagrants and the displaced poor.⁷⁵ Before the revolution in transport, made possible by industrialization, no one walked by choice, only necessity. Walking was labelled as a low status and degrading mode of transport by an aspirant bourgeoisie that opted for the decorum of the horse-drawn carriage. It was the advent of cheap, safe and efficient travel that made the idea of aesthetic pleasure in walking viable. Only after industrialization therefore, could contemporaries successfully construct the activity of walking as an elevated pursuit connoting sensibility. It became possible to celebrate walking as a simple rural pleasure to be enjoyed by the refined rather than merely endured by the deprived. However, this process was not instantaneous, and physical exertion was long frowned upon as an unfeminine trait in a well-bred woman.

Such concerns occasioned the following extremely starchy exchange between Dorothy Wordsworth and her Aunt at Windy Brow:

I cannot pass unnoticed that part of your letter in which you speak of my 'rambling about the country on foot.' So far from considering this as a matter of condemnation, I rather thought it would have given my friends pleasure to hear that I had courage to make use of the strength with which nature has endowed me, when it [...] procured me infinitely more pleasure than I should have received from sitting in a post-chaise [...]⁷⁶

Indeed, William Wordsworth, who had himself contributed to the aestheticization of walking from his earliest published verse such as *The Evening Walk*, later challenged such criticism when he made use of the pages of the *Morning Post*, to defend the right of a 'child of nature' to enjoy the open country in 'To a Young Lady who had been Reproached for Taking Long Walks in the Country' (1802).⁷⁷

Such outdoor pursuits could dissolve essential social distinction by providing an opportunity to mix with the disreputable poor. Walking retained its traditional connotations of vagrancy and displacement and so was entirely incompatible with aspirations to upward social mobility. As Alexis Easley (1996) notes, it was just such fears about association with displaced female vagrants that caused disapproval of Dorothy Wordsworth's solitary wandering in rural Westmorland:

By moving outside protected spaces on her many countryside walks, Wordsworth was risking being associated with mobile – and morally suspect – underclass women.⁷⁸

Even towards the end of the century this disapproval of unchaperoned movements persisted. In Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), Elfride Swancourt is likened to a farmer's daughter because she enjoys the freedom to gallop alone across the countryside on her horse.⁷⁹ Certainly, working women were not expected to engage in elevated communing with the natural world; more pressing economic necessities silenced solitary wanderers among this class.⁸⁰ William Barnes's comic sketch, 'A Lot of Maidens A-Runnen the Vields' (1862) mocks the 'maïds' who are characterized by their timidity and ignorance of the countryside.⁸¹ Ruskin, however, despite being an upholder of the separate spheres, consistently commended outdoor exercise for young women. He argued that the lack of a desire to explore the countryside indicated a profound educational failing:

Pollution of rivers! – yes, that is to be considered also; – but pollution of young ladies' minds to the point of never caring to scramble by a riverside [...] – *this* is the horrible thing, in my own wild way of thinking.⁸²

The often self-imposed limitations placed upon bodily movement in this broader sense, augmented the more immediate physical encumbrances of the ostentatious dresses associated with the high Victorian era – as well as the infamously restrictive whalebone corsets beneath. In the later nineteenth century, feminists, such as Frances Power Cobbe, denounced the impedimenta of 'senseless fashions of dress' because they prevented young women from taking part in healthy outdoor pursuits. Cobbe noted that the daughters of the

most wealthy (secure in their social standing) enjoyed greater opportunities for outdoor exercise:

Probably English girls of the highest classes have at this day more freedom of this kind, more wholesome riding and rowing and tennis-playing and mountain-scrambling, than any young ladies ever possessed before in any case or country. But, even for them, senseless fashions of dress often interfere with health and pleasure; while as they grow older, the lesson is too often enforced by their parents and governesses and all their teachers and elder relations, that they must put a curb [...] on their physical and mental energy, their harmless animal spirits, and righteous longing to be of some use in the world in which they find themselves.⁸³

As such codes collapsed the call for physical exercise in education became a key demand of women's emancipation. Cobbe goes further than Ruskin as she explicitly links the urge to physical exercise in the outside world with self-fulfilment and greater participation in society.

After the mid-nineteenth century, improvements in transport and a higher proportion of women with money at their own disposal enabled those with some independence to travel.⁸⁴ Poet and essayist, Mathilde Blind was not to be intimidated when she set out (aged nineteen) to undertake an unaccompanied alpine tour in 1859. However, she ran into difficulties while walking alone during a thunderstorm when she was harassed by an extremely persistent, 'evil-looking Frenchman', and escaped from his unwelcome attentions only by punching him hard in the face and taking flight.⁸⁵ In 1893 Margaret Fountaine claimed that she relied upon remonstrance and the protection afforded by her purity of character to (successfully) escape from similar molestation while butterfly hunting in Corsica.⁸⁶

The difficulties women met wandering the countryside alone were ultimately mitigated by the invention and more widespread availability of the bicycle. This initially urban activity had significant implications for mass access to the countryside. Although the first wobbly excursions were undertaken by men, on the early nineteenth-century 'hobbyhorse', it was only with a technical innovation of the latter half of the century that bicycles became practical and gained widespread acceptance. Most ironically, it was the introduction of chains that provided the link to liberation. Chains revolutionized cycling, making possible ground level gear-changes on tyres of equal circumference. However, it was not until the mid-1890s, and in the face of significant cultural resistance, that women, if they could afford the purchase price, were widely accepted as cyclists.⁸⁷

The appearance of rational dress worn by women cyclists was, sometimes correctly, perceived to constitute a cultural critique of conventional femininity as well as simply a more practical style of dress. Women cyclists often met with disapproval and opposition. Flora Thompson, born 1876, remembering late nineteenth-century changes in rural life, documents such hostility in her childhood memoir *Lark Rise to Candleford* (1939-43):

For some obscure reason, the male sex tried hard to keep the privilege of bicycle riding to themselves. If a man saw or heard of a woman riding he was horrified. 'Unwomanly. Most unwomanly! God knows what the world's coming to,' he would say; but, excepting the fat and elderly and the sour and envious, the women suspended judgement. They saw opportunities which they were soon to seize. The wife of a doctor in Candleford town was the first woman cyclist in that district. 'I should like to tear her off that thing and smack her pretty little backside,' said one old man, grinding his teeth with fury.⁸⁸

A. B. Demaus confirms that women were frequently confronted with abuse and even physical intimidation during the late nineteenth century, and were condemned for wearing unseemly shorter skirts and knickerbockers which quickly became the rebellious emblem of the 'new woman'.⁸⁹ However, the addition of pneumatic tyres in the 1890s rapidly ensured the popularity and acceptability of cycling for both sexes. The challenge to notions of separate spheres represented by the liberating power of the safety bicycle was, therefore, a fundamental one for it directly increased the possibilities for women to move around outside the home.

A writer in the *Irish Cyclist* was fully aware that bicycles achieved a transformation of gendered space. This demonstrates clearly the proscriptions that had formerly confronted more affluent girls and young women:

I congratulate myself, and feel most truly thankful that I live in this perfect enlightened age of cycles (and pneumatic tyres!) and not 50 years ago; when the greatest diversion appeared to be a quiet stroll round a walled-in garden, under the escort of a foot-man or page-boy – for, of course, no girl with *any* sense of her position would even dream of going about alone and unescorted!⁹⁰

This also had particular consequences for nature study. Miss F. J. Erskine, author of *Lady Cycling* (c.1896), noted:

Natural History is a fit hobby for cycling. Mounted on rubber-tyred wheels, the manners and customs of birds, beasts, and even reptiles may be studied – for it is possible to get quite close to them without being heard.⁹¹

Beyond the literary highways of canonical male writers, a close reading of the texts of less-frequented women's writings reveals a problematic tension at the heart of the idea of the solitary wanderer, one of the central tropes of the Romantic period. While I do not suggest that Wordsworth would have endorsed the impediments to wandering on the part of women that I have described, I do believe that the self-revealing engagement with the countryside which he encouraged takes a form which is sharply contingent upon the identity of the wandering subject. As Buell succinctly observes, 'in adolescence, female protagonists become socialized away from nature, while the male continues to enjoy freer mobility and the option of questing'.⁹² Present environmental concerns, such as identity and spatial mobility as factors that complicate access to the land, allow for a re-reading that can throw fresh insights into the nuances of gendered difference in Romantic and Victorian texts. For women to participate in the Romantic quest could be a risky undertaking, possibly earning a reputation for social transgression, or making one vulnerable to physical attack. Women could and did wander alone in the countryside of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England; however, 'wildly wandering' into the dangerous terrain of the sublime was ill-advised. During the late nineteenth century, bicycles made unchaperoned exploration of the countryside more viable.

For the reasons I have detailed, women in search of encounters with nature's beauty and sublimity were accustomed to tread warily among the winding lanes, lonely vales and shady groves of the Romantic countryside. In Mary Shelley's play, *Proserpine* (1820), Ceres prophetically warns her daughter 'But wandering alone, by feint or force,/You might be lost, and I might never know/Thy hapless fate.'⁹³ So, in the Persephone/Proserpine myth, it was at the moment that Persephone wandered away from her friends in the Vale of Enna and was, (symbolically in psychoanalytical terms), separated from her mother's protection, that she was abducted and raped while picking flowers.⁹⁴ With connotations of personal empowerment, self-development and autonomy, to stride out alone was literally an act of stridency, an aspiration to participate in an enterprise underwritten by the liberal assertion of the bounded ego of the individualistic autonomous subject. When sharing this assertion, women were both conscious of the countryside as a potentially hazardous physical space and of cultural difficulties retained in the older biblical connotations of the walk as an allegory for the moral path of righteousness. In innumerable books of Christian instruction, the narrative of the walk as a metaphor for life's journey in its entirety is used as reliable trope in which linear piety is contrasted with the moral digressions of more circuitous ramblings. If piety and fortitude are learned from an approved text (another kind of journey), then the evil consequences of moral transgression may be avoided. In a direct

address to her readers, Clara Reeve merges topographical with botanical metaphors of vice and virtue:

I have led you down from the top of a high hill, down into a spacious valley, from whence we can fall no lower. The rich and the proud look down with disdain from this high habitation, but we will not doubt to find many beautiful flowers, fruits and herbs; we shall also find many noxious weeds, which we will endeavour to eradicate, that the herbs of value may thrive the better.⁹⁵

It is to the rhetorical uses of botany, both to express edifying precepts of moral decency, and to encode dangerous sexual exploration, that I shall now turn.

¹ Letter 53, May 1875, Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, Works, XXVIII.

² Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, p. 603.

³ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* [1976], (London: Women's Press, 1986), p. 55.

⁴ William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, p. 735.

⁵ John Stuart Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties' [1833], ed. by John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger, in *Autobiography and Literary Essays, Collected Works Volume I* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 349.

⁶ Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 13.

⁷ 'The male is male only at certain moments. The female is female her whole life or at least during her whole youth.' Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education* [1762], ed. and trans. by Allan Bloom (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 361.

⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 361-62.

⁹ Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 432.

¹⁰ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 43.

¹¹ Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, p. 55. The gender construct of 'natural' feminine weakness, is made clear by Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis (1757-1808), the French Revolutionary physician and philosopher, who equally stressed the sedentary nature of women and the antipathy to walking and solitude:

This muscular feebleness inspires in women an instinctive disgust of strenuous exercise; it draws them towards amusements and sedentary occupations. One could add that the separation of their hips makes walking more painful for women.[...] This habitual feeling of weakness inspires less confidence [...] and as a woman finds herself less able to exist on her own, the more she needs to attract the attention of others [...]

From Cabanis, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, I, p. 278. Cited in Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth- and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 28.

¹² Priscilla Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex: With Suggestions for its Improvement* [1798], 2nd edn (London: Darton, Harvey and Darton, 1817), pp. 20-21.

¹³ Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex*, pp. 23-24.

¹⁴ Words of Theocles in [Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury], *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody. Being a Recital of Certain Conversations Upon Natural and Moral Subjects* (London: John Wyat, 1709), pp. 199-200. James Beattie's *The Minstrel* was also characteristic and influential:

The gentle Muses haunt the sylvan reign;
Where through wild groves at eve the lonely swain
Enraptured roams, to gaze on Nature's charms.

The Minstrel, or The Progress of Genius with some other Poems [1771-74], a new edition to which are prefixed memoirs of the life of the author by Alex Chalmers (London: J. Mawman, 1805), p. 5.

¹⁵ Again Mellor (*Romanticism and Gender*, p. 146) draws attention to lines from Wordsworth's *Prelude*: 'Two consciousnesses – conscious of myself, / And of some other being' (1805 *Prelude*, II, 32-33) which offers a curious double perspective, as if he were somehow looking over his own shoulder.

¹⁶ Gilligan writes:

From the different dynamics of separation and attachment in their gender identity formation through the divergence of identity and intimacy that marks their experience in the adolescent years, male and female voices typically speak of the importance of different truths, the former of the role of separation as it defines and empowers the self, the latter of the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community.

In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 156.

¹⁷ For example, Burke's celebration of the aesthetic 'smoothness' of womanly beauty. See Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* [2nd

edn, 1759] and other Pre-Revolutionary Writings, ed. by David Womersley (London: Penguin, 1998), III, xiv-xv, pp. 148-49.

¹⁸ See Tim Fulford, *Romanticism and Masculinity: Gender, Politics and Poetics in the Writings of Burke, Coleridge, Cobbett, Wordsworth, De Quincey and Hazlitt* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

¹⁹ Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 97. It may be doubted that the reworking and transformation of the quality described as the sublime by Mellor really maintains a coherent meaning as a domesticated sublime. The process that Mellor identifies appears to be a rejection of the sublime rather than its appropriation and redeployment. By definition sublimity refers to a liminal space and point of transcendence (the root of the word is adapted from 'lintel'), a threshold between the individual and the wider cosmos which will incorporate the notion of an encounter with the power of a Supreme Being. It is surely problematic, semantically and conceptually, to describe such a renegotiated engagement with nature, a domesticated, immanent and interpersonal space, as sublimity.

²⁰ Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 Oct. 1818. *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. by Gittings, p. 157.

²¹ William Hazlitt, *The Round Table*, 'Observations on Mr. Wordsworth's Poem The Excursion', *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, IV, p. 112.

²² Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 149.

²³ Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism*, p. 38.

²⁴ Judith Pascoe, 'Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith', in eds. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner, *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers 1776-1837* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 193.

²⁵ Pascoe, 'Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith', p. 205.

²⁶ Snyder, 'Mother Nature's Other Natures', p. 145.

²⁷ Jeremy Hooker, 'Ditch Vision', *Powys Journal*, IX (1999), pp. 14-29.

²⁸ Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period*, II, p. 349. John Clare's possible encounters with gamekeepers are dramatized in Edward Bond's play, *The Fool* (1975).

²⁹ See Rackham, *History of the Countryside*, p. 263.

³⁰ Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 13.

³¹ Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape* (1816), pp. 191-94. Cited in Stephen Daniels, 'The Political Iconography of Woodland in Later Georgian England', in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. by Denis E. Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 71-72.

³² Harry Hopkins, *The Long Affray: The Poaching Wars 1760-1914* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1985), p. 7. The *Black Act* of 1723, which introduced the death penalty for poaching and a wide range of other offences against property, was consolidated and extended by ongoing legislation (*Long Affray*, pp. 66-67). Major Game Laws and trespassing acts were placed on the statute in 1770, 1800, 1803 (Lord Ellenborough's law), 1816, 1820 (*Malicious Trespass Act*) and 1828. Unarmed poachers could be transported by the provisions of the 1816 *Night Poaching Act* and Lord Liverpool's government actively encouraged the use of spring-guns and mantraps.

³³ Sydney Smith, 'Spring Guns and Man Traps' [a review of J. B. Johnson's *The Shooter's Guide* (1819)], *Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal*, XXXV (March-July 1821), p. 134.

³⁴ Grainger, *Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, p. 234. Journal entry for 16 April 1825. Botanists and even people cropping hazel-nuts suffered and came into conflict with the keepers and their traps. See Hopkins, *Long Affray*, pp. 170-71. Later, in 1855, Charles Kingsley wrote:

[...] Do not you, the London merchant, recollect how last summer your douce and portly head-clerk was seized by two keepers in the act of wandering in Epping Forest at dead of night, with a dark lantern, a jar of strange sweet compound, and innumerable pocketsful of pill-boxes; and found it very difficult to make either his captors or you believe that he was neither going to burn his wheat-ricks, nor poison pheasants, but was simply 'sugaring the trees for moths,' as a blameless entomologist?

Kingsley, *Glaucus*, p. 5.

³⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelley, '[Fragment] On the Game Laws', in *Shelley's Prose, or The Trumpet of a Prophecy* [1954], ed. by David Lee Clark (London: First Estate, 1988), pp. 342-43.

³⁶ Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth-Century* [1982], rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 137.

³⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Forest and Game-Law Tales*, 3 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1845), I, p. iii.

³⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence*, p. 115.

³⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence*, pp. 116-17.

⁴⁰ Anthony Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* [1866-67], ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 355.

⁴¹ See Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, pp. 188-89 and Mary Russell Mitford, *Our Village* [1832], (London: Dent, 1936).

⁴² Letter of 18 December 1798. *Jane Austen's Letters to her sister Cassandra and others*, ed. by R. W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 39.

⁴³ In a letter from Ellen Nussey to Clement Shorter, published in Clement King Shorter, *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896), p. 179.

⁴⁴ Attacks were frequently suffered by maidservants and daughters of the tenantry. For correlation between rape and social class, see A. D. Harvey, *Sex in Georgian England: Attitudes and Prejudices from the 1720s to the 1820s* (London: Duckworth, 1994), pp. 81-84.

⁴⁵ Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 108.

⁴⁶ See Roy Porter, 'Rape – Does it Have a historical meaning?' in *Rape*, ed. by Sylvana Tomaselli and R. Porter (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 221.

⁴⁷ Harvey's evidence, indicates some of the difficulties and even contradictions that arise in the study of legal records pertaining to crimes of sexual assault. For example, between the years 1805 and 1818 there were three times as many convictions for murder as for rape, whereas during the 1990s there were more than five times as many rapes as homicides in the combined records for England and Wales (*Sex in Georgian England*, p. 75). [Note *Parliamentary Papers* 1819 XVII, pp. 302-3; Home Office Criminal Statistics: England and Wales 1991 Command Papers 1992-3 cm 2134, pp. 46-47, Table 2.5] Given that rape is a notoriously unreported crime, this comparison makes a compelling case for a significant under-representation of the true level of violent sex crime during the period under study. Anthony Simpson found that 83% of rape cases that reached the Old Bailey between 1730-1830 resulted in acquittal. See 'Vulnerability and the Age of Female Consent: Legal Innovation and its Effect on Prosecutions for Rape in Eighteenth-Century London', in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. by G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 188.

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When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow park we saw a few daffodils close to the water-side. We fancied that the lake had floated the seeds ashore, and that the little colony had so sprung up. But as we went along there were more and yet more; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about and about them; some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness; and the rest tossed and reeled and danced, and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind, that blew upon them over the lake; they looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing.

15 April 1802, *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* [1941], ed. by Ernest de Sélincourt, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1959), I, p. 131.

⁴⁹ During his younger years, William Wordsworth was even keen on nocturnal rambles and excursions (Gill, *William Wordsworth*, p. 24).

⁵⁰ 27 September 1822, *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* [1941], ed. by Ernest de Sélincourt, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1959), II, pp. 390-94. See Susan M. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, The State University, 1987), pp. 85-6.

⁵¹ Mitford, *Our Village*, pp. 313-14. The words of Lucy Snowe, the narrator in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, provide a further example from fiction:

[...] I should have trembled in that lonely walk, which lay through still fields, and passed neither village, nor farmhouse, nor cottage; I should have quailed in the absence of moonlight.

Villette [1853], reset with an introduction by Margaret Drabble (London: Dent, 1983), p. 38.

⁵² Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* [1791], ed. by Chloe Chard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 299-300.

⁵³ Philomel is raped by Tereus in a solitary cottage among the trees of an old forest, in the 'Solitudes of Heleas'. After the bloody events that follow, Philomel metamorphosizes into a nightingale.

⁵⁴ Ann Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance* [1790], ed. by Alison Milbank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 42 and 125.

⁵⁵ Radcliffe, *Sicilian Romance*, p. 111.

⁵⁶ Charlotte Smith, *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* [1800], (Poole: Woodstock Books, 1995), III, pp. 72-3.

⁵⁷ For example, Imogen dressed in boy's clothes in *Cymbeline* or Rosalind disguised in male attire for safety purposes in *As You Like It*.

⁵⁸ Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House* [1793], ed. by Anne Henry Ehrenpreis (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). Possibly, the title is a pun upon those 'old manners' embodied in the character of Mrs. Rayland, the present incumbent of Rayland Hall. The retreat is a repressive Arcadia that represents the values of hierarchy, privilege, reciprocity and paternalism associated with old England.

⁵⁹ Charlotte Smith, *Elegiac Sonnets with Additional Sonnets and Other Poems* [1784], 7th edn, 2 vols (London: A. Strahan, for T. Cadell, 1795), p. 11.

⁶⁰ Charlotte Smith was likely to have been aware of Mary Robinson's poem, 'The Maniac' (1793), which similarly features a cave-dwelling man seen to 'howl, responsive to the waves below' from his cliff-top. In Robinson's poem, the 'maniac' is directly addressed as the female poet overrides her horror of the man (able to 'freeze my blood' and 'fill my soul with dire dismay') in order to offer him sympathy:

Poor Maniac! I will dry thy tears,
And bathe thy wounds, and calm thy fears,
And with soft Pity's balm enchant thee to repose.

Published in *Romantic Women Poets*, ed. by Ashfield, II, pp. 53-56.

⁶¹ Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, pp. 307-8. In a footnote to Sonnet XXI, 'Supposed to be Written by Werter', Smith quotes Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*: 'See the story of the lunatic: "Is this the destiny of man? Is he only happy before he possesses his reason, or after he has lost it?"', *Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Curran, p. 26.

⁶² Jeffrey C. Robinson, *Romantic Presences: Living Images from the Age of Wordsworth and Shelley* (Barrytown, NY: Clinamen Studies Station Hill, 1995), p. 180.

⁶³ Smith is singled out in Richard Polwhele's 'Unsex'd Females'. While her published novels were favourably received, at the time much critical opinion revealed anxiety about 'democratic cant' – perceived radicalism in her allusions to social and political issues – and expressed disapproval of unconventional love matches among her characters. See Carol Lee Fry, *Charlotte Smith, Popular Novelist* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), pp. 14-19.

⁶⁴ Only six children survived her. In addition to her own numerous offspring, Charlotte Smith also supported others economically such as her daughter's émigré husband.

⁶⁵ Even so, Anna Seward criticized her for 'foreign taste' and 'dark dreams'. See Wu, *Romantic Women Poets*, p. 1 and p. 4. Charlotte Smith was always conscious of the tension that exists between the success as a woman writer and fame. In the preface to the 6th edn of the *Elegiac Sonnets* [1792], she writes: '[...] notwithstanding I am thus frequently appearing as an Authoress, and have derived from thence many of the greatest advantages of my life. (since it has procured me friends whose attachment is most invaluable,) I am well aware that for a woman – "The Post of Honour is a Private Station".', republished in 7th edn, p. xii.

⁶⁶ See Philip Cox, *Gender, Genre and the Romantic Poets: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 43-44. The quotation of Coleridge is from *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by E. H. Coleridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 1139.

⁶⁷ The sonnet's modern editor, Stuart Curran, suggests that this is apparently a misquotation from Horace Walpole, *Poems of Charlotte Smith*, 61 n.

⁶⁸ Suicide is of course the obliteration of identity and a possibility in several of the *Elegiac Sonnets*. See Marlon Ross, 'Romantic Quest and Conquest: Troping Masculine Power in the Crisis of Poetic Identity', in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. by Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 44. Deaths, many believed to be suicides, at Beachy Head are recorded in local registers for the past four hundred years. The more recent are collated in John Surtees, *Beachy Head* [1997], revised and reprinted edn (Seaford, East Sussex: SB Publications, 1999).

- ⁶⁹ Thomas De Quincey, *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater* [1821], ed. by Alethea Hayter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 1856 revision, p. 170.
- ⁷⁰ 23 July 1800. Cited in Clara Frances McIntyre, *Ann Radcliffe in Relation to her Times* [1920], (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1970), p. 27.
- ⁷¹ The word 'chaperone' passed into English from the French as late as 1796 when Jane Austen made use of the word in *Sense and Sensibility* [OED].
- ⁷² Anne D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of the Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 29.
- ⁷³ Charlotte Smith, *Ethelinde*, 3 vols (Dublin: printed for H. Chamberlaine [et al], 1790), 1, p. 131.
- ⁷⁴ Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, p. 2.
- ⁷⁵ See Wallace, *Walking, Literature and English Culture*, p. 10 and p. 18.
- ⁷⁶ Letter to Mrs. Christopher Crackenthorpe, 21 April 1794. *Letters of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 18.
- ⁷⁷ Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, p. 173.
- ⁷⁸ Alexis Easley, 'Wandering Women: Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals* and the Discourse on Female Vagrancy', *Women's Writing*, 3.1 (1996), p. 74.
- ⁷⁹ Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* [1873], (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 102.
- ⁸⁰ The novelty of Ann Yearsley (1756-1806), the 'milkmaid poet', perhaps makes her the rare exception that proves the rule.
- ⁸¹ 'Oh! how the bull do hook,
An' bleäre, an' fling the dirt.'
'Oh! won't he come athirt?'
'No, he's beyond the brook.'
'O lauk! A hornet rose
Up clwose avore my nose.'
'Oh! what wer that so white
Rush'd out o' thik tree's top?'
'An owl.'

'How I did hop,
How I do sheäke wi' fright.'
'A musherroom.'

'O lau!
A twoadstool! Pwoison! Augh.'
- William Barnes, *Selected Poems* [1972], ed. by Robert Nye (Manchester: Carcanet, 1988), pp. 69-72.
- ⁸² Letter of April 1875, Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, *Works* XXVII, p. 302.
- ⁸³ Frances Power Cobbe, *The Duties of Women: A Course of Lectures* [1881], 8th American edn (Chicago, Ill.: Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1887), p. 19.
- ⁸⁴ The Grand Tour had been, almost exclusively, a part of the finishing process for the young men of the landed gentry. See Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, p. 14.
- ⁸⁵ See *Victorian Women Poets*, ed. by Leighton and Reynolds, p. 454 and Mathilde Blind, *The Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind*, ed. by Arthur Symons with a memoir by Richard Garnett (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), pp. 8-9.
- ⁸⁶ See Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travellers and Their World* [1986], (London: Flamingo/Harper Collins, 1994), p. 182.
- ⁸⁷ A mass demonstration against the admission of women students to Cambridge University held in c. 1897 prominently featured an effigy of a woman cyclist on a bicycle swinging high above the proceedings. See Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), picture opposite p. 99.
- ⁸⁸ Flora Thompson, *Larks Rise to Candleford* [1939-1943], ed. by H. J. Massingham (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 477.
- ⁸⁹ A. B. Demaus, *Victorian Cycling and Motoring from Old Photographs* (London: Batsford, 1977), p. 7.
- ⁹⁰ 'Tadpole', *Irish Cyclist*, 17 December 1890. Cited by Brian Griffin in a lecture given at Bath Spa University College, 22 April 1998 entitled 'Bikers! Beards! and Butch Broads in Bloomers! Cycling in Nineteenth Century Ireland'. However, threats to personal safety remained. James McGurn writes: 'Few women of the 1890s habitually cycled alone, whatever their choice of costume. Magazines

warned of attacks by tramps on lonely roads.' *On Your Bicycle: An Illustrated History of Cycling* (London: John Murray, 1987), p. 106.

⁹¹ Miss F. J. Erskine, *Lady Cycling* (London: Walter Scott Limited, 189[6?]), p. 134. Erskine remained conscious of the problem of women's personal security:

Riding in company is a certain safeguard against annoyance from tramps, though I think a lady, inconspicuously dressed and riding quietly alone in daylight, has little to fear. However, in the large manufacturing towns the rowdy element may at times annoy ladies riding alone, though I have, myself, always met with courtesy; still, this may have been by exceptional good fortune, and I have no wish to boast of it.
(*Lady Cycling*, p. 138).

⁹² Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, p. 46.

⁹³ Mary Shelley, *Proserpine and Midas: Two Unpublished Mythological Dramas*, ed. by A. Koszul (London: Humphrey Milford, 1922), p. 7.

⁹⁴ In some versions of the tale, notably Ovid's account, these flowers, which slip from Persephone's fingers, are red poppies – a gesture signifying the young woman's deflowerment.

⁹⁵ Clara Reeve, *Plans of Education with Remarks on the Systems of Other Writers: In a Series of Letters Between Mrs. Darnford and her Friends* (London: T. Hookham and J. Carpenter, 1792), p. 76.



CULTIVATION AND BLOSSOMING: **BOTANY IN EDUCATION**

I am convinced that at any age the study of nature abates the taste for frivolous amusements, subdues the tumults of passion, and bestows upon the mind a salutary nourishment by filling it with a subject most worthy of its contemplation.

(Rousseau, *Elementary Letters to Madame Delessert*)¹

Opportunities to pursue natural history became greater for upper- and middle-class women in the final quarter of the eighteenth century. Women who wished to study plants had previously found that the use of Latin by botanists was a persistent obstacle. Eighteenth-century women were almost universally excluded from élitist classical education and, hence, Latin constituted a form of mystification that effectively upheld patriarchal and class barriers.² However, factors such as the availability of more affordable texts in translation and an increase in leisure time contributed to a steady and accumulating growth in interest in natural history by the mid-nineteenth century.

Furthermore, unlike medicine, nature study retained a more amateur status that enabled women to collect and admire botanical specimens without encroaching on the professional male sphere.³ Botany represented a field of scientific endeavour open to women's participation despite their broader exclusion from medicine, political economy and the study of the physical world that was termed 'natural philosophy'. In her encyclopaedic *British Botanical and Horticultural Literature Before 1800* (1975), Blanche Henrey records that, by the end of the eighteenth century, several women writers including Elizabeth Blackwell, Margaret Meen, Mary Lawrence, Charlotte Murray and the children's authors, Priscilla Wakefield and Maria Jacson, had successfully published botanical writings.⁴

The spirit of greater acceptance and encouragement of women's education was an important supporting feature of the affective companionate relationship that social historians such as Lawrence Stone and Roy Porter have documented as the dominant marital arrangement from the early eighteenth century onwards.⁵ This shift in emphasis towards personal choice and romantic inclination in assessing the eligibility of a potential partner – albeit in the context of powerful constraints upon compatibility that continued to be particularly predicated upon class and religion – ensured that proficiency in domestic accomplishments (of which knowledge of natural history was one), was a significant enhancement of women's social capital. As we shall see however, the durable, yet shifting, ideology of the separate spheres complicates the pursuit of improvement through the

engagement with botany throughout the Romantic and Victorian periods. Charles Kingsley explicitly gendered natural history when he wrote ‘Entomology [...] is the study most fit for boys (as Botany is for girls).’⁶ Female aspirations and commitment could be indulged in the study of plants because it was held to be an improving enthusiasm. The supposed benefits were many and it is fitting that botanical metaphors such as ‘cultivation’, ‘being rooted’ and ‘flourishing’ are enduring metaphors of personal development and well-being. Botany sharpened the faculties by encouraging an active engagement and connection with immediate, living things and was therefore preferable to inattentively traversing the countryside. Charlotte M. Yonge commended its benefits and pleasures in 1853:

To teach them [village children] to value and observe, and perceive the wide-spread beauties in the woods and fields around them, is opening a great source of happiness, and leading them to a pursuit of refining and softening nature, one of the best of the subordinate means of cultivation.⁷

There was one sense however, in which the study of botany was held to be inappropriate and indeed improper. The intensification of public debate about women’s education⁸ coincided with the appearance, from the 1760s onwards, of translations of the Linnaean system of classification, based upon *sexual* differentiation in botany. The discovery of plant sexuality, which had become orthodox by the eighteenth century, prompted an often-exaggerated anthropomorphism and heightened awareness of a human-ethical dimension which made the study of plants more contentious. Continuities between the display of flowers and the exhibition of women’s bodies are abundant in writings such as Erasmus Darwin’s *The Loves of the Plants* (1789), which enabled the metaphorical representation of human bodies and behaviours, removed, first to the floral realm, and further from the physical to the theatrical space of the camera obscura.

In the chapters that follow, I shall illustrate the ways in which, despite some reservations about the ‘immodesty’ of the sexualized Linnaean system, botany featured in several sketches for female curricula during the Romantic period. However, it is also evident that some constraints applied to botanical study for women because, while it was considered to be an appropriate aesthetic pastime, it was also a scientific discipline in an era when professional status was exclusively male.⁹

Vertu and Ecstasy: Botanizing with Rousseau

Rousseau’s writings did much to popularize the vogue for botany in Western Europe during the eighteenth century. He took up botany in 1764, confiding to Madame de Boufflers, ‘I am

not sure that I may not be mad enough to undertake its study seriously'.¹⁰ The ardour for botany, expressed with Rousseau's customary eloquence, enchanted many of his readers. He claimed that it was a non-cerebral activity which he adopted in later life as a safe alternative to the dangers and misfortunes that philosophy had caused him:

I never had single thought, virtuous or useful, without seeing in my mind's eye the scaffold or the gallows looming up beside me; with a copy of Linnaeus in my pocket, and hay in my head, I shall not be in danger of hanging; botany is the only occupation left to a wandering machine such as me to indulge in, after having been warned off thinking again and again.¹¹

This is an early instance of what was to become a familiar escapist notion of botany as a refuge activity during the century that followed. Rousseau described the pleasure and elation he experienced while botanizing in *The Confessions*, *The Reveries* and, most directly, in the botanical letters. Alan Bewell remarks that for Rousseau 'plants are as noble as savages', and indeed the philosopher describes his first acquaintance with the new Linnaean system as a primal, almost revelatory experience.¹² Rousseau joyfully applied the sexual system during his exile on the secluded and, for him, idyllic, Island of Saint-Pierre in 1765:

Nothing could be more extraordinary than the raptures and ecstasies I felt at every discovery I made about the structure and organization of plants and the operation of the sexual parts in the process of reproduction, which was at this time completely new to me.¹³

Delighted with the Linnaean system, Rousseau became a dedicated enthusiast.¹⁴ However, he was more circumspect when advocating the study as a pastime for women, and careful to maintain boundaries that would preserve decorum. In practice, Rousseau had a low estimation of women's abilities as scientific botanists, apparently insinuating that more rigorous study was a masculine endeavour:

Nothing was more depressing and more ridiculous, when a woman or one of those men who resemble women asked you the name of a plant or a flower in a garden, than the obligation to answer by spitting out a string of Latin words that resembled a magic invocation. Such a pedantic apparatus was enough to make these shallow-minded persons recoil from a fascinating study.¹⁵

Rousseau's eight *Elementary Letters to Madame Delessert*, and the *Notes Towards a Dictionary of Botanical Terms*, were penned between 1771 and 1773, and published posthumously in 1782.¹⁶ The 'lady' correspondent addressed in the *Elementary Letters*, was Mme Étienne Delessert (1747-1816), who wished for her young daughter, Marguerite-Madeleine, to carry out a programme of botanical education under Rousseau's tutelage.

Rousseau met the request, feeling that an enthusiasm for botany should be encouraged so long as it was kept within bounds appropriate to the feminine sphere. The *Elementary Letters* consistently privilege the aesthetic pleasure of botanizing while de-emphasizing its utilitarian aspects, thereby marking a distinction between recreational botany and vocational science.

Consistent with the gender division in education that he had prescribed in *Emile*, Rousseau advises that female education should sometimes be as much concerned with the appropriate restriction and suppression of information as with the dissemination of knowledge. In his first botanical letter, Rousseau follows a discussion of the fructification of lilies with the warning:

You will not begin by telling all this to your daughter, nor even tell her later when you will unveil to her by degrees no more than is suitable to her age and sex, leading her to discover things for herself rather than teaching them to her.
(*Botany*, p. 34)

Rousseau was a man of contradictions and a master of paradox, and his botanical writings are characteristically contrapunctual. He seeks to account for the usefulness of the study while denying its utility. He indulges in the legerdemain of gradual unveiling so that botanical understanding and enlightenment come not by disclosing but by restricting details in order to allow for personal discovery, yet occasions for such exploration are to be carefully contrived by the 'leading' presence of an adult. For women to participate in such scientific scrutiny was to take part in an interrogation of nature that could infringe patriarchal norms. Rousseau argues that the pedagogue should approach any unveiling, not only of sexual knowledge, but of any scientific knowledge with extreme caution. Consequently, the main caveat that Rousseau adds to his endeavour is that these lessons should be instilled with a view to amusement and not to the later development of scientific practice. Indeed, Rousseau repeatedly insists that as 'a study of pure curiosity' (*Botany*, p. 106), botany should have no wider utilitarian purpose. Nevertheless, he expects the four-year old Marguerite-Madeleine to absorb and familiarize herself with extraordinarily sophisticated information. His purpose is to teach her to be attentive to the natural world and to enjoy exercise in a 'gentle and charming' study that is edifying and will occupy the mind in 'interesting observations on nature', thus avoiding 'those empty moments devoted by others to idleness, or worse' (*Botany*, pp. 45-46). The time, and indeed the mind, of a young woman, then, was conceived as an empty vessel which should be filled with virtuous activity were it not to become loaded with indolence or vice.

Familiarity with botany was therefore a part of a young girl's preparation for a fixed role in adult society. According to Rousseau's ideology of the separate spheres, husband and wife form different, though complementary aspects of a unified identity. The tension between the idea of complementary fusion and 'natural' masculine hierarchy in this model was challenged forthrightly by Catharine Macaulay, who objected 'he has made up a moral person of the union of the two sexes, which, for contradiction and absurdity, outdoes every metaphysical riddle that was ever formed in the schools'.¹⁷

For Rousseau, the observational skills and use of critical faculties developed through botany contributed to the socialization of a marriageable bourgeois daughter, later to be an effective helpmate and a responsible educator of children. It is an interest that should be cultivated in the private sphere 'without wishing to make [Marguerite-Madeleine] a very great botanist', even with such a strong grounding at an early age, but in the expectation 'that she will always find it useful to have learned how really to see what she is looking at' (*Botany*, p. 28).

Rousseau's advice about botany is not therefore imparted in a way that excludes female participation but rather defines the context in which the study ought to take place. Again it is an aspect of female study that was designed to inculcate girls to grow up to be more effective domestic partners to husbands in companionate relationships in adult life.¹⁸ Like *Emile*, the intention of the *Elementary Letters* is to offer advice on appropriate child-rearing for Mme Delessert in her husband's absence, this being, Rousseau insists, the 'sweetest and most worthy of [her] duties' (*Botany*, p. 112).

It is the educative and morally efficacious rather than the economic or taxonomic aspects of botany that are emphasized. Rousseau stresses attention to structure as the most significant factor in honing the critical and intellectual faculties, beyond learning the arbitrary names that are attached to plants:

If we are only giving your children an amusing occupation, we are failing to achieve the more important part of our intention, which is, whilst granting them entertainment, to exercise their intelligence and accustom them to careful observation. Before teaching them to give a name to what they see, let us start by teaching them to see. [...] I can never reiterate this enough; teach them never to be satisfied with words, and to believe they know nothing whilst it resides only in their memory.
(*Botany*, p. 70)

Despite certain reservations therefore, Rousseau honours botany as a means to a fuller and more enlarged realization of human understanding and potential. He presents himself as a firm yet indulgent pedagogue who is ever attentive to his pupil's needs. Rousseau's concern for the wider human significance of botany, despite the deprecating tone of his words, prompts him to make wide and important claims for the study, its value lying in 'what a thinking, sensitive being can draw from observing nature and the marvels of the universe' (*Botany*, p. 106). The Rousseauist gaze, therefore, is one that, he claims, is strictly aesthetic and ethical and needs no utilitarian justification; it is 'virtuous' because 'it is a way of preventing any seeds of vengeance or hate from taking root in my heart'.¹⁹

Rousseau was repelled by the tendency, worst in France he felt, to look with an eye that was motivated solely by the commercial imperatives of professional male apothecaries. He waspishly vents his scorn and distaste for these in the Seventh Walk of the *Reveries*, which seeks to educate a wider spectrum of public sympathizers and kindred spirits in the benefits of botany. He expresses his abhorrence for the reductionism of what he clearly believes is an appropriating and colonizing gaze:

All the charming and gracious details of the structure of the plants hold little interest for anyone whose sole aim is to pound them all up into a mortar, and it is no good seeking garlands for shepherdesses among the ingredients of an enema. (*Reveries*, pp. 109 and 110)

This attack upon vulgar commodification of the kind that treats the natural environment as a vast repository of resources for 'profits or remedies' (*Reveries*, p. 111) marks Rousseau as an originator of an anti-utilitarian impulse that urges a qualitative rather than quantitative view of the natural environment. In this sense Rousseau anticipates later green thinking, yet finds that his sentiments have little resonance among his contemporaries, conceding that they are 'diametrically opposed to other men'.²⁰ The use of the generic 'men' in this instance indicates a normatively masculine perspective, identified as it is with speculators and professional apothecaries who were male.

Rousseau's less colonizing, admiring gaze is itself consistently gendered in its depiction of a feminized and corporeal physical world:

Trees, bushes and plants are the clothing and adornment of the earth. There is no sight so sad as a bare, barren countryside that presents the eyes with nothing but stones, mud and sand. But brought to life by nature and dressed in her wedding

dress amidst the running waters and the song of birds, earth in the harmony of her three kingdoms offers man a living, fascinating and enchanting spectacle, the only one of which his eyes and his heart can never grow weary.
(*Reveries*, p. 108)

The contrast between the 'barren' and life-bearing earth again recalls the myth of Persephone and Demeter. There is a complementary harmony of male and female in which nature is the adored object of a subjective male gaze. Rousseau's vegetation is both real and substantial and a metaphorical living dress worn by a nurturing feminized nature. In desperate moments of exile and persecution, Rousseau attempted to flee to such rural idylls to take oedipal 'refuge in the bosom of our common mother'.²¹ The sensuous appreciation of flowers is contrasted to the horrors of anatomy and the dissection and imprisonment of animals, or an interest in mineralogy: because minerals are 'buried deep in the bosom of the earth its riches seem to have been placed far from the eyes of men so as not to arouse their cupidity' (*Reveries*, pp. 113-14).

Botanical Accomplishments in Educational Curricula

Natural history and botany also began to feature in the general theories of learning and curricula that proliferated during the late eighteenth century. Education was central to the broader political impulse for inclusion and self-improvement on the part of those huge social constituencies, women, the working classes and religious dissenters. The Lockean idea that human nature in its infancy is a *tabula rasa*, supported the proposition that by placing the human child in the optimum environment for personal development, he or she would naturally flourish according to the individual's own potentiality. To this end, the direct experience of natural history made for structured intellectual development and understanding of the living world's diversity of forms and processes. In particular the educational theorist, David Williams, who was inspired by Rousseau (though occasionally critical of him), held that natural history was the primary area of study for familiarizing the child with the workings of the physical world and a sure foundation for all human knowledge.²² Hestor Chapone, writing in *Letters on the Improvement of Mind* (1773), similarly placed an emphasis upon the inexhaustible capacity of the natural world to productively engage the human mind, given that it could 'afford such a range for observation and enquiry as might engross the whole term of our short life, if followed minutely'. For Chapone, 'delight' in the natural world depends upon its standing as a revelation of divine creation:

The contemplation of perfection must produce delight – and every natural object around you would offer this delight, if it could attract your attention:– if you survey the earth, every leaf that trembles in the breeze – every blade of grass beneath your feet is a wonder as absolutely beyond the reach of human art to imitate as the construction of the universe.²³

While Chapone's book sets out a challenging and ambitious programme for female study, she does so firmly with the expectation and assumption that this will take place in the context of the home for an entirely domestic future. Kathryn Sutherland (2000) argues, however, that within a decade there was an 'urgent national political argument' about women's education and an aspiration to create a 'professional female space' which would be 'freed from the taint of mere accomplishments'. While the idea that female education was desirable and important was no longer contentious, the value system that it ought to instil became highly controversial.²⁴ Michael Sanderson (1983) records that a significant disparity between men and women's rates of literacy had long been apparent.²⁵ Given the growing recognition of education's socializing function in this period, the nature of female schooling and instruction became a hotly contested issue as mass, eventually universal, education became established during the nineteenth century.²⁶

The inclusion of botany in the syllabus is one small but illuminating component of the wider debate concerning female education. Individual improvement became increasingly associated with scientific knowledge and instruction rather than classical learning and theology. However, women remained excluded from learned scientific societies, and campaigns for the attainment of professional status were not to reach their full momentum until the late nineteenth century.

Helen Maria Williams found space for botany in her programme for educational reform. She commended the French Lycée as a model for an inclusive participatory educational system, 'resorted to not only by men of letters, but by the most fashionable persons of both sexes'. Botany and natural history were prominent among the subjects that were discussed there. Using the appropriately botanical metaphor of the flowering of knowledge ('where learning seems stripped of its thorns and decorated with flowers'), Williams recorded that in 1791-2 she studied at the Lycée, where lectures were given 'by the most celebrated professors at Paris, on natural philosophy, chemistry, natural history, botany, history, and belles lettres'.²⁷

Botany, as might be expected, was also a privileged area of study in Erasmus Darwin's curriculum. In the *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (1797),

Darwin listed botany first before chemistry, mineralogy, mathematics, the arts, manufactures and shorthand, and recommended several suitable texts, including his own. Darwin emphasizes the value of a scientific education for girls who will grow up to be fitting companions for men:

As in male education the tedious acquirement of antient languages [...] is gradually giving way to the more useful cultivation of modern sciences, it may be of advantage to ladies of the rising generation to acquire an outline of similar knowledge; as they are in future life to become companions; and one of the greatest pleasures received in conversation consists in being reciprocally well understood. Botany is already a fashionable study for ladies [...].²⁸

Darwin is confident and optimistic about the improvement brought about by the participation of women in science. However, the emphasis placed upon a companionate role makes it clear that botany remains a pastime that is to be undertaken primarily in order for a wife to become an intelligent and able auxiliary for her husband rather than to make a broader social contribution. The primary justification for study here resides in the creation of a competent conversationalist able to reciprocate in the interests of an assumed spouse. The value of botany is not intrinsically imagined to be a means to personal development so much as the cultivation of accomplishments in the strictly relational context of attachment to a male partner and a family. As such, even among ‘progressive’ writers such as Erasmus Darwin, the study of botany is kept within the same limits that Alan Richardson identifies as ideological constraints upon female education as a whole during the Romantic period:

Educational reform may be advocated in order to make women better companions to (and even civilizers of) men, and more adequate tutors of their children, but such “mental improvement” must never challenge women’s fundamentally subordinate role, or interfere with the cardinal virtue of modesty, or disrupt the sexual division of society into distinct spheres of activity.²⁹

In *A Treatise on Education* (1774), David Williams argued that before children can develop any real understanding of grammar it is first necessary to develop an *a priori* sense of the thing itself so that the association between the referent and its signifier will have a strong force as a mental concept. To this end, he advises teachers ‘you must be continually wandering over the world with your pupils’.³⁰ Knowledge should be gained by direct experience and active engagement with the natural world, for example by drawing, because, Williams argues, ‘natural history is the first ground and foundation of philosophy’ (*Treatise on Education*, p. 117). He believed that this approach could have profound social implications. While Williams claims the English philosopher is ‘taught to reason before he is taught to observe’, he credits Swedish ‘disciples of Linnaeus’ with disseminating ‘more

knowledge than any other association in Europe', through direct observation of nature. Williams asserts that if such habits of mind were to be cultivated, the ensuing benefits would be so far-reaching that the English could 'enjoy all that can be obtained by man' (*Treatise on Education*, p. 120).

Williams describes a hypothetical pupil whose 'eye was well educated' and whose 'taste was well formed' through observing and copying objects from natural history (*Treatise on Education*, p. 253). In his later and more substantial work on educational theory, *Lectures on Education*, however, Williams acknowledged his own practical limitations in the study. He sets out to describe the same elevated status that he had earlier claimed, describing natural history as 'the first pursuit of the human mind; because it furnishes the materials of all convenience and all science'.³¹ Despite the boldness of this general declaration, the practical reality of embarking on a search for knowledge and wisdom in the garden and neighbouring countryside with a six year old turns out, at first, to be a 'discouraging', even farcical, undertaking. Williams thus satirizes and punctures his own inflated discourse of improvement:

Having no system or plan, our first excursions were discouraging; no objects having occurred which attracted the attention of my companion: and the autumn not being favourable to the random searches of ignorant botanists. [...] The disposition of the inferior parts of my family to laugh at our ignorance of common objects would have destroyed the project at its birth, if I had not been involved in the ridicule; and the child had not perceived it affected neither my temper, nor the respect with which I was treated.³²

Nevertheless, Williams's now more modest expectations are eventually rewarded through the act of collecting, and then classifying, the natural objects that they discover. An endeavour that initially appeared ludicrous or simply banal – 'every thing was in maturity and courted our appetites rather than our curiosity' – becomes transformed into a triumph of empirical learning and confirms his faith in libertarian education:

I availed myself of his desire to class the collections.[...] The business arising out of his immediate convenience, the rapidity with which he actually comprehended or converted to his purposes, the four general rules of arithmetic, was beyond any example I had seen on the progress of learning: and I am convinced, no such effect is possible by the menaces of authority, or the punishments of tyranny.³³

The programme of education set out by Maria Edgeworth and her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, also places a high value upon natural history as a means of classifying the world, and hence learning to structure knowledge and think coherently. In *Practical*

Education (1798), they condemn the frustration of childhood ingenuity by unimaginative adults:

To those who acquire habits of observation every thing that is to be seen or heard becomes a source of amusement. Natural history interests children at an early age; but their curiosity and activity is too often repressed and restrained by the ignorance or indolence of their tutors.³⁴

By contrast, the Edgeworths insist that such activities should be indulged: 'if [children] are to learn chemistry, mineralogy, botany, or mechanics; if they are to take sufficient bodily exercise without tormenting the whole family with noise, a room should be provided for them'. (*Practical Education*, I, p. 28). In keeping with David Williams's argument that an interest in natural history enables children to cultivate orderly habits of mind, the Edgeworths stress that:

If they have proper places to keep things in, they will acquire a taste for order by the best means, by feeling the use of it; to either sex this taste will be highly advantageous.
(*Practical Education*, I, pp. 29-30)

While the existence of the separate spheres, means that the purpose of female education is domestic,³⁵ the Edgeworths stress that education for young women must be as systematic, methodical and thorough as that given to young men:

Whatever women learn, let them be taught accurately; let them know ever so little apparently, they will know much if they have learnt that little *well*. A girl who runs through a course of natural history, hears something about chemistry, has been taught something of botany, and who knows just enough of these to make her feel that she is well informed, is in a miserable situation, in danger of becoming ridiculous, and insupportably tiresome to men of sense and science. But let a woman know any one thing completely, and she will have sufficient understanding to learn more, and to apply what she has been taught so as to interest men of generosity and genius in her favour.³⁶

So, particularly after the popularization of Linnaean taxonomy, several educational theorists placed great value upon botany as a method of teaching children how to think about natural phenomena in order that they should learn how to systematize knowledge. Such systemizing in botany is particularly apparent in a sophisticated botanical dialogue written by Jane Marcet (1769-1858). In *Conversations on Vegetable Physiology* (1829) an initially unwilling pupil, Caroline, is, predictably, converted from sceptic to enthusiast by her botanical preceptor, Mrs B. This is achieved through a discussion of the physiology of plants, in a more dynamic approach to botany. Mrs B. suggests: 'In the infancy of botany,

they sought after names: when further advanced, they aimed at learning the essence of things.’³⁷

While writing in a similar genre and tradition, the market was clearly ready for a less elementary botanical dialogue than those presented by Charlotte Smith and Priscilla Wakefield. Marcet deliberately stressed the scientific aspects and agricultural uses of botany. For Marcet this utilitarian approach was ultimately grounded in theology. If science and theology were mutual guarantors, those students of nature that could perceive in these complementary halves the love and wisdom of the creator of the whole would achieve not only intellectual but moral improvement:

[...] from every natural science, and every branch of it, from the arrangement and classification of the organs of the flower as well as from the history of vegetation, the well-disposed mind will draw lessons of piety; and he must study Nature with very contracted views, who does not raise his thoughts from the admiration of the creation to that of its all-wise and beneficent Creator.
(Marcet, *Conversations on Vegetable Physiology*, I, p. 28)

Mrs B. was certainly an autobiographical representation of Marcet, a particularly well-informed author because, Shteir writes, the *Conversations* were distilled and popularized immediately after her own attendance at Candolle’s lectures in Geneva. Despite the confinement of botanical science to the domestic setting evident in the early nineteenth century, the botanical dialogue was a genre that characteristicly featured an intelligent woman, in Shteir’s words: ‘a certain ideal type, self-possessed and self-controlled, she is rational mother rather than biological woman, moving beyond reproduction into rationality’.³⁸

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Botany: A Study of Pure Curiosity: Botanical Letters and Notes towards a Dictionary of Botanical Terms*, illustrated by P. J. Redouté. Letters trans. by Kate Ottevanger with an introduction by Roy McMullen (London: Michael Joseph, 1979), p. 26.

² Walter Ong even goes so far as to suggest that such was the anthropological significance of Latin that it amounted to a tribal 'puberty rite' for upper-class males during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 251. Irene Tayler and Gina Luria note that male Romantic poets produced work grounded in Classical Latin texts from which most women were excluded by education. See 'Gender and Genre: Women in British Romantic Literature', in *What Manner of Woman: Essays on English and American Life and Literature*, ed. by Marlene Springer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), pp. 100-104. Some, such as Charlotte Smith, were nevertheless undeterred and were prepared to familiarize themselves with Latin terminology. Her strategy was one of appropriation rather than refusal. Mrs. Talbot, Smith's autobiographical narrator in *Conversations Introducing Poetry*, is insistent that her children, both boys and girls, take the trouble to learn the correct Latin names to describe flowers accurately, even if such terms might invite ridicule from those that prefer the vernacular:

Nothing offends more than pretence to knowledge, in company which you know cannot possess it; and these girls will never forgive you for telling them that they should say "viola tricolor", instead of "Leap-up-and-kiss me", or "three-faces-under-a-hood", and your talking of chrysanthemums, and Errigeron, has given them occasion to laugh at you as long as they remember the conversation.

See Charlotte Smith, *Conversations Introducing Poetry: Chiefly on Subjects of Natural History for the Use of Young Persons* (London: J. Johnson, 1804), II, p. 180.

³ Women were excluded from all the main professional bodies for botany, being barred from membership of the Royal Society, the Linnean Society, the Royal Horticultural Society and the Royal Microscopical Society. See Jennifer Bennett, *Lilies of the Hearth: The Historical Relationship between Women and Plants* (Camden, Ontario: Camden House, 1991), p. 113.

⁴ Blanche Henrey, *British Botanical and Horticultural Literature Before 1800*, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), II, pp. 577-84.

⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* [1977], abridged rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 228. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 28-30.

⁶ Kingsley, *Glaucus*, p. 220. Some remarks by Margaret Gatty concur with Kingsley's contrast as she suggests that there is a gendered distinction between an aesthetically focused, feminine gaze and a more acquisitive, masculine gaze in natural history, which causes the eye to accustom itself to what it is searching after:

Any mother knows this who has walked down a wooded lane with a schoolboy son. To her it is full of primroses, violets, and such matters; to him of the birds' nests which, even when pointed out she can scarcely distinguish in the thick green hedge.

Mrs. Alfred Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds: Drawn from Professor Harvey's 'Phycologia Britannica' with Descriptions, an Amateur's Synopsis, Rules for Laying out Sea-weeds, An Order for Arranging them in the Herbarium, and an Appendix of New Species* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1863), p. x.

⁷ *The Herb of the Field*, by the author of 'The Kings of England', 'Langley School', 'Scenes and Characters', etc [Charlotte M. Yonge], reprinted from 'Chapters on Flowers' in the 'Magazine for the Young'. (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1853), p. v. An example of the acute sensitivity to place and awareness of immediate surroundings developed through botany is Yonge's claim that she could tell the route school-girls had been walking when they presented her with nosegays of violets because the flowers' colours are determined by the soil from which they grow. See pp. 25-26.

⁸ While the value of women's education was accepted by the later decades of the eighteenth century, traditionalists and progressives were sharply divided over the appropriate input – and outcomes – to be encouraged in, and expected from, female instruction. Rousseau's educational programme set out in *Emile* (1762) had insisted upon entirely different educational treatment for the boy, Emile to that of the girl, Sophie. Mary Wollstonecraft's response, in *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and other important contributions to the debate such as Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education*, which opposed the nurture of 'situation and education' to Rousseau's nature, offered a far more egalitarian approach. See *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical*

Subjects [1790], (London: William Pickering, 1996), pp. 205-6. Such texts rehearsed the central and familiar contentions of the educational debate, namely: whether men and women's anatomical differences were paralleled in different mental abilities; whether the shifting emphases in female curricula should cultivate 'accomplishments' pleasing to men or achievements aimed at self-development; whether women's education should conform to that of men or be designed to a different purpose and outcome; whether the purpose of women's education should be social control or personal development; ultimately, what sort of intellectual and moral being a woman should turn out to be, which aspects should be encouraged and developed, or indeed, curbed or repressed.

⁹ Adam Sedgwick wrote that 'we know, by long experience, that the ascent up the hill of science is rugged and thorny, and ill-fitted for the drapery of a petticoat', review of *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, in *The Edinburgh Review* 82 (July 1845), p. 4.

¹⁰ Letter of 26 August 1764, cited in Gavin de Beer, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Botanist', *Annals of Science* 10.3 (September 1954), p. 205.

¹¹ Letter to Malesherbes, 11 November 1764, cited in de Beer, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Botanist', p. 208.

¹² Alan Bewell, 'Jacobin Plants: Botany as Social Theory in the 1790s', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 20.3 (Summer 1989), 132-139 (p. 134).

¹³ Rousseau, *Reveries*, p. 84.

¹⁴ See McMullen's introduction to Rousseau, *Botany*, p. 13.

¹⁵ Cited by Roy McMullen in introduction to Rousseau, *Botany*, p. 13.

¹⁶ The *Elementary Letters* were repeatedly republished after the appearance of Thomas Martyn's English translation, which included twenty-four further letters penned by Martyn himself in imitation of Rousseau's style.

¹⁷ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 206.

¹⁸ Rousseau had helped Mme Delessert to escape the imposition of an unwelcome marriage of convenience when she was a teenager. See McMullen's introduction to Rousseau, *Botany*, p. 15.

¹⁹ Rousseau, *Reveries*, p. 106.

²⁰ Rousseau, *Reveries*, p. 111. Rousseau's importance to the development of the environmental movement is discussed in detail by LaFreniere, 'Rousseau and the European Roots of Environmentalism', pp. 41-72.

²¹ Rousseau, *Reveries*, p. 112. In *The Confessions*, Rousseau records that he took up botany in 1765 during a period of extreme persecution from the local population at Motiers:

[...] The populace abandoned all restraint. I continued, however, quietly to take my walks to the accompaniment of their hooting; and my taste for botany, which I had begun to acquire from Doctor d'Ivernois, gave these walks a new interest. They sent me wandering the country in search of new plants, unworried by the shouts of all that mob, who became even more infuriated by my coolness.

The Confessions [1781], trans. by J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1953), p. 582. In a letter of 17 September 1765, Julie von Bondeli wrote of the comfort and pleasure that her gift of some plants had afforded Rousseau at this time: 'You see that women and plants can still perform miracles.' Cited in De Beer, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Botanist', pp. 219-20.

²² See W. A. C. Stewart, *Progressives and Radicals in English Education* (London: Macmillan, London, 1972), pp. 22-32.

²³ Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* [1773], and Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* [1797], (London: Pickering, 1996), pp. 200-201.

²⁴ Sutherland, 'Writings on Education and Conduct', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*, ed. by Jones, p. 35.

²⁵ Michael Sanderson, *Education, Economic Change and Society in England 1780-1870* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 54. Jacqueline Pearson points out that eighteenth-century literacy rates are unreliable and that to ascertain what degree of knowledge of the written form constitutes literacy is problematic. She cites 40% as an estimate of adult female literacy in 1750. See *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 11.

²⁶ See Margaret Bryant, *The Unexpected Revolution: A Study in the History of the Education of Women and Girls in the Nineteenth Century* (London: University of London Institute of Education, 1979); Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); June Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England* (Milton Keynes: Open University

Press, 1991); Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁷ Williams, *Letters from France*, Vol. 1, II, p. 130.

²⁸ Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* [1797], (Wakefield, Yorkshire: S. R. Publishers, 1968), pp. 44-5. Darwin particularly singled out the *Botanical Dialogues* of Maria Jacson (c.1760-c.1840), as 'a lady well skill'd in botany', *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, p. 41. Darwin had written to Jacson to commend her 'ingenius labours' in producing her *Botanical Dialogues*. *The Letters of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. by Desmond King-Hele (London:Cambridge, 1981), p. 287.

²⁹ Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism*, p. 172.

³⁰ Williams, *Treatise on Education*, p. 112.

³¹ David Williams, *Lectures on Education: Read to a Society for Promoting Reasonable and Humane Improvements in the Discipline and Instruction of Youth*, 3 vols (London: John Bell, 1789), I, p. 133.

³² Williams, *Lectures on Education*, I, p. 134.

³³ Williams, *Lectures on Education*, I, pp. 139-40.

³⁴ Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1798), I, p. 28.

³⁵ The Edgeworths' observation that 'Women are peculiarly restrained in their situation, and in their employment, by the customs of society' and lead 'sedentary lives' (*Practical Education*, II, pp. 522-23) confirms, though does not necessarily approve, the view of Rousseau in *Emile*, an important influence upon their own educational theory.

³⁶ M. and R. L. Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, II, p. 551.

³⁷ Jane Marcet, *Conversations on Vegetable Physiology; Comprehending the Elements of Botany with their Application to Agriculture*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1829), II, p. 117).

³⁸ Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science*, p. 102.



BOTANICAL EROTICA

*Various and many are the kinds,
The Botanist, and female fends
In hot-beds, do they thrive and grow,
And there, to best advantage shew
Their motions that inchant.
(Perry, Mimosa)¹*

Lilies of Ill-Repute and other Moral Panics

As early as 1672 Sir Thomas Millington (1628-1709) made public his revolutionary hypothesis that flowers had sexual propensities, an idea substantially supported by Nehemiah Grew (1641-1712) during the following decade. This was a scientific verification of the continuous figurative presence of Western erotic botanical imagery, stemming from the Dionysian cornucopias of classical representation, through the alluring blooms in Georgia O'Keeffe's oil paintings, to Robert Mapplethorpe's voluptuous orchids, parrot tulips and calla lilies.² The idea that plants were sexually distinguished in a literal sense was a novel, and indeed shocking, one.³ The experimental evidence of the German scientist, Rudolf Jakob Camerarius (1665-1721), corroborated the theory in 1694, but scientific critics and puritan objectors predictably responded with ridicule, incredulity and hostility. When Linnaeus later made sexuality central to the classification of the *Systema Naturae* (1735) the idea became the accepted orthodoxy. However, it took many years for the Linnaean system to fully supplant the home-grown classification of John Ray and the popularity of older herbals by Gerrard, Hill and Culpeper.

The immediate consequence of the ethical human dimension brought about by sexualized botany was to reconfigure a formerly acceptable feminine sphere of interest into a site of a 'moral panic' about propriety. Finding it impossible to reconcile delicacy with the lewd practice of peering into the genitals of flowers, troubled theologians cautioned responsible guardians to be wary of botany as, potentially, a corrosive and morally degrading study.

Late eighteenth-century botanical writings reflect the contention and anxiety about gender difference during a moment of transition in women's social situation. During the 1790s fear of revolution on the French model swung majority English upper- and middle-class opinion resolutely against radical change. In Elizabeth Fay's words, the 'latter part of

the Romantic period was reactionary rather than radical, shutting down on individual rights rather than opening up the possibility of rights for the working classes and for women'.⁴

In his attack on radical women, *The Unsex'd Females*, Polwhele objected how 'the study of the sexual system of plants can accord with female modesty, I am not able to comprehend'.⁵ Wollstonecraft had recommended the edifying study of flora and fauna in her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*:

A taste for the beauties of nature should be very early cultivated: many things, with respect to the vegetable and animal world, may be explained in an amusing way; and this is an innocent source of pleasure within everyone's reach.⁶

The 'many things' may include the discussion of the sexual facts of life. Wollstonecraft's pragmatic approach to this matter offended and angered Polwhele who was repulsed by the explicit nature of botanical literature. He issued a forthright warning against Wollstonecraft's nature lessons:

Miss Wollstonecraft does not blush to say, in an introduction to a book designed for the use of young ladies, that, "in order to lay the axe at the root of corruption, it would be proper to familiarize the sexes to an unreserved discussion of these topics which are generally avoided in conversation from a principle of false delicacy; and that it would be right to speak of the organs of generation as freely as we mention our eyes or our hands." To such language our botanizing girls are doubtless familiarized: and, they are in a fair way of becoming worthy disciples of Miss W. If they do not take heed to their ways, they will soon exchange the blush of modesty for the bronze of imprudence.⁷

For Polwhele, botany was a sensual, wanton and lustful activity which, he strongly suspected, provided a cover for illicit liaisons between young people ('I have, several times, seen boys and girls botanizing together', he confides), and could be a code to discuss normally forbidden topics.⁸ Pascoe writes in reference to this passage, that it is 'as if this were akin to sexual experimentation'.⁹ It is quite possible Polwhele was correct in the sense that, through botany, young people were able to claim a linguistic space in which they were able to express sexual difference and allude to human anatomy. Indeed, it appears that such a taboo exercised his own imagination. Polwhele's prudish suspicion may have had some foundation in shrewd psychological perception as he insinuates a site of displaced curiosity and desire that is projected onto plants:

With bliss botanic as their bosoms heave,
Still pluck forbidden fruit, with mother Eve,
For puberty in signing florets pant,
Or point the prostitution of a plant;
Dissect its organ of unhallow'd lust,

And fondly gaze the titillating dust [...]'¹⁰

Polwhele's verse aligns botany with the founding myth of Judaeo-Christian civilization, in which the apple was an accomplice in the seductive wiles that led to the fall of humanity after Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden, subsequently symbolizing the forbidden fruit of sexual awakening. Polwhele alleged that botany enjoyed popularity in his own time because it was a cunning device for introducing 'illicit knowledge' that was otherwise prohibited.¹¹ For what more guileful, and therefore dangerous, device could there be for disseminating libertarian sexual attitudes than the innocent 'tussy mussy'? The cropping of plants and herbs was, furthermore, traditionally the preserve of wise women or witches who ritualized the harvest at full moon or other auspicious nights – frequently naked or 'sky-clad'.¹² However, it is tempting to read Polwhele's lines as themselves specimens of puritan erotica – for all his denial and protestation of disgust at the fascination for floral genitalia there is a suspicion of fetishism in his description.¹³

Polwhele also singled out botany for its association with 'gallic licentiousness'¹⁴ and subversion of the natural order. In particular, as Bewell argues in 'Jacobin Plants' (1989), a priceless exposition of the sexual politics of botany during the 1790s, commendations by such writers as Darwin and Wollstonecraft made the study seem dangerously Jacobin during the reactionary aftermath of the French Revolution.¹⁵ Botany was morally suspect because Rousseau, its chief exponent and popularizer, was held to be an inspiration for the Revolution, complicit in a way of looking at the world that culminated in sexual wantonness and regicide. Such an image was substantiated by the promotion of Rousseau's friend and disciple, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre as director of the Jardin des Plantes and Muséum Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle during the Terror.¹⁶

Botany and Improper Amusement in Plumptre's *Lakers*

One zealous reader considered some of the language of James Plumptre's *The Lakers* to be so florid that he or she scratched out some lines in the copy held by the British Library. Fortunately, time has undone the censor's work so that the offending lines are now again visible through the faded ink. Plumptre's satirical 'comic opera', however, is itself a further attack on the voluptuous nature of botany, written at the height of the anti-Jacobin backlash in 1798. Condemning the 'prying eyes'¹⁷ of the botanist, Plumptre was another clergyman who had moral objections to the study:

The author assures himself he is not singular in thinking the study of Botany not altogether a proper amusement for the more polished sex; and the false taste of a licentious age, which is gaining ground, and corrupting the soft and elegant manners of the otherwise loveliest part of the creation, requires every discouragement which can be given.¹⁸

This text also gives rise to a suspicion that Plumptre's moral disdain is combined with covert titillation and the *frisson* of transgression. The representative botanist in *The Lakers* is a wealthy Aunt, improbably named Miss Beccabunga Veronica of Diandria Hall (a Linnaean pun), who roves across the Lake District in search of botanical specimens, picturesque prospects and 'very impatient for a husband'.¹⁹ While it may be assumed that Veronica's priorities here are best taken in reverse order, there is an implication that hunts for botanical specimens and men are readily interchangeable and that once she has studied the 'system of plants' she is ready to study the 'system of man'.²⁰ Wallace suspects that there is a pun on 'husbandry' which makes use of botany in place of farming or gardening.²¹ Plumptre mocks the decorous Aunt Veronica with her pretentious baggage of malapropisms and affectations. She is a character as irresistible in drama, as she would be irritating in life, exquisitely encumbered with all the *mise-en-scène* of the picturesque; a perennial parasol always erected to give the right appearance, and a fashionable Claude glass for framing suitable vistas.²² Plumptre's play demonstrates a confidence that, even if his readers were no more expert in Linnaean botany than Veronica, the topical caricature he created would be instantly recognizable. *The Lakers* also secures the association between women and the use, or rather misuse, of botany at this time. By contrast, the astute Sir Charles Portinscale, who is more quietly versed in botanical lore, is not risible but rather a man of authentic sensibility.

Plumptre disparages the idea that botany can be an improving study for women and if his satirical aim be in any doubt he explicitly assured William Gilpin: 'The object of it was to ridicule the study of botany by Ladies, not the picturesque, but only the affectation of it.'²³ In *The Lakers*, botany functions as a symbol for disruption to the conventional relations between men and women. Female characters with botanical interests live outside the family unit in which husband and wife are bonded in a complementary yet male dominant union. Aunt Veronica is an unmarried woman with abundant leisure time because she has not been successful in fulfilling her 'natural' role as a wife. Such leisure time creates a vacuum which is filled with displaced sexual frustration. Her sexual presence, though moderated, is marked by Plumptre's opening protestation that he 'would not have introduced an Otaheitan [...], nor have gone so far as to "make his heroine blue"' (that is, a bluestocking).²⁴ Veronica's conversation with a serving man called Sample, with whom she persistently speaks at cross

purposes due to her use of botanical metaphors, significantly takes on the appearance of an adulterous flirtation (in a comic case of mistaken identity she presumes Sample to be Sir Charles). She appears to be at once indecently ‘forward’ in her knowledge of botanical sexuality yet at the same time comically shocked and unknowing about human sexuality. For all her sensibility, Veronica apprehends little while her fashionable maid, Anna, appears haughty, dangerously profligate and offends other characters with her matter of fact knowledge of the sexual system. Speedwell, a man of common sense, fears the social dangers of women so well-versed in the sexual predilections of plants. The following observation is just legible in the defaced text held by the British Library: ‘she, who is bawd to a blossom, may not be very nice in the intercourse of her own species’.²⁵

Veronica agrees to marry Speedwell, despite his servant status, partly because she has a fear that she may otherwise remain a virgin and partly, it seems, because his name is suitably botanical. Her wooing draws upon Titania’s seductive attentions to Bottom the Weaver as an ass in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Veronica’s willingness to marry across the class divide, though initially unintentional, marks her as a threat to the social structure. Her transgression of gender and class conventions had already been mocked when Sample mistook her for a serving traveller, an unheard of occupation for a woman.²⁶ Plumptre was surely forcing a connection between the sexual eccentricities of botanists and a susceptibility to Jacobin levelling when he caused Veronica to cite the example of Lord Level, who married his daughter to a servant, as a precedent for her own match. Furthermore, Veronica’s authorship of both ‘Gothick’ thrillers and an epic botanical poem about the rape of Proserpina links botany with politically subversive literature of sensibility. However, despite his derision, the slapstick qualities of the comic opera make Plumptre’s play a mocking satire rather than the authentic tone of moral outrage.

The Sexual Politics of the Flower-Bed: Other Responses to *The Loves of the Plants*

If Foucault’s premise that the modern view of human sexuality was entirely innovative during the Early Modern period is correct, then it is strikingly contemporaneous with the discovery of plant sexuality. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault suggests that, before the emergence of bourgeois society, there was no real concept of sexuality. People engaged in sexual *acts* of course, but there was no notion that they had a particular sexual *identity*, in the sense of something amenable to analysis and scrutiny in a manner that one can identify as modern.²⁷ Foucault dates the emergence of this concept from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period concurrent with Millington and

Grew's hypotheses of plant sexuality. The sexual awareness in eighteenth-century works such as Darwin's *Loves of the Plants* (the second part of the *Botanical Garden*), partly followed in the tradition of bawdy poems such as James Perry's *Mimosa* (1779) but also anticipates the dissemination of more wide-ranging investigations into human sexual practices.²⁸

While there was a bowdlerization of explicit sexual reference in popular Romantic and Victorian texts that referred to the Linnaean system, erotically romanticized botanical writing remained acceptable and extremely popular. Notwithstanding the objections of its critics, Darwin's delight in Linnaean botany and his enthusiastic celebration of aesthetic diversity helped to account for some of the system's popular appeal. In that hot-house of sexualized flora, *The Loves of the Plants*, he was fully able to exploit the sensual pleasures that one could enjoy through the contemplation of plants. When *The Loves of the Plants* was written, it was perhaps not shocking to a section of the reading public that was familiar with lines written with far stronger sexual content. *Mimosa: or The Sensitive Plant*, written a decade earlier by the Scottish journalist James Perry (1756-1821), was penned with the masculine bravado of the age of Casanova and Boswell. It is a sustained double entendre in celebration of that male 'pistil', the penis. Written in botanical rhyming couplets, Perry's poem was a prototype for Darwin's verse though, as Shteir points out, there is a marked switch from his phallic representation to the feminized mimosa that appears in *The Loves of the Plants*.²⁹ In the dedication, Perry indulges in some prosaic foreplay for the benefit of Joseph Banks, head of the Royal Society and England's most prominent naturalist. He therefore situates botany in an Imperial context based upon the imported products of global exploration.

The success of the *Loves of the Plants* earned Darwin much acclaim and, during the early 1790s, made him one of England's most widely read poets.³⁰ It seems, therefore, that besides publicly vocal moralists, there existed a wider readership that was enthralled by such work. Even the puritanical Polwhele regarded the *Botanical Garden* as 'an admirable poem' and its descriptive pictures 'the most beautiful [...] that were ever delineated by the poetic pencil', modelling in fact his own rhyming couplets upon it.³¹

Women writers too were prepared to defend Darwin's poetry against accusations of immorality. His friend and first biographer, Anna Seward, argues that the poem is characterized by grace rather than titillation and that even in the single passage where he 'can be justly taxed with voluptuousness' this is milder than its Homeric sources.³² She rounds upon Darwin's critics:

As to the amours of the Plants and Flowers, it is a burlesque upon morality to make them responsible at its tribunal. The floral harems do not form an imaginary but a real system – which philosophy has discovered, and with which poetry sports. The impurity is in the imagination of the reader, not on the pages of the poet, when the Botanical Garden is considered on the whole, as an immodest composition.³³

Likewise, the response of Elizabeth Moody (d.1814) appears to be characterized by a tone of coy amusement rather than moral indignation. Moody's poem 'To Dr. Darwin, On Reading His Loves of the Plants' (1798), concludes with a plea to:

[...] tune no more thy Lyre's sweet powers,
To libel harmless trees and flowers.³⁴

Written in rhyming couplets, Moody's poem is a playful tribute to Darwin, itemizing the sexual content of his work as she objects to his 'libel'.

Darwin's odyssey into the realm of plant sexuality suggests and draws attention to a compulsive quest for the truth of human sexuality in all its implied diversity of affective relationships. For, in the personified plant world of his imaginings, a colourful variety of often orgiastic cohabitations exist. Darwin was also anticipating those sexologists who collated human sexual pleasures and, to make use of Foucault's particularly apposite phrase, 'made up a herbal of them and established a system of classification'.³⁵

The Loves of the Plants is sharply contemporaneous with the broader diffusion of romantic affection within upper-class marriages during the eighteenth century.³⁶ Lawrence Stone records that choice in marriage had been placed more firmly in the hands and hearts of the younger generation during the Early Modern Period.³⁷ The replacement of alliances arranged by parents in favour of the companionate love-marriage amounted to an adjustment in the perpetual tension between emotional inclination and economic pragmatism. The competing attractions of qualities such as personal charm and physical attractiveness became more significant considerations as forms of social capital and weighed more substantially as values when deliberating the eligibility of a prospective spouse in a more mobile society. This trend is in part corroborated by the accompanying proliferation of the discourse of romantic love exemplified by the emergence of the sentimental novel as a fashionable literary genre. Writers, artists and thinkers of the Romantic period began to explore the implications of the entire 'herbal' of love connections. Darwin was writing in the age of Rousseau's *Julie or the New Heloise* and Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*.

The apotheosis of heterosexual love – depicted as something to live or die for in sentimental literature– began to be exalted into almost a new religion in which ‘secular love replaced heavenly salvation as a popular ideal of fulfillment’.³⁸

However, in the more socially-conservative climate of the years of the Continental Blockade, women writers in particular became more circumspect about presenting themselves as apologists for the sexual aspects of Darwin’s work with its associations of gallic promiscuity. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Sophia Reeve tastefully transposed the setting of a flower masquerade written in Darwinian couplets from the boudoir to the more demure Royal Court. In *The Flowers at Court* (1809), she itemized several reasons for studying botany, urging the physical benefits of ‘health and vigour to the body’, and the enlargement of the mind because plants ‘exercise our industry in classifying their beauty’. Finally, Reeve used the argument of natural theology whereby she hoped that the wonder experienced by those studying botany ‘may be warmed into devotion, resulting in the ‘most salutary influence’ upon conduct, believing that the brilliance, diversity and beauty of flowers were a revelation of God’s Creation.³⁹ These are instances of the many other uses to which botany was put during the nineteenth century, a theme that I shall now move on to explore in more detail.

¹ James Perry, *Mimosa: or The Sensitive Plant, A Poem* (London: W. Sandwich, 1779), p. 12.

² In the period under study, the mezzotint and aquatint plates in Robert John Thornton's collection, *The Temple of Flora*, provide some of the most popular and immaculately executed examples of illustrations inspired by the Linnaean sexual system. Robert Thornton, *The Temple of Flora* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981). This illustrated section forms the third part of *A New Illustration of the Sexual System of Carolus von Linnaeus* (London: 1799-1807).

³ See Alec Bristow, *The Sex Life of Plants: A Study of the Secrets of Reproduction* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1979), p. 10.

⁴ Fay, *Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, p. 18. The narrative of the rights of man and the idea of an historical development of changing sensibilities and an ever more humane liberalism has itself been rigorously challenged. Utilitarians, Marxists and other critics have long argued that the concern for individual rights reflects the ideology of competitive liberal individualism which compliments the industrial capitalism that, in its tendency to atomize, commodify and appropriate, generates many of the destructive tendencies in modern society would-be holders of rights need protection from. As the eighteenth-century theorists realized, the demand for rights is an inevitable and necessary corrective to human fallibility or even malevolence and consequently will probably be as long in duration. They reflect a utopian impulse for an ideal human standard which remains a continuing struggle, even if individual rights are attained. Ultimately, they are not to be found in those 'musty records and mouldy parchments' that Edmund Burke held in disdain, but are a fluid and inexact commodity. Bentham quickly recognized their shortcomings when he dismissed such aspirations as 'nonsense on stilts', because they are entirely contingent upon the agency of power and context; those beings that have the power to assert them can enjoy them, while for those that are dependent upon others to confer rights they are at best arbitrary and at worse a hollow aspiration. Furthermore, there are semantic ambiguities surrounding the word itself. First, a distinction can be made between absolute rights and those *prima facie* rights that are provisional in the sense that they may be overridden in extraordinary circumstances. Second, the way in which a legal or a moral right is grounded may be variable. It may be established by an appeal to one or each of nature, God, heredity, or human reason and consensus of opinion. While the legitimacy of the concept of rights has some validity, they are most accurately conceived as aspirational rather than descriptive. The notion of rights is a concept in the Enlightenment tradition that seeks to establish the optimum conditions for the realization of human potential. A declaration of rights gives a glimpse of human nature writ large, magnified through the lens of potentiality.

⁵ Polwhele, *Unsex'd Females*, p. 8.

⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life* [1787], ed. by Gina Luria (New York: Garland, 1974), p. 22.

⁷ Polwhele, *Unsex'd Females*, 9 n.

⁸ Polwhele, *Unsex'd Females*, p. 8.

⁹ Pascoe, 'Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith', p. 200.

¹⁰ Polwhele, *Unsex'd Females*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹ Polwhele, *Unsex'd Females*, p. 8.

¹² See Geoffrey Grigson, *The Englishman's Flora* [1958], (Oxford: Helicon, 1996), p. 15.

¹³ In topical footnotes supporting the text of this short poem, Polwhele reflects on an ongoing preoccupation with naked display as he details the naked sports of ancient Sparta, Wollstonecraft's plea for open discussion of genitalia among children, the display of naked women in the religion of nature adopted by the new French Republic and the decriminalization of promiscuous sexual activity in France and the voluptuous nature of the work of artists Angelica Kauffman and Emma Crewe.

¹⁴ Polwhele's description of the sympathies of Charlotte Smith and Helen Maria Williams. See *Unsex'd Females*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Bewell, 'Jacobin Plants', p. 132.

¹⁶ Roy McMullen, introduction to Rousseau, *Botany*, p. 19.

¹⁷ James Plumptre, *The Lakers: A Comic Opera in Three Acts* (London: W. Clarke, 1798), p. xv.

¹⁸ Plumptre, *The Lakers*, pp. xi-xii. The new Theatre by the Lake at Keswick was launched with a production of this play in 1999. It had never previously been performed.

¹⁹ Plumptre, *Lakers*, p. 2.

²⁰ Plumptre, *Lakers*, p. 2.

²¹ Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture*, p. 97.

²² Plumptre, a Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge, was himself an early picturesque traveller to the Lakes which he visited laden with 'Knick-Knacks' which he itemized on a 'List of travelling

requisites', including a Gray's glass and a Claude Glass, two volumes of Cowper's poems, a drawing book, a compass and a pedometer, a magnifier for botany, a telescope and a barometer. Cited by Peter Bicknell and Robert Woof from a manuscript held at Cambridge University Library. See *The Discovery of the Lake District, 1750-1810: A Context for Wordsworth* (Grasmere: The Trustees of Dove Cottage, 1982), p. 39.

²³ Letter of 22 January 1801. Reproduced by Bicknell and Woof, *The Discovery of the Lake District*, p. 40.

²⁴ An intriguing explanation by David Elliston Allen suggests that 'bluestocking' is a word with botanical origins: 'It is pleasant to recall that the name "bluestocking," which was hurled at [the fashionable drawing-room hostesses] and stuck, derived from the eccentric garb in which one of their most prominent friends, Benjamin Stillingfleet, regularly came to the parties to discourse (we may presume) on botany and to explain to them the delightful parlour-game lately invented by Linnaeus.' See *The Naturalist in Britain*, p. 49. A Pacific tribe, infamous for their practice of promiscuous marriage, the Otaheitans are footnoted in Canto IV of Darwin's *Loves of the Plants*.

²⁵ Plumptre, *Lakers*, p. 52.

²⁶ Plumptre, *Lakers*, p. 11.

²⁷ See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1979), especially pp. 68-69 and pp. 103-7.

²⁸ Erasmus Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants, Part II of The Botanic Garden* [1789], pub. as part of *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834* (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991).

²⁹ Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science*, p. 249.

³⁰ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, p. 33.

³¹ Polwhele, *Unsex'd Females*, p. 4.

³² Indeed, the poetic project was partly Seward's idea, though considerations of propriety, prompting the fear that 'the plan was not strictly proper for a female pen', ensured that she left the composition to the expertise of Darwin. Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin Chiefly During His Residence of Lichfield, with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms on His Writings* (London: J. Johnson, 1804), p. 131.

³³ Seward, *Memoirs*, pp. 216-17.

³⁴ Poem published in full in Feldman, *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era*, pp. 460-62.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, p. 64.

³⁶ 'Warmth, and even tenderness', writes Roy Porter, 'came to characterize the public face of upper-class conjugality' (*English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 29).

³⁷ Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 193. Aristocratic families were an exception to this and slower to change. See p. 212.

³⁸ Baumeister, *Identity*, p. 61.

³⁹ Sophia Reeve, *The Flowers at Court* (London: Printed and published for the author by C. and R. Baldwin, 1809), pp. 6-7.



‘FREE, BOLD, JOYOUS’: THE LOVE OF SEA-NATURE

Lift up these heavy masses of brown weed anywhere, and most certainly you will find pleasure and employment in the crannies and sandy ledges beneath them.

(Clarke, *Common Seaweeds of the British Coast*)¹

In 1848 Margaret Gatty had a chance conversation with her doctor about seaweed.² This took place while convalescing from physical exhaustion in Hastings, a consequence of frequent pregnancy. The discussion was the origin of an absorbing passion for shore hunting, and Gatty retained her zest for algology and indeed all natural history until her death in 1873.³ As a case study, the prominent Victorian children’s writer who produced *Aunt Judy’s Tales and Parables from Nature* gives some insight into the fashion for seaweed collecting, a perhaps unlikely instance of mid-Victorian biophilia. Gatty, author of *British Sea-Weeds* (1863), was but one of many authors, several of them women, who collected and published on marine botany during the mid-nineteenth century. Besides renowned male contemporaries who participated in the shore-hunting phenomenon, such as Philip Gosse, George Henry Lewes and Charles Kingsley, there were popular contributions by Elizabeth Anne Allom, Anne Pratt, Isabella Gifford and Louisa Lane Clarke.⁴ In 1856, George Eliot contemplated the way in which the process of identifying species of seaweed helped her to make sense of the world in journal entries entitled ‘Recollections of Ilfracombe’.⁵

Such writings about seaweed exemplify both the gendering of Victorian natural history and several of those areas in which an active engagement with the non-human biotic world can be improving to the human condition. By the mid-nineteenth century it is possible to identify a popular taste for the deliciously quotidian qualities of the genera long designated the meanest subjects of the plant ‘kingdom’. It quickly becomes apparent that the bow of the shoreline is like an amphitheatre in which the entire tragi-comedy of human existence is played out, a panorama which encircles and takes in *en passant* a range of sensations and emotions. Popular books about marine botany thus reveal how far Victorian nature study is moralized with problems of the human spirit and identity; for in seaweed literature we encounter embarrassment and pleasure, devotion and fear, love, hilarity and obsession. The experiences recorded in such literature illustrate the diffuse relationships that exist between the human and the non-human. They contribute to a synthesis of historical examples from the period during which today’s environmentalist thinking was being defined. Such texts amount to a useful point of departure for thinking about Victorian, as well as current, ideas

about the way in which the pursuit of natural history has been understood to meet human needs and enhance well-being.

An early amateur writer, Elizabeth Anne Allom, author of *The Sea-Weed Collector* (1841), particularly commended Ramsgate as a suitable location because its genteel topography made it readily accessible for the fashionable female collector. She suggested reassuringly, 'the most scrupulously delicate lady may walk with comfort along the beautifully level sands and collect the most interesting specimens of marine vegetation without the slightest danger or inconvenience from damp or cold'.⁶ Others were more resilient. In Gatty's *British Sea-Weeds* there remains a robust acceptance of the practicalities demanded by the study at hand. Gender expectations present an immediate difficulty given the requirements of correct dress. *British Sea-Weeds* opens with pragmatic advice to 'disciples' of algology and explicitly addresses female readers. While conforming to the social codes of women's dress, Gatty clearly regards such clothes as a severe hindrance. She insists that the serious seaweed hunter 'must lay aside for a time all thought of conventional appearances, and be content to support the weight of a pair of boy's sporting boots'.⁷ However, while some cross-dressing might be admissible in footwear, Gatty was unwilling to endorse 'rational dress' for women. The wider mid-Victorian debate about the propriety of usurping the masculine sphere by wearing 'bifurcated garments'⁸ is implicit in the following lines concerning the 'question of petticoats':

[...] If anything would excuse a woman for imitating the costume of a man, it would be what she suffers as a sea-weed collector from those necessary draperies. But to make the best of a bad matter, let woollen be in the ascendant as much as possible; and let the petticoats never come below the ankle.⁹

Gatty, married to a Yorkshire clergyman, Alfred Gatty, advised, albeit reluctantly, acceptance and obedience to the dictates of dress and fashion, not defiance, conceding 'a woman is right in not dressing differently from the world's opinion when she is in the world if she can [...]'.¹⁰

Gatty's misgivings concerning personal appearance are a reminder of that almost ubiquitous sense of embarrassment that Allen suggests accompanied the Victorian naturalist.¹¹ If not cautious and well-wrapped, the female seaweed hunter risked moments of déshabillé and she might find herself publicly burdened with strange paraphernalia, sporting curious attire and even waist-deep, face-down or upended in the most unexpected predicaments. Louisa Lane Clarke, author of the *Common Seaweeds of the British Coast and Channel Islands* (1865), appears, however, to revel in her idiosyncratic appearance:

*We are going for seaweeds. The tin can is slung over one shoulder, an oilskin bag is at our girdle for smaller and more precious specimens, a pole in our hand ready to lift the tangled masses of rough weed away.*¹²

While some dress etiquette had to be observed, the ecological richness and diversity of this fragile but dynamic periphery remained a site of personal emancipation for women engaged in seaweed collecting. Largely denied comparable opportunities for daring and expansive global travel like the famous naturalists of past decades such as Alexander von Humboldt, William Bartram, Darwin or Wallace, presaging the central thrust of cultural advance, women found that the home shores afforded more accessible pickings.¹³ During the nineteenth century, female naturalists such as Gatty experienced rock pools and sandy seashores as liberating and enticing spaces.¹⁴ This was dependent upon financial solvency, leisure time, mobility and often a supportive partner; Gatty was fortunate in all of these and able to travel as far as the Isle of Man, Ireland and the colourful ‘mesembryanthemum-starred Scilly Isles’ to find her specimens.¹⁵

In an ironic reversal of gendered conventions, Gatty warns that a ‘male companion’ may be useful, almost as an auxiliary helpmate, ‘to lend a hand and infuse a sense of security’ so that ‘a very *eerie* hunting-ground may sometimes be ventured upon’. She adds, however, that “‘unprotected females’” have no business to be running risks for the sake of vile “sea-weeds’”. Although this is a reminder of the dangers and conventions that made solitary expeditions difficult for women, the quotation marks around “‘unprotected females’” in part ironize the phrase and suggest that while Gatty acknowledges the truth of such sentiments she is reluctant to fully endorse them. At the sea-margin, Gatty experiences a state torn between exhilaration and trepidation as the pursuit of natural beauty leads her to a dangerous zone, more in keeping with the masculine province of the sublime:

The truth is, the scarce low water plants are apt to haunt very inaccessible places; places, too, where the roaring of the breakers is so near at hand, and the standing ground so wet with spray, that a strong mental effort is necessary to keep the nerves and feet steady, even after the difficulties of getting there are surmounted. Not that the spot is unsafe for any one who is sure of a continuous self-command; but invalids sometimes become sea-weed collectors, and it would be madness to counsel women indiscriminately to be strong-minded above their condition.
(Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. xiii.)

There is a sense of caution here, given that for women to participate in such extremes of physical activity risks infringing the nineteenth-century separation that rendered ‘natural’ the divide between the feminine domestic sphere and the supposedly more strenuous

demands of the masculine public sphere. However, even the irrepressible and adventurous Gatty conceded, 'in reflecting upon the best and easiest shores, such as the choice one of Douglas Bay, Isle of Man, for instance, it must be owned that a low-water-mark expedition is more comfortably undertaken under the protection of a gentleman [...]'.¹⁶

However, Gatty's expectations of a hypothetical male companion are not high. Her sensitivity towards possible disruption to the shore-line is expressed in her fear that an accompanying 'gentleman' might amuse himself by killing gulls while she takes the initiative in collecting:

He may fossilize, or sketch, or even (if he *will* be savage and barbaric) shoot gulls, though one had rather not; but no need anyhow, to involve him in the messing after what he may consider "rubbish," unless, happily, he be inclined to assist.¹⁷

In this sense George Eliot was fortunate in taking part in littoral expeditions at Ilfracombe with the guidance and encouragement of her partner, G. H. Lewes, the prominent nineteenth-century naturalist:

Every day I gleaned some little bit of naturalistic experience, either through G's calling on me to look through the microscope or from hunting on the rocks [...] ¹⁸

For his part, Lewes valued the assistance of Eliot's 'quick female eyes' and 'nimble fingers' as they went out together to 'woo the mermaids'.¹⁹

So, ideally, 'seaweeding' was to be carried out 'with a strong, friendly, and willing, if not learned companion' for the sake of personal safety and company. However, for Gatty, it was in any case a shared pastime, often undertaken as a family activity. A diary entry for 1850 records: 'Set off for Filey, Alfred, self, seven children, two nurses and the cook. Arrived safely. D.G. went down to the sand and found seaweeds.'²⁰ Her marine botany was also carried out in the context of a network of fellow enthusiasts and personal friendships, secured through a mutual interest, such as William Harvey and Catherine Cutler.²¹ Intellectual exchanges of this kind conform to the 'relational' model which psychologist Ruth Formanek has used to explain the enthusiasm for collecting in terms of a desire to engage actively with other minds in a matrix of supportive and mutually advantageous relationships.²² A strong sense of this rapport and common bond of algological camaraderie is expressed by Gatty's address to her readers as a 'sisterhood' of seaweed hunters.

Gatty was keen to stress that her seaweed hunting was to be kept firmly within the bounds of an entertaining, and hopefully improving, amateur pursuit and did not encroach upon professional algology as a scientific endeavour. She was content to defer to Dr Harvey's expertise and her modesty often becomes characterized by expressions of self-depreciation. In *Waifs and Strays of Natural History* (1871) she writes:

We remember to have often made Dr Harvey smile, by asking him to *help a lame dog over a stile*, when we wanted him to make a scientific statement intelligible to our unlearned ears.²³

By contrast to Harvey's professionalism, Gatty claimed only to aspire to impart 'a little knowledge of the subject, in however desultory a way'.²⁴ Her diffidence and emphasis upon the unmethodical, diminutive nature of her work reflects her continued acceptance of a separate sphere for women within botany. Gatty's refusal to push herself forward as an authoritative voice is reflected in her wider views about public pronouncements by women. After listening to a speech by Frances Power Cobbe, she objected:

I was interested by what was said and liked the lady who spoke. But to hear a woman hold forth in public, except when she is acting and so not supposed to be herself, is like listening to bells rung backwards.²⁵

Isabella Gifford with equal modesty offered 'the object of the little work' she had written, namely *The Marine Botanist* (1851), as 'short and scientific descriptions of the commonest kinds, given in as simple words as possible'.²⁶ Likewise Clarke suggested that her 'easy Guide' might be 'valuable to a young collector for album or fancy work' but added that she would 'by no means offer it to my scientific friends'.²⁷ Such comments are in keeping with Londa Schiebinger's suggestion that while women built up impressive botanical collections, wrote competent descriptive works and became able illustrators, professional taxonomy was regarded as men's work, demonstrating that there could be a division of labour within the study of botany.²⁸

However, despite their protestations that they were unscientific, we should perhaps be wary of taking the modest caveats of these women about their proficiency in marine botany at face value. Progress in algology was considered to be worthy and improving because it was dependent upon persistence and hard work. To be successful, it was not sufficient to wait for specimens to be thrown up by the happenstance of the incoming tide. Gatty warns: 'Patience and enjoyment must go hand in hand here. To stoop down once or twice and then to be weary, will not do'.²⁹ The 1860s were the high-tide mark of the Victorian work ethic – *British Sea-Weeds* was published four years after Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859).

Hibberd equally stresses conscientious application, urging 'one of the finest qualities in seashore collecting is a passion for patient scrutiny'.³⁰ Gatty's diligence in algology was acknowledged and recognized by her male correspondents and her biographer, Christabel Maxwell, records that it was an 'intense source of gratification' when two species were named in her honour; Dr Harvey named an Australian algae *Gattya pinella* and Dr Johnson paid her the compliment of naming a marine worm *Gattia spectabilis*.³¹

For women, natural history was a field of scientific enquiry in which, in Schiebinger's words, knowledge had long been 'shaped by patterns of inclusion and exclusion from the scientific community'.³² Within such constraints, the sense of partnership with male naturalists in a shared spirit of enquiry was, therefore, a partial yet real achievement in the acceptance and recognition of women's science. While the presence of the separate-spheres convention is apparent in much popular botanical writing during the mid-nineteenth century, it did not go unchallenged. As early as 1830, Robert Greville, a leading male algologist, dedicated his *Algæ Britannicæ* to women:

It is not without a feeling of extreme pleasure that, by means of the present Work, I shall place in the hands of my fair and intelligent countrywomen, a guide to some of the wonders of the Great Deep; nor need I be ashamed to confess that I have kept them in view throughout the whole undertaking. [...] To Mrs GRIFFITHS, Miss HUTCHINS, Miss HILL, Miss CUTLER, and Mrs HARE, we owe very many discoveries. [...] ³³

David Landsborough, author of the *Popular History of British Sea-Weeds*, cites seven female algologist and six male algologists among the extensive acknowledgements in the preface to the 1851 edition.³⁴ In particular, Amelia Griffiths of Torquay – for Landsborough, the 'willingly acknowledged Queen of Algologists' – had set a precedent as an outstanding authority in this area. However, while she discovered several species during the 1830s and 1840s, Landsborough remarks that Griffiths did not directly make her work public, being:

a lady who, so far as we know, has published nothing in her own name, – but who may yet be said to have published much, as she has so often been consulted by distinguished naturalists, who have been proud to acknowledge the benefit they have derived from her scientific eye and sound judgment.³⁵

Indeed, some naturalists feared that botany was not a suitably 'manly' activity. By 1881, Charles Kingsley, apostle of 'muscular Christianity',³⁶ felt compelled to defend the study from accusations of effeminacy and reclaim its weightiness:

There are those who regard it as a mere amusement, and that as a somewhat effeminate one; and think that it can best help to while away a leisure hour harmlessly, and

perhaps usefully, as a substitute for coarser sports, or for the reading of novels. Those, however, who have followed it out, especially on the sea-shore know better. They can tell from experience, that over and above its accessory charms of pure sea-breezes, and wild rambles by cliff and loch, the study itself has had a weighty moral effect upon their hearts and spirits.³⁷

So, how might seaweed collecting transcend its status as a 'mere amusement' and attain a more 'weighty' importance for enthusiasts? Hibberd argues, in *The Seaweed Collector* (1872), that even 'if it does not happen to lead to something higher', algology is firstly a 'delightful recreation' that is open to all those who at some time have visited the seaside where they will inevitably have 'found some entertainment in the observation of seaweed'.³⁸ For Gatty, the immediate physical benefit of seaweed collecting was as a form of gentle exercise for those who have 'taken up the pursuit originally as a resource against weariness, or a light possible occupation during hours of sickness', which was clearly her own experience, following sustained fatigue.³⁹ Like Rousseau and many since, writers such as Anne Pratt enjoyed a restorative effect in sublimating present difficulties in pursuit of rare and beautiful plants. She wrote in *Chapters on the Common Things of the Sea-Side* (1850):

Dr. Cullen used to say that he had cured weak stomachs by engaging his patients in the study of botany, and particularly in the investigation of wild plants; and many a head-ache, and a heart-ache too, would be relieved if its owner could be brought to feel an interest in the shells or seaweeds which are strewn on the beach [...]⁴⁰

Gatty makes no grandiose claims for the redemption of humankind by the charms of seaweed but instead exalts algology as an escapist activity, an antidote to current affairs which makes one gleefully forgetful of the wider world.⁴¹ Indeed, Gatty probably regarded dabbling in rock pools as a desirable alternative to dabbling in the murkier waters of politics for her mostly female readership. There is a facetious prioritizing of the requirements of seaweed specimens over the imperatives of worldly matters which are considered secondary in importance to the other-worldly quality of littoral oblivion. After a return from the shore, she suggests:

the squabbles of nations may come in for a share of his attention perhaps; but, even then, only imperfectly, for the collected treasures have to be examined and preserved [...].⁴²

However, Gatty's love of sea-nature does not bear out her own claims for the total forgetfulness of human concerns. She clearly desired to share her experience of physical and psychical regeneration through seaweed with others, particularly her 'sisterhood' of fellow

amateur collectors. Also, five years before the publication of *British Sea-Weeds*, Gatty created presentation copies of books filled with mounted specimens of seaweeds which she then sold and used the proceeds to buy blankets for the poor of her parish – a priceless window into Victorian philanthropy.⁴³ Pratt, briefly allowing herself a digression into home economics and the virtues of self-reliance, recommended a seaweed called carrageen moss, for which she, similarly, had philanthropic hopes:

Plentiful as this plant is on our shores, and nutritious as are its qualities, it is to be regretted that it is not more generally used by the poor as food [...] a small portion of meat, accompanied by a good quantity of the carrageen moss, well boiled, would furnish a wholesome meal to many a poor family.⁴⁴

Gifford, Hibberd and Clarke all dedicate chapters in their books to the practical and economic uses of seaweed.

Gatty's success and the substantial literature that popularized shore hunting was no doubt responsible for encouraging many Victorians to take up natural history. Unfortunately, Gatty may have lived to share Philip Gosse's distress at the thought that his invitation to other collectors to share the delights of the seashore caused them to kill the thing they loved. Edmund Gosse recorded his father's dismay at the devastation of the shoreline ecology by overzealous collectors. This was in contrast to earlier years in which the rock pools were pristine, to the extent that 'Adam and Eve, stepping lightly down to bathe in the rainbow-coloured spray, would have seen the identical sights.' Writing in 1907, Gosse described his memories of the consummate rock pools of the 1850s and their subsequent appropriation by collectors. His retrospect forms an early critique of the touristic gaze and a curiosity for natural history that resulted in a destructive ecological impact:

An army of 'collectors' has passed over them, and ravaged every corner of them. The fairy paradise has been violated, the exquisite product of centuries of natural selection has been crushed under the rough paw of well-meaning, idle-minded curiosity. That my Father, himself so reverent, so conservative, had by the popularity of his books acquired the direct responsibility for a calamity that he had never anticipated, became clear enough to himself before many years had passed, and cost him great chagrin. No one will see again on the shore of England what I saw in my childhood, the submarine vision of dark rocks, speckled and starred with an infinite variety of colour, and streamed over by silken flags of royal crimson and purple.⁴⁵

Hibberd's book also obliquely acknowledges the environmental consequences of human industry: 'everywhere rocky coasts are more productive than those that are sandy or muddy, or defiled by town drainage or seaside trade'.⁴⁶ While there is clearly some truth in Gosse's

paradox that the popular literature of natural history brought about the destruction of the very ecosystem that it celebrated, it is also apparent that, through their close observations of the shoreline, such naturalists were often the first to be aware of the threat that human activity posed. Again, for Hibberd, it is the wider ecological context of seaweed that is central to the importance which he attaches to its study. This context links humanity with other animal species: 'amid the wealth of organic creation in the midst of which our lives are embedded, the vegetation of the sea may fairly claim a share of our attention for its intimate associations with animal organisms that are perhaps more wonderful than itself'. The study of seaweed is improving, therefore, because it increases awareness of a broader range of life forms: 'how vast a world of life it nourishes and jealously hides in its bosom', Hibberd declares.⁴⁷

George Eliot was one amateur naturalist fortunate enough to explore the 'unravished' shoreline of the 1850s,⁴⁸ and who was equally enchanted by the sensuous 'fairy paradise' that she discovered:

There are tide-pools to be seen at almost every other step on the littoral zone at Ilfracombe, and I shall never forget their appearance when we first arrived there. The *Corallina Officinalis* was then in its greatest perfection, and with its purple pink fronds threw into relief the dark olive fronds of the *Laminariæ* on one side and the vivid green of the *Ulva* and *Enteromorpha* on the other. After we had been there a few weeks the *Corallina* was faded and I noticed the *Mesogloia vermicularis* and the *M. virescens*, which look very lovely in the water from the white cilia which make the most delicate fringe to their yellow-brown whip like fronds, and some of the commoner *Polysiphoniæ*.⁴⁹

While Eliot confessed that 'these tidepools made one quite in love with sea-weeds' (*Letters*, II, p. 244), Gatty also described the sentiments aroused in the 'loving disciple' by the shoreline and made use of the analogy of a love relationship to express her passion for collecting.⁵⁰ Indeed, Ann Shteir even describes Gatty as a 'botanical bacchante',⁵¹ while Clarke found her formerly quiet tide-pool 'lashed into foam by the rough yet joyous kisses of the up-coming tide'.⁵² Such descriptions are clearly derived from the discourse of fictional romance. So how might the impulses behind these love affairs with seaweeds be explained? Allen's comments on the Victorian fern craze may equally be applied to the fervour for seaweed:

At the height of the Fern Craze, in the middle 'fifties, we have an excellent example of a society in the grip of a powerful emotion, a 'collective projection,' rooted in some deeply buried psychological layer. We know too little about such outbursts – and probably can never know enough.⁵³

Twenty-five years after Allen's study, Werner Muensterberger's *Collecting: An Unruly Passion* was published, an exhaustive enquiry into the motivations of the collector.⁵⁴ His investigation of the collecting mentalité reveals a pattern of infatuation in which 'the search and obtainment sound like adventure stories or magical-romantic pursuit', for desired objects that become compensatory companions able to provide restitution and reparation for the uncertainties, disappointments and uncontrollability of human relationships.⁵⁵ It is not necessary to pursue heavy-handed psychoanalytical interpretations of anal-retentive behaviour to attribute fantasies of control in the processes at work in the selection and pinning down of the lepidopterist's exhibition board. To fix a botanical specimen into position with a touch of isinglass was likewise an opportunity to impose an order of one's own choosing upon the complexities of the floral world. Looking down at algae through the framing device of the microscope or from above a rock pool privileged the observer with an omniscient perspective.

Such control however, was at best partial and always illusory. Equally, a keen aesthetic sense of the luminescent colours and textures of seaweeds caused collectors to become mesmerized by the other-worldly beauty of the marine environment, teeming with species reproducing, flourishing and mutually consuming in an existence ultimately inscrutable to human sensibilities. Landsborough showed a female acquaintance a specimen of the *Licmophora splendida*:

Aided by a microscope, the whole was so beautiful that a lady to whom I showed a portion of *Licmophora* thus magnified, said she could not fall asleep for a long time that night, as the lovely fans seemed ever before her eyes; and when she did sleep she dreamed of them.⁵⁶

Clarke likewise found herself entranced by the peacock-tailed appearance of the *Padina pavonia*: 'truly', she wrote, 'the play of colour on the frond beneath the water is so beautiful, we bend to gaze upon it, and forget to gather it'.⁵⁷ Eliot clearly shared this sense of the beauty and mystery of marine life and confided an unusual plan for a nocturnal liaison with the colourfully anthropomorphized *Actiniæ*. The characters described in a letter from Tenby in 1856 are observed with the eye of a novelist:

We have a project of going into St. Catherine's caverns with lanterns some night when the tide is low about 11, for the sake of seeing the zoophytes preparing for their midnight revels. The *Actiniæ*, like other belles, put on their best faces for such occasions.⁵⁸

For Gatty, the improving nature of the pursuit was always combined with a sense of liberating joy. When she described her elation upon experiencing the delights of this transcendental other-world with its curious alchemy of the alien and familiar, she expressed all the euphoria of an earthly nirvana:

[...] to walk where you are walking, makes you feel free, bold, joyous, monarch of all you survey, untrammelled, at ease, at home! At home, though among all manner of strange, unknown creatures, flung at your feet every time by the quick succeeding waves.⁵⁹

This stress upon being at home suggests that Gatty attained moments of self-actualization, feeling grounded, empowered and connected to the universe, making her pursuit of sea-nature a striking example of biophilia. With the beauty of this liminal world between earth and sea came mystery. A glimpse into a bounded and transparent rock pool offered, and still offers, a vision of a radically different other world, a microcosm of biota caught up in a cycle of existence indifferent to human concerns. Hibberd referred to that ‘mystery that surrounds its life in the depths of the ever-changing waters’.⁶⁰ The species of sea-fan, the gorgonias, were named after classical gorgons, such as Medusa with her hair made up of live snakes, who once turned those who gazed upon them into stone. Now, however, the gorgonias particularly enchanted Gatty because she considered their seemingly ‘purposeless perfection’ to be works of God’s creation:

Oh those Gorgonias! Let us be proud of the few we have, as connecting our seas with those warmer ones where the lovely race abounds – gorgeous with tints worthy of the sunnier skies – scarlet, crimson, lilac, and yellow overcoats being as common there as white. [...] They are pitiful students of Nature, indeed, who can investigate without loving, admire and not adore. “All thy works praise thee, O Lord, and thy saints give thanks to thee.”⁶¹

Many of these chronicles of salt marsh and rock pool are written firmly in the tradition of natural theology and the moment of rejoicing in a created world becomes a spiritual act of worship, in which the shore-line teems with as much symbolism as marine life. The mysticism of an extraordinary entry by Anne Pratt even recalls the medieval Christian belief that God placed ‘signatures’⁶² in his works for human divination and as a test of faith. When viewed under the microscope, she informs the reader, one species of *Griffithsia* has: ‘strings of small pearl-like substances, most beautifully and symmetrically disposed, each marked with a white cross, surrounded by a rich red colour’.⁶³ A similar response was that of Clarke, for whom the marks upon tiny shells are like the ciphers of miniature Rosetta Stones: ‘our hearts are directed upward even by a slide of microscopic shells sculptured with the hieroglyphics of the Creator’.⁶⁴ For Hibberd seaweed is valued ‘above all things, because it

affords us one great and, in a certain sense, complete expression of the will of God in things created'.⁶⁵ He suggests that it helps to forge a human bond with the natural world and cites 'the world is not wholly profane in which we have given heed to some natural object'.⁶⁶ Isabella Gifford affirmed the role of natural history in demonstrating an underlying created order that united all things:

The pages of the Great Book of Nature lie open before our eyes; and he who attempts, with an earnest and persevering spirit, to read but a few lines from thence, will see the Almighty Power alike evident in the smallest and the greatest of His works – will see in all things the beautiful order and regularity that rule alike o'er the immense planet and the lowliest plant.⁶⁷

Particularly after 1859, such celebration of the living world was asserted with decreasing confidence, given an often unspoken anxiety about the ongoing transformation in thinking about natural history. This reflects the need felt by many to reorient their personal cosmologies and to make sense of an uncertain world in the throes of the Darwinian revolution. Gatty tellingly included Charles Darwin in a picture collection she called her 'Chamber of Horrors', and her suspicion that Dr Harvey had some sympathy with Darwin's ideas began to place a strain upon their relationship.⁶⁸ In *Darwin's Plots*, Gillian Beer, recalling that it was Darwin's work on cirripedes that was so important in demonstrating organic progression, suggests that the evolutionary hypothesis that life had its origins in the sea made the marine environment an immediate area of interest and contention. The intellectual vogue for cosmogony and the enigma of origins that Beer records is an important factor in the prevailing interest in marine biology during the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁹ Even before Darwin and Wallace's ideas were published, recent ocean exploration was yet another challenge to a human-centred cosmology.⁷⁰ Since Lyell's uniformitarian hypothesis about geological processes, the permeation of the idea of deep time generated a new kind of secular awe in Victorian society. Darwin himself humbly conceded: 'The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us; and I for one must be content to remain an Agnostic'.⁷¹

Shore hunting offered an opportunity to undertake an active engagement with the natural world, and the taxonomies of natural history contributed to making sense of the world and conferring some notion of order upon its bewildering complexities. In this respect Eliot's words in the 'Recollections of Ilfracombe' (1856) define the way in which a fascination with cryptogamous plants and zoophytes becomes an act of self-exploration:

I never before longed so much to know the names of things as during this visit to Ilfracombe. The desire is part of the tendency that is now constantly growing in

distinct, vivid ideas. The mere fact of naming an object tends to give definiteness to our conception of it – we have then a sign that at once calls up in our minds the distinctive qualities which mark out for us that particular object from all others.⁷²

In her informal musings on the shore-line, Eliot thus intuits the value of human participation in natural history in the construction of a logos. Foucault observed, in *The Order of Things*, that part of the epistemic shift that took place during the nineteenth century was the rigorous interrogation and classification of language itself using taxonomic strategies of tabulation themselves honed and imported from the ostensibly objective discourse of natural science.⁷³ Eliot is clearly sensitive to the ontological significance of natural history and the semantic pleasure of naming the things of the shore in helping to frame her own mental faculties and in the construction of self. Indeed, it is significant that it was during this summer, reading zoology and Shakespeare, that Eliot, urged by Lewes, decided to try her hand at writing fiction.⁷⁴ Four years later, in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Eliot described the significance of childhood experience of the natural world in establishing a broader love for the earth and conditioning adult patterns of thought. Such things as familiar wild flowers and birds, she writes, ‘are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them’.⁷⁵

In imposing her own conceptual and linguistic patterns upon non-human species and processes, a novelist such as Eliot was able to create her own ‘gestalts’, the term that Naess has adapted to describe the holistic relationship between organic entities and the ecosystem within which they are contextualized. These are analogous to the way in which the complex network of historical and cultural relationships in the zoologically aware *Middlemarch* attains a meaning in the whole that is beyond the sum of its character parts. By the act of naming, Eliot is able to ground herself more comfortably within the natural world through a humanizing framework. Such systematizing therefore encourages the development of a sensibility towards the interconnectedness of life and natural processes. The impulse to impose a taxonomic structure upon living things has been contradictory in its consequences, finding expression in both the capitalist commodification, appropriation and destruction of the natural world, that Mary Louise Pratt critiqued in *Imperial Eyes* (1992), and in the ecological inspiration for the environmental movement.⁷⁶

So, Victorian algologists found that seaweeds, the lowliest botanical tribe, had significance that went far beyond a pastime to occupy the mind while taking the sea-breeze. For within the bounds of the common rock pool there could be spied ‘humble’ representatives of an entire Divine cosmic order; an order that was increasingly contested. If

we now peer discreetly into the neglected world of the seaweed hunter we ourselves discover a gleaming cameo vividly framing the perspectives and sensibilities of Victorian naturalists. Algology at once reflects a delight in the physical and intellectual participation in natural history that grounds the self in the world but, at the same time, refracts contentions which disrupted and unsettled those selves in a moment of profound epistemological transition. These studies therefore, which are literally of the marginal, touch upon some central concerns and problems of ecocriticism such as the phenomenon of biophilia, the gap between the natural environment and the cultural discourse about it and the identity politics of gender in the representation of that natural environment.

¹ Clarke, *Common Seaweeds of the British Coast*, p. 75.

² Gatty was loaned a copy of Dr Harvey's *Phycologia Britannica*. Possibly there was some discussion of the obstetric uses of seaweed, given her personal interest in this area of medicine – subsequently Mrs Gatty campaigned actively for the use of chloroform in childbirth by women in her parish. See Christabel Maxwell, *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing* (London: Constable, 1949), pp. 91 and 100-01. Dried *Laminaria* stipes or 'tents', for example, have been found effective in promoting the dilation of the cervix, enabling greater ease of access for examination and treatment. See Janet R. Stein and Carol Ann Borden, 'Causative and beneficial algae in human disease conditions: a review', *Phycologia*, 23.4 (1984), 485-501 (p. 494). Certainly, the use of *Laminaria* was extremely frequent in mainstream gynaecology by the 1860s and 1870s. See Burritt W. Newton, 'Laminaria Tent: Relic of the Past or Modern Medical Device?' *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 113, (1972), 442-48. Similarly, Sara Coleridge's interest in botany and other sciences, after multiple pregnancies assisted – and expressed – her return to health and vitality after a prolonged period of physical and mental exhaustion. See Earl Leslie Griggs, *Coleridge Fille: a Biography of Sara Coleridge* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 77-8.

³ See David Elliston Allen, *The Victorian Fern Craze: A History of Pteridomania* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), pp. 46-47.

⁴ E. A. [Elizabeth Anne] Allom [fl. 1840s-1870s], *The Sea-Weed Collector, An Introduction to the Study of the Marine Algae, with Directions from Practical Observations on the Best Method of Collecting and Drying the Weed. Illustrated with Natural Specimens from the Shores of Margate and Ramsgate* (Margate: Printed by T. H. Keble, 1841); Anne Pratt [1806-93], *Chapters on the Common Things of the Sea-Side* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1850); Isabella Gifford [ca.1823-91], *The Marine Botanist; an Introduction to the Study of Algology, Containing Descriptions of the Commonest British Sea-Weeds, and Giving the Best Method of Preserving them, with figures of the most Remarkable Species* [1848], 2nd edn (London: Darton; Bath: Binns and Goodwin, 1851); Louisa Lane Clarke [1812-1883], *The Common Seaweeds of the British Coast and Channel Islands; with some insight into the Microscopic Beauties of their Structure and Fructification*. (London: Frederick Warne, 1865). Further popular contributions were offered by J. Cocks, M.D. [John Cocks, 1787-1861], *The Sea-Weed Collector's Guide: Containing Plain Instructions for Collecting and Preserving, and a List of All the Known Species and Localities in Great Britain* (London: John Van Voorst, 1853), Samuel Octavus Gray [1828-1902], *British Sea-Weeds: An Introduction to the Study of the Marine Algae of Great Britain, Ireland, and the Channel Islands* (London: L. Reeve and Co., 1867) and [James] Shirley Hibberd [1825-1890], *The Seaweed Collector: A Handy Guide to the Marine Botanist Suggesting What to Look for, and where to go in the Study of the British Algae and the British Sponges* (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1872).

⁵ GE Journal, Ilfracombe, 8 May-26 June 1856 (entitled by Eliot 'Recollections of Ilfracombe') in *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols (London: Oxford University Press and Geoffrey Cumberlege; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1954), II, pp. 238-252. Some of the descriptive passages in Lewes's *Sea-Side Studies* were taken verbatim from Eliot's journal.

⁶ Allom, *Sea-Weed Collector*, p. 7.

⁷ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. viii.

⁸ See Stella Mary Newton, *Health, Art and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1974), pp. 106-7.

⁹ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. viii.

¹⁰ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. x.

¹¹ Allen, *Naturalist in Britain*, p. 153.

¹² Clarke, *Common Seaweeds of the British Coast*, p. 75. Lewes equally enjoyed describing the mutual contempt with which the naturalists and the belles and beaux of the promenade regarded each other at seaside resorts. Like Clarke, he challenged convention through humour and self-parody:

Not that I insinuate any idea of our *not* having looked somewhat queer. Our costume was but indifferently adapted to the drawing-room, and would have obtained small suffrage on the Boulevard des Italiens, the Prater, or Pall-Mall. You shall judge. We are a lady and two men. The lady, except that she carried a landing-net, and has taken the precaution of putting on the things which "won't spoil", has nothing out of the ordinary in her costume. We are thus arrayed: a wide-awake hat; an old coat, with manifold pockets in unexpected places, over which is slung a leathern case, containing hammer, chisel, oyster-knife, and paper-knife; trousers warranted not to spoil; *over* the trousers are drawn huge worsted stockings, over which again are drawn huge leathern boots. Mine are fisherman's boots, and come a few inches

over the knee. The soles are well nailed, which is of material service in preventing our slipping so much on the rocks. Now these boots, with the worsted stocking peeping above, are not, it is true, eminently aesthetic. I will not recommend them as objects for the *Journal des Modes*; but if you will consider the imperfect success which will attend any hesitation as to walking into the water, and through it, – or if you reflect on the very mitigated pleasure of feeling the water trickle into your boots, – you will at once recognise the merit of such boots as I have just described, covered with liquid india-rubber, and well greased. Never mind the inelegance: handsome is as handsome does!

(Lewes, *Sea-Side Studies*, pp. 16-17).

¹³ However, there were exceptions in the form of a minority tradition of women who, though rarely professionals or expedition leaders, became global travellers, most notably Mary Kingsley, who made a significant contribution to the European exploration of Africa. See Russell, *Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt*. The presence of the colonial endeavour also sometimes comes down to us in the minutiae of seaweed preservation and arrangement. In their appendices, Pratt and Clarke detail the camel-hair brush, the porcupine quill and isinglass among the requisite paraphernalia.

¹⁴ Even today many undeveloped shore-lines remain havens of free access.

¹⁵ Margaret Gatty, *Parables from Nature*, with a short memoir of the author by her daughter, Juliana Horatia Ewing (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888). See Ewing's *Memoir*, p. xxvii.

¹⁶ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. xiii.

¹⁷ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. xiii. Shelley similarly made a comparison between the civilizing pursuit of botany and the 'barbaric' nature of bloodsports in a letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, dated 22 October 1821:

As to Botany, how much more profitable & innocent an occupation it is than that absurd & unphilosophical diversion of killing birds – besides the ill taste of giving pain to sensitive & beautiful animals, this amusement of shooting familiarises people with the society of inferiours & the gross & harsh habits belonging to those sort of pursuits.

The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. by F.L. Jones, 2 vols (London: Clarendon Press, 1964), II, p. 361.

¹⁸ *George Eliot Letters*, II, p. 243.

¹⁹ Lewes, *Sea-Side Studies*, p. 25.

²⁰ Cited in Maxwell, *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing*, p. 97. 'D. G.' refers to Margaret Gatty's third daughter, Dot Gatty.

²¹ William Henry Harvey (1811-1866) and Catherine Cutler (1784-1866), who gave her name to the brown algal genus, *Cutleria*.

²² Ruth Formanek, 'Why They Collect: Collectors Reveal Their Motivations', *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6.6 (1991), 275-86 (p. 277), particularly drawing upon the work of S. A. Mitchell, *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis* (1988).

²³ Mrs. Alfred Gatty [Margaret], *Waifs and Strays of Natural History* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1871), p. 88.

²⁴ Gatty, *Waifs and Strays*, p. 78.

²⁵ Maxwell, *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing*, p. 138.

²⁶ Gifford, *Marine Botanist*, p. v.

²⁷ Clarke, *Common Seaweeds of the British Coast*, pp. 5 and 137.

²⁸ Londa Schiebinger, 'Gender and Natural History' in *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ed. by N. Jardine, J. A. Secord and E. C. Spary, pp. 163-64. This is born out by Shteir's note that while some regional botanical societies welcomed women in a spirit of inclusiveness, the major national societies excluded them from the upper echelons of scientific endeavour until the twentieth century. Shteir reveals that the Linnaean Society opened up access to women in 1919, while admission to the Royal Society was not permitted until 1946 ('Linnaeus's Daughters', p. 68).

²⁹ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. xii. Gatty's incitement to hard work was itself not an idle comment. Mrs. Gatty's daughter recalled that her mother taught herself to write with her left hand when her right hand became paralyzed. When her left hand too 'lost its cunning' she began to dictate her work. Gatty, *Parables From Nature*, Ewing's *Memoir*, p. xxv.

- ³⁰ Hibberd, *The Seaweed Collector*, p. 8. Hibberd, a Tottenham nurseryman and journalist, was a prolific writer who had books on an eclectic range of topics related to natural history published during the second half of the nineteenth century.
- ³¹ Maxwell, *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing*, p. 99.
- ³² Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, p. 210.
- ³³ Robert Kaye Greville [1794-1866], *Algæ Britannicæ, or Descriptions of the Marine and Other Inarticulated Plants of the British Islands, Belonging to the Order Algæ; with Plates Illustrative of the Genera* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan & Stewart, 1830), p. vi.
- ³⁴ Landsborough, *Popular History of British Sea-Weeds*, pp. v-viii.
- ³⁵ Landsborough, *Popular History of British Sea-Weeds*, p. 8. Professor Agardh, a member of the algological establishment, even named an entire genus – *Griffithsia* – in her honour. Algology, or phycology as it is more often termed today, has since remained an area of natural science in which women (such as Lily Newton, Kathleen Drew-Baker, Irene Manton and Rachel Carson) have been dominant. When the British Phycological Society was founded in 1953, the first committee largely consisted of women members (information provided by Dr Juliet Brodie of the Faculty of Applied Sciences, Bath Spa University College).
- ³⁶ See Allen, *Naturalist in Britain*, p. 166.
- ³⁷ Kingsley, *Glaucus*, p. 40.
- ³⁸ Hibberd, *The Seaweed Collector*, p. 1.
- ³⁹ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. vii.
- ⁴⁰ Pratt, *Chapters on the Common Things of the Sea-Side*, p. 2. Presumably, Pratt is referring to Dr William Cullen (1710-1790), the Scottish physician and clinical lecturer who first theorized the existence of nymphomania.
- ⁴¹ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. vii.
- ⁴² Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. vii.
- ⁴³ See Maxwell, *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing*, p. 100: 'I have earned £3 in cash for my charity purse, and I can tell you it is something. I have half crowns and blankets at my fingers' ends, so to speak.' Later, proceeds from her children's tales, many of them based on natural history, were used to raise money for the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children. Gatty, *Parables From Nature, Ewing's Memoir*, p. xxiii. David Landsborough also promoted 'a pretty album', containing about fifty specimens of Scottish Algæ, entitled 'Treasures of the Deep', prepared by his daughters to raise money for charity. Landsborough, *Popular History of British Sea-Weeds*, pp. 172-73.
- ⁴⁴ Pratt, *Chapters on the Common Things of the Sea-Side*, p. 145.
- ⁴⁵ Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* [1907], (London: Penguin Books in association with Heinemann, 1949), pp. 110-11. The demise of this marine trooping the colour is patriotically imaged as a diminution of Englishness. The law of supply and demand has unfortunate consequences when applied to the collection of rare species; the most endangered or scarce are always most coveted. Allen records that the popularity of ferns similarly led to the decimation of many woodlands by private collectors and by those picking for the market (*Victorian Fern Craze*, pp. 53-55).
- ⁴⁶ Hibberd, *The Seaweed Collector*, p. 33. In Kingsley's popular children's book, it is the water babies that are responsible for mending broken seaweed and keeping rock pools neat and clean. His objection to contaminating human activity predates the concerns of popular environmental groups of the present day, such as Greenpeace and Surfers Against Sewage, by a hundred and thirty years:

Only where men are wasteful and dirty, and let sewers run into the sea, instead of putting the stuff upon the fields like thrifty reasonable souls; or throw herring's heads, and dead dog-fish, or any other refuse, into the water; or in any way make a mess upon the clean shore, there the water babies will not come, sometimes not for hundreds of years (for they cannot abide anything smelly or foul) [...] And that, I suppose, is the reason why there are not water babies at any watering place which I have ever seen.

Charles Kingsley, *The Water Babies and Selected Poems* [1863], (London: Collins, 1954), pp. 130-32.

⁴⁷ Hibberd, *The Seaweed Collector*, pp. 1-3.

⁴⁸ Eliot would have undertaken the journey as far as Barnstaple on the new North Devon Railway from Exeter, which opened in 1854, when she travelled to Ilfracombe in 1856. (World wide web, accessed 25 May 2000: <http://www.ndirect.co.uk/~barrie/l&b/history/timeline/>)

- ⁴⁹ *George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Haight, II, p. 244.
- ⁵⁰ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. vii.
- ⁵¹ Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science*, p. 185.
- ⁵² Clarke, *Common Seaweeds of the British Coast*, p. 112.
- ⁵³ Allen, *Victorian Fern Craze*, p. x.
- ⁵⁴ Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- ⁵⁵ Muensterberger, *Collecting*, p. 33.
- ⁵⁶ Landsborough, *A Popular History of British Sea-Weeds*, p. 338.
- ⁵⁷ Clarke, *Common Seaweeds of the British Coast*, p. 73.
- ⁵⁸ Letter to Sara Sophia Hennell, 29 June 1856, *George Eliot Letters*, II, p. 256.
- ⁵⁹ Gatty, *British Sea-Weeds*, p. xi.
- ⁶⁰ Hibberd, *The Seaweed Collector*, p. 1.
- ⁶¹ Gatty, *Waifs and Strays*, p. 87.
- ⁶² See Michel Foucault on this cosmic 'interplay of resemblances' in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966], (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), pp. 25-30 and Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 84.
- ⁶³ Pratt, *Chapters on the Common Things of the Sea-Side*, p. 153.
- ⁶⁴ Louisa Lane Clarke, *The Microscope: Being a Popular Description of the most Instructive and Beautiful Objects for Exhibition* (London: Routledge, 1858), p. 184.
- ⁶⁵ Hibberd, *The Seaweed Collector*, p. 1.
- ⁶⁶ Hibberd, *The Seaweed Collector*, p. 3.
- ⁶⁷ Gifford, *Marine Botanist*, p. vii.
- ⁶⁸ See Maxwell, *Mrs Gatty and Mrs Ewing*, pp. 125-6. Darwin kept company in this rogues' gallery with Voltaire and Tom Paine.
- ⁶⁹ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, pp. 194-5.
- ⁷⁰ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 129.
- ⁷¹ Charles Darwin [1876-1881] and T. H. Huxley [1889], *Autobiographies*, ed. by Gavin de Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 54.
- ⁷² *George Eliot Letters*, II, p. 251.
- ⁷³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 131.
- ⁷⁴ See Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 197, p. 203 and pp. 206-7.
- ⁷⁵ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* [1860], ed. by A. S. Byatt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 94. See Hooker, 'Ditch Vision', p. 15.
- ⁷⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).



ATTITUDES TO ANIMALS: **‘WE MAY BE ALL NETTED TOGETHER’**

There is yet another advantage arising from the study of Algology, and indeed of Natural Science in general, which it would be unpardonable to omit. It is of great importance that the young in particular, should be armed against the artifices of those who, by a plausible mixture of facts and fiction, try to sap the foundation of our holy faith, and too often succeed in throwing stumbling-blocks in the way of the unwary. Religion has nothing to fear from facts, but it rejects fiction, and it is well to be able to separate the chaff from the wheat. By their theory of development, – provided you unwittingly swallow all their pretended facts, – they will trace the progress of a rational creature, from a little almost invisible monad floating in the sea, till the monad becomes a monkey, and the monkey a man. And they will tell you that the oak, the monarch of the woods, has arrived at his dignity by almost imperceptible steps, being, some thousands of years ago, only a humble sea-weed in the universal ocean [...] If they are less successful now than they once were, it is because Natural Science is now more generally cultivated than when the theory of development was brought forth by Maillet, and fostered by Lamarck. That you may not be imposed upon by their bold assertions and cunning artifices, it is your duty and your interest to study Natural Science, that you may meet and master these deceivers on their own ground.

(Landsborough, *Popular History of British Sea-Weeds*)¹

The Paradigm Shift

As late as 1806, the Creationist author Jane West questioned ‘whether any species of plant or animal has entirely disappeared since the creation’, thus doubting the very occurrence of species extinctions.² By the close of the eighteenth century, however, the great debate between those who insisted upon a divine, pre-ordained and fixed creation, and others who began to propose a rudimentary evolutionism had already begun, in advance of the Darwinian revolution.

Foucault’s location of a paradigm shift from a Classical history of nature to a Modern episteme during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was based upon the emergence of dynamic life science, in the form of biology, and its later corollary, ecology.³ The cultural accretions, such as the concern for mythology and utilitarian purposes, of a Classical, anthropocentric understanding of living things were discarded in scientific writing, as there emerged a thoroughgoing concentration upon structure and the relationships and exchanges of species as organisms within what is now termed an ecosystem.⁴ In *The Order of Things* (1966) Foucault challenges the linear and Whiggish ‘history of ideas’ approach that assumes a progressive development of ideas from simple to complex as more of the natural world is

discovered. On the contrary, Foucault suggests, many previous Classical naturalists – he cites the work of the Bolognese naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605) – had a broader understanding and knowledge, at least in the sense of an accumulation of facts, than did their successors. The *modus operandi* of Classical naturalists therefore was not a rudimentary anticipation of modern science but one that interpreted and represented living things within an entirely different taxonomic paradigm.

Linnaeus particularly exemplified the transition. Linnaeus, trekking through the arctic tundra was, beyond the search for particular species, undertaking a quest for a definitive taxonomy with the optimism of the Enlightenment. However, despite the achievements of the *Systema Naturae*, this ambition proved elusive and towards the end of his life Linnaeus conceded that the natural world was untidily resistant to such precision. The search for a discrete and orderly arrangement of species proved to be an impossible enterprise. By the century's close, proto-evolutionists or 'transformists' such as Diderot, Lamarck, Erasmus Darwin and Goethe were all making speculations that challenged the idea of an eternal fixity of species. It was a problem that seamlessly opened the way for its philosophical corollary: the question of human origins.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition it was believed that humans were made in God's image. When Linnaeus considered the classification of humans this identification with the divine created particular difficulties. Schiebinger argues that it was essential to observe social as well as scientific factors when formulating a new mammalian taxonomy, in order not to offend propriety by debasing humanity through imputing affinity to ungodly animals. Linnaeus's decision to place humans together with other species in the order 'mammals', was therefore tempered by the designation *Homo sapiens* which, in maintaining the distinction of rationality, reflected such cultural sensitivities.⁵ The shock of recent and disquieting encounters with great apes made it particularly important to uphold an aspect of human uniqueness in taxonomic structures. Mary Midgley reminds us that the great apes' existence had not been fully verified by Europeans when Descartes characterized non-human animals as irrational machines.⁶ The inclusion of humans within Ray's order of 'anthropomorpha' was abandoned for a fresh classification named 'primates' in the 1758 *Systema Naturae*.⁷ Schiebinger notes that the designation of *Homo sapiens* ('man of wisdom') maintained a firm distinction from those other species – apes, monkeys, sloths, lemurs and bats – which shared this first order in the taxonomic hierarchy.⁸

These large shifts in perceptions of the natural world during the eighteenth century are contemporaneous with the developing Romantic world-view. The rupture between literature

and science, an outcome of the division of knowledge and increasing specialization, was already apparent to critics such as Diderot, who called for a greater accommodation between the liberal and mechanical arts in the *Encyclopédie*.⁹ However, Romantic thinkers conceived literature, society and the natural world to embrace, ideally, a mutually informing whole. For polymaths, such as Erasmus Darwin or Humphry Davy, both poet-scientists, the divide between art and science was a narrow one. Donna Haraway notes the intimate connection between the emerging science of biology and Romanticism:

[...] The discourse of biology, beginning near the first decades of the Nineteenth Century, has been about organisms, beings with a life history, i.e., a plot with structure and function. Biology is inherently historical, and its form of discourse is inherently narrative. Biology as a way of knowing the world is kin to Romantic literature, with its discourse about organic form and function.¹⁰

Born in 1809, Charles Darwin (grandson of Erasmus Darwin) was steeped in this Romantic outlook. His world-view was incubated during the age of Romantic scientific naturalism, especially that of von Humboldt, and he shared Romantic preoccupations such as organic unity, the exploration of human identity in the light of our kinship with other species, and the expression of natural development as narrative. Gillian Beer suggests 'Wordsworth and Coleridge mattered to Darwin', because: 'The emphasis on growth and process rather than conclusion and confirmation was a releasing element in his intellectual upbringing. It is the essential experience of organic life.'¹¹ The Romantics were the first generation of writers and thinkers to wrestle with the limits of taxonomy, fixity of species and the issues of otherness and similitude that ultimately brought about the decline of a theological world-view in favour of secular evolutionism, of the kind consolidated after 1859, as the dominant explanatory paradigm for scientific understanding of the physical world.

The dynamic science of biology was also entirely congruent with the meritocratic imperatives of emergent capitalism. The evolutionary world-view was more in keeping with the competitive nature of the industrial economy than the fixity of species reflected in the trope of the Great Chain of Being, itself better suited to the more limited social mobility afforded by the *ancien régime*. The impulse for developmental adaptation among organisms provided a ready analogy which accorded well with the enterprise and achievement of self-made men such as Huxley.¹²

Animals and Social Progress

These changes in the scientific world-view fundamentally altered attitudes to animals. While Wilson's biophilia hypothesis suggests that the love of life is an innate and universal trait, examples of concern for the welfare of other animals in their own right are scarce in European thought between the Greek classical age and the eighteenth century. An intrinsic interest in non-human species and concern for their welfare was foremost among those new sensibilities that Thomas documented in *Man and the Natural World* (1983). Since 1983, however, both the motivations behind Thomas's new sensibilities and the significance of this impetus have been challenged.

Keith Tester, in *Animals and Society* (1991), makes the historical specificity of sympathy for animals since the eighteenth century a central tenet in his social constructionist critique of the 'humanity of animal rights'.¹³ Tester argues that debates about animal liberation and rights are less concerned with non-humans than a metonym for a framework of social superiority. He suggests that the self-perception of ethical superiority regarding the treatment of animals is apparent in the discourse of an emergent urban middle class engaged in ideological conflict in the cultural sphere. Looking to Norbert Elias's account of the rise of manners – *The Civilizing Process* (1939) – Tester proposes that the primary motivation behind benign attitudes to animals on the part of the middle class was to establish a realm of difference in behaviour, in order to establish moral supremacy over aristocratic oppression and working class brutality.

There are several objections to Tester's argument. In practice, it can be sustained only by erasing the history of working-class resistance to animal abuse, such as the broad class base of the PDSA, opposition to vivisection by the labour movement documented by Coral Lansbury and substantial working-class resentment towards hunting. As an academic sociologist, Tester is himself making assertions from within a predominantly middle-class profession, with little of the kind of evidential class analysis of animal campaign groups, necessary to substantiate such claims. The idea that human-animal relations should be understood in the context of sociology and the linguistic realm of difference is an uncontentious one; indeed the present thesis could not advance without accepting this premise, (albeit to different conclusions). However, Tester is, it seems to me, guilty of treating the natural environment and its inhabitants as an inert backdrop to the essential human drama. In treating concern for the natural world and other species as elaborate fetishism, Tester's hypothesis that 'animal rights is not concerned with animals at all' (*Animals and Society*, p. 16) has an overstated absolutism that undermines his case. In

Tester's account, the discourse of animal rights is a sophisticated interior monologue, carried on in urban culture in such a way that the attributes of the (nonhuman) object have no bearing whatsoever on the perception of the subject – a stress that overlooks the dialectic by which human subjectivity is itself conditioned by the material circumstances in which it experiences the physical world. As I have outlined, for instance in my earlier discussion of Naess, the insight that nature and culture form mutually constitutive spheres makes phenomenology a more suitable epistemological approach for environmentalists. Tester fails to persuade that epistemic shifts in linguistic and moral frameworks fundamentally undermine the requirement for a coherent ethical praxis in human behaviour towards other species. The enduring presence and agency of other species has since led to a counter emphasis by theorists such as Kay Anderson (1998) who argues:

No longer can we speak of separate spheres of culture and nature, but rather of “hybrid spaces” of the cultural and the natural where are conjoined knowledges, products, images, and experiences of both artificial and natural derivation.¹⁴

In the examination of the texts that follows, I shall demonstrate that the theoretical ground of these categories of nature and culture continue to be present in discussions about the progressive (or, conversely, misguided or even harmful) character of concern for other species. While attitudes to animals are socially mediated and implicated in cultural contentions about human identity, particularly gender and ethnicity, the fact of social mediation does not in itself preclude the social responsibility to theorize and implement the optimum conditions for human well-being and animal welfare.

Most accounts, sympathetic or otherwise, of new attitudes towards animals, acknowledge that emerging perspectives that regard animals as deserving of moral concern are conditioned by a shift in the material relationship to the living world. According to this explanation, these changing sensibilities were rooted in a new feeling of human security within the natural environment, coupled with an emerging anxiety about leaving ‘nature’ due to rapid urban growth. It also became increasingly apparent that industrialism carried its own threats to human well-being. However any nostalgia was accompanied by theories of moral improvement and social progress. Hilda Kean challenges James Turner's idea that urban sympathy for animals was inspired by city-dwellers' desire to ‘feel a sense of kinship with their rural past’,¹⁵ suggesting rather that their impulses were progressive ones as they were looking to the future: ‘Protesters lamented that London was failing to lead the way as a seat of empire and centre of a new enlightened world.’¹⁶

The response to the altered relationship to other species in an increasingly urban

society was therefore complex and contradictory. Thomas's 'changing attitudes' and the emerging sympathy for other species, coexisted with another strain of Romanticism. John Mackenzie points to that 'Romantic fascination with violence, extremes of emotion and fatalism',¹⁷ epitomized by the subliminal atavism behind the taxidermist's gallery, the chase and the *battue*. Mackenzie cites such cultural recidivism as a corrective modifier to the Thomas's thesis:

One of the manifestations of Romanticism, after all, was Gothic fantasy and horror. The rediscovery of forests and mountains, particularly those in the genuine wild, brought human beings face to face with, and forced them to participate in, nature in the raw. Its violence and cruelty had to be appropriated in order to control and tame it.¹⁸

The descriptions of attitudes in both Thomas and Mackenzie are surely not mutually exclusive. Both sympathy and domination could exist at once and compete for hegemony (according to the particular subject positioning of individuals concerned), then as now. As the colonial enterprise expanded during the nineteenth century it is evident that participation in the domination of large hunted animals in particular was a synecdoche for the broader cultural narrative of imperial triumph and racial supremacy. Despite Mackenzie's caveat however, as the immediate imperative for subsistence and personal security within the natural environment diminished, many of those who enjoyed material security developed a more inclusive concern for other species.

It is, of course, not possible to distinguish the increasing sensibility for other species from ongoing debates about the rights, needs and liberation of animals themselves. In *Against Liberation* (1991), Michael Leahy challenges the idea that there has been a gradual increase in the circle of compassion:

Public opinion, as it is reflected in British law, has steadfastly refused to enlarge upon the spirit of the pioneer legislation of the early 1820s and 1830s, updated fifty years later, which introduced the protection of animals against *cruelty*.¹⁹

Leahy asserts that because animals do not possess language, they exist as 'primitive beings', incapable of self-awareness and therefore unable to experience pain and suffering in the way that we understand it. Adapting the linguistic theories of Wittgenstein, Leahy appears to believe that animals, lacking self-awareness, exist in a state of wakeful *unconsciousness*. Midgley puts forward a contrary position, contending that the absence of a formalized language structure does not preclude a cognitive conceptual order. Indeed, Leahy's beliefs might entail several doubtful propositions, if not logical absurdities. The absence of even the

most basic ideas would imply, Midgley suggests, that ‘all animals except man would live in a totally disordered world’.²⁰ Indeed, if this were the case then the divide between human intelligence and the absence of intelligence on the part of other species would be total, thus rendering ethology itself redundant because there would be no nuances or degrees of intelligence among other species – there can be no gradations within an absent quality. Despite the insurmountable epistemological difficulty of ascertaining the consciousness of other species, Midgley’s case is strengthened by the fact that it would be nearly impossible to reconcile Darwinian evolution with the idea of a break between intelligent species (with humanity as sole representative) and all other unintelligent species. Leahy offers no evolutionary explanation to suggest why he imagines that there is an *absolute* division between human and other animal consciousness.

Leahy’s primary utilitarian objection against reducing the industrial and recreational consumption of animals is that this would have economic consequences that would create material deprivation for many humans. He does not attempt to defend a position of ‘absolute dismissal’ of animals’ welfare interests, (which Midgley characterizes as the rationalist philosophy, historically represented by Spinoza and Descartes),²¹ nor does he fundamentally challenge Jeremy Bentham’s thesis that animals deserve the right not to be violently exploited because they are, to use Tom Regan’s term, ‘moral patients’ and have the capacity to suffer.²² He is therefore logically compelled to uphold the humane treatment of other species. Even if the lack of self-concept is granted, the idea that animals continue to have the capacity to suffer and are therefore entitled to have their welfare respected (which he accepts), leaves Leahy only with economic utilitarian arguments:

Even if *all* meat and dairy products were produced by intensive husbandry and the alleged abuses were rife it would nonetheless be perfectly fair to argue that the possible catastrophic consequences of widespread vegetarianism for human beings, [...] would more than outweigh the continued suffering of the animals.
(*Against Liberation*, p. 217)

Leahy has in mind here the ‘misery of unemployment’ and damage to economies that rely upon the ‘livestock’ industry (*Against Liberation*, p. 214). However these may be legitimately countered by the suggestion that perspectives that countenance exploitation and commodification, and tolerate lack of respect and violence towards other sentient beings, may not form a social outlook in which social justice and human well-being are likely to thrive. Elsewhere Leahy fears that while ‘the ending of all hunger [through the greater efficiency of vegetarian food production] would undoubtedly benefit many in underdeveloped countries in the short term’, the developed world could be confronted with

the Malthusian decline in as much as ‘the demographic and political implication might be slightly chilling if one ponders upon international stability in the next century’ (*Against Liberation*, p. 213). Indeed, there is also a pervasive distrust of human liberation movements in *Against Liberation*.²³ Leahy’s commitment to market competition and loyalty to the discrete nation state are at variance with environmentalist perspectives which suggest that there is a ‘real’ economy that is ultimately founded and dependent upon the health and sustainability of the planet as a whole which generates and supports cultural life and is best grounded in respect for other species as individuals and as participants in ecosystems. Leahy’s concessions towards the need for animal welfare and the capacity of animals to suffer, for instance in terms of intensive animal husbandry and the captivity of chimpanzees, suggest that his real philosophical target may be the more general challenge that radical liberationist theories pose to capitalism.

Such contentions about the appropriate treatment of other species and the bearing that they have upon human conduct, well-being and progress are grounded, in their modern form, in the exchanges about sympathy that appear in the eighteenth century. However, these exchanges took place in a developing rather than static context. There was an increasing shift from eighteenth-century arguments for indirect duties to animals, of the kind Kant espoused, toward theories that ground ethical treatment of other species in a belief in the inherent value of sentient beings, such as the moral philosophy of Regan, whose work *The Case for Animal Rights* (1984) is a foundational text in current debate. The secular vegetarianism practised by Joseph Ritson and the Shelleys was extremely marginal at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was not until the end of that century that vegetarians became a sizeable minority, able to sustain an infrastructure of societies, conferences and restaurants. Also conspicuous is the development from the domestic tone of late eighteenth-century animal welfare concerns, for example in children’s conduct books, towards more collective strategies for progressing animal rights and moral regeneration at the social level, registered by the appearance of organizations such as the Vegetarian Society (1847) and the antivivisection societies dating from the 1870s.

From such developments the enlarged claim emerges that, in being mindful of other species and the natural environment as a whole, human life is vested with ethical and aesthetic value. Such structure creates both direction and rational criteria in the existentialist nuances of decision-making that make up the terms of our being-in-the-world. In Paul Taylor’s words:

When our consciousness of the life of an individual organism is characterized by both objectivity and wholeness of vision, we have reached the most complete realization, cognitively and imaginatively, of *what it is to be that particular individual*. We have let the reality of another's life enter the world of our own consciousness. We know it as fully and intensely as it can be known.²⁴

Several late nineteenth-century writers urged the association between more compassionate attitudes towards animals and human well-being and social progress, arguing that humanity is rendered humane by the imaginative spirit and force of such sympathy. Anna Kingsford, for instance, contrasts the horrors of the shambles with a vegetarian aesthetic of the 'golden produce of the harvest',²⁵ when she contemplates the necessity for a beauty in production as well as in consumption in 1885:

[...] I defy anyone to make beautiful verse or paint beautiful pictures about slaughterhouses, running with streams of steaming blood, and terrified, struggling animals felled to the ground with poleaxes; or of a butcher's stall hung round with rows of gory corpses, and folks in the midst of them bargaining with the ogre who keeps the place for legs and shoulders, and thighs and heads, of the murdered creatures! What horrible surroundings are these for gentle and beautiful ladies! (Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, II, pp. 248-49)

Preferring 'Arcadian homeliness' to 'the ugly lives which most folks lead in our modern towns' Kingsford evokes a Hogarthian nightmare of 'hideous' streets 'with their crowded gin-palaces, blood-smeared butchers' stalls, reeling drunkards, and fighting women' (*Anna Kingsford*, II, p. 249). Explicitly linking vegetarianism with other issues such as 'advocates of freedom for women',²⁶ Kingsford upholds this cause as the one that goes furthest in its consequences for uplifting the human condition: 'the Vegetarian movement is the bottom and basis of all other movements towards Purity, Freedom, Justice, and Happiness'.²⁷

In *Animals' Rights Considered in Relation to Social Progress* (1892), Henry Salt likewise advances an enlarged vision of human self-interest:

The humane instinct will assuredly continue to develop [sic]. And it should be observed that to advocate the rights of animals is far more than to plead for compassion or justice towards the victims of ill-usage; it is not only, and not primarily, for the sake of the victims that we plead, but for the sake of mankind itself. Our true civilisation, our race-progress, our *humanity* (in the best sense of the term) are concerned in this development; it is ourselves, our own vital instincts, that we wrong, when we trample on the rights of the fellow-beings, human or animal, over whom we chance to hold jurisdiction.²⁸

It becomes clear that for such authors ethical contact with other species represents not only a means to an end, but a striving to express a vision of serenity that entails moments of

realization as end experiences; states whereby both individual and cosmic dimensions are integrated.

¹ Landsborough, *A Popular History of British Sea-Weeds*, pp. 80-81.

² Mrs. [Jane] West, *Letters to a Young Lady, in which the Duties and Character of Women are Considered, Chiefly with a Reference to Prevailing Opinions*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1806), II, p. 192.

³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 125-65. The OED records the first appearance of 'biology' in 1802 when Jean-Baptiste Lamarck adapted the term from the German naturalist Gottfried Reinhold (Treveranus). It became popularized and absorbed into English by 1813. The later term 'ecology' dates from 1873 when it was coined as a neologism by the German Darwinian scientist, Ernst Haeckel.

⁴ 'Ecosystem' was first used by A. G. Tansley, 1935 (OED).

⁵ See Londa Schiebinger's chapter entitled 'Why Mammals are called Mammals' in *Nature's Body*. Schiebinger argues persuasively, that the Linnaean classification of 'mammal', with its selection of a gendered emphasis upon the female breast (in preference to other possible distinguishing features), was a decision deeply enmeshed in the cultural significance of the female breast and its valorized iconography at this historical moment.

⁶ Midgley, *Beast and Man*, pp. 231-32.

⁷ 'Primates' was a word coined by Linnaeus. See Vernon Reynolds, *The Apes: The Gorilla, Chimpanzee, Orangutan, and Gibbon – Their History and their World* (London: Cassell, 1968), p. 49.

⁸ Londa Schiebinger, 'Mammals, Primatology and Sexology', in *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality*, ed. by Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 187 and 191.

⁹ Denis Diderot, *Political Writings*, ed. by John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 5.

¹⁰ Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 4.

¹¹ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 110.

¹² See Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 411 and p. 504. It was also useful for the acceptance of Darwinian evolutionary theory into scientific and social orthodoxy that natural selection and the competition of species were paradigms far more in keeping with the ascendant social and political trends in which the increased social mobility were facilitated by competitive individualism and meritocracy. Prominent self-educated advocates of evolutionary theory, such as T. H. Huxley and Herbert Spencer, were proud both of their achievements as individuals and of the advanced evolution of the human species. Huxley explicitly drew a parallel with meritocracy pushing forward the idea of extending knowledge rather than hiding behind static philosophy in his infamous retort to Samuel Wilberforce's gibe about whether he was a descendent of monkeys on his mother's or his father's side that 'I would rather be the offspring of two apes than to be a man and afraid to face the truth.' See James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 48.

¹³ Keith Tester, *Animals and Society: The Humanity of Animal Rights* (London: Routledge, 1991).

¹⁴ Kay Anderson, 'Animals, Science, and Spectacle in the City', in *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands*, ed. by Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel (London: Verso, 1998), p. 28.

¹⁵ James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 33.

¹⁶ Kean, *Animal Rights*, p. 61.

¹⁷ John M. Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 32.

¹⁸ Mackenzie, *Empire of Nature*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁹ Michael P. T. Leahy, *Against Liberation: Putting Animals in Perspective* [1991], rev. edn (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 177.

²⁰ See Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1983), pp. 56-58.

²¹ Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter*, p. 47. Leahy's attempts to draw lines concerning legitimate animal welfare measures lead him to some rather counterintuitive positions, for example conceding that the traditional 'slow strangulation' of dogs for food in Korea may be considered 'revolting' but believing that "a sharp blow on the back of the neck or a blow from a mallet to the forehead" is relatively humane if administered skilfully' (*Against Liberation*, p. 211).

²² For Tom Regan, non-human animals have rights because they are 'moral patients', in so far as they have the capacity to experience suffering, to be distinguished from 'moral agents' who are 'morally accountable for what they do'. This idea, that healthy adult vertebrates, at least, constitute 'moral patients' as experiencing subjects of a life, is a philosophical approach that sidesteps the kind of moral contractarianism that philosophers (such as Roger Scruton) have often used to deny them inclusion in ethical consideration. See *The Case for Animal Rights* [1984], (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 152.

²³ Leahy, like Thomas Taylor in *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* two centuries before, in ridiculing animal liberation perhaps hopes to undermine liberal demands for sexual liberation and the liberation of non-white ethnic groups (*Against Liberation*, p. 14).

²⁴ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, pp. 127-28.

²⁵ Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, II, p. 248. Kingsford's ideal image of a cornucopian golden age is certainly romanticized, the pastoral being provocatively represented not so much as how it is but possibly how she feels that it could be; thus her construction of the countryside is literally recreational.

²⁶ Kingsford argues that 'Vegetarianism is pre-eminently a woman's question because it will do away with the most degrading part of her work.' Presidential address to the Vegetarian Society, *Food Reformers' Year Book and Health Annual* ed. by Henry Amos (London, 1909), p. 18. Cited in Kean, *Animal Rights*, p. 241. Eder notes the anthropological correspondences alleged between vegetarianism and matriarchal societies, based upon the predominance of gathering as an economic activity associated with a feminine gendered division, *Social Construction of Nature*, p. 135.

²⁷ From one of Kingsford's speeches, dated to 1885. See Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, II, p. 248.

²⁸ Salt, *Animals' Rights*, pp. 110-11.



HUMANITARIAN CONCERN FOR NON-HUMANS IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Here I a man, I am persuaded that I should turn knight-errant in defence of the mere animal, against what are improperly called reasoning beings.
(Charlotte Smith, *Rural Walks*)¹

Any explanatory account of the growth of modern movements for animal welfare and liberation must look to the eighteenth-century rehearsal of humanitarian ideas. Sensibility is the literary manifestation of a late Enlightenment concern to temper excessive rationalism with a counterbalancing role for the emotions and subjective taste. The growth of individualism encouraged many among the upper and middle classes to aspire to an integrated subjectivity in which the refined individual was someone, ideally, who was not only intellectually articulate and learned but also emotionally articulate and sensitive. Given that it was the emotional aspect of this equation, conventionally gendered 'feminine', that was, traditionally, felt to be wanting among men, it was felt that this should be developed if moral progress was to be achieved.

Sympathy for Beasts: Shaftesbury, David Hume and Adam Smith

When the third Earl of Shaftesbury linked his call to live closer to 'nature' to one for a more compassionate treatment of others, he explicitly embraced 'other Species' within the circle of moral concern. In the influential *Characteristics* (1711), Shaftesbury, an important precursor for eighteenth-century sensibility, described his belief in a beneficent universe in which humans were naturally drawn to virtue by the logic of a divinely created universe.² The inclusion of non-humans within this beneficence was an early instance of an impulse to extend the moral community in a systematic way:

[...] To delight in the torture and pain of other creatures indifferently, natives or foreigners, of our own or of other species, kindred or no kindred, known or unknown; to feed as it were on death, and be entertained with dying agonies; this has nothing in it accountable in the way of self-interest or private good [...], but is wholly and absolutely unnatural, as it is horrid and miserable.³

The rationale for this inclusion of non-human species is based on an anti-Cartesian view of animal ontology which accepts that other species may share sense and feeling (albeit in a rudimentary form), characteristics which Shaftesbury invests with primary importance as the regulating forces for all social intercourse. He asserts: 'Without demurring on the profound modern hypothesis of animal insensibility, we are to believe firmly and resolutely that other animals have their sense and feeling, their mere passions and affections, as well as

ourselves.’⁴ However, by extending the circle of compassion to animals, Shaftesbury not only confronted conventional theories of ethics, exclusively confined to human concerns, but placed his own masculinity in doubt. When he challenged the rupture between feeling and intellect he was confronting the socially gendered separation between the qualities of masculine reason and feminine emotion. The conventional association of compassion for other species with effeminate, unmanly sentiments, dates back, for example, to Spinoza’s *Ethics*:

[...] The law not to slaughter animals has its foundation more in vain superstition and womanish pity than in sound reason. The reason for our seeking what is useful to us teaches us the necessity of uniting ourselves with our fellow-men, but not with brutes or things whose nature is different from human nature.[...] ⁵

Like Shaftesbury, David Hume, in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), affirms his belief in the reasoning power of animals, dismissing Cartesian assumptions with his assertion that ‘no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow’d with thought and reason as well as men’.⁶ Hume works on the premise that, for the purposes of enquiry, the mental operations of animals should be judged by the same criteria as those of humans. He concedes that all reasoning creatures may not share the same complexity of thought and discrimination of mind, but suggests that even among humans though ‘children and the common people’ may have a reduced capacity for thought in comparison with those of intellectual minds, they are ‘notwithstanding susceptible of the same emotions and affections as persons of the most accomplish’d genius and understanding’.⁷

Hume’s conception of sympathy, upon which care for others (including animals) depends, is grounded in a gendered view of the nervous system, because he believed that women have more delicate nerves and, therefore, greater sensibility.⁸ Sympathy is the theoretical foundation of sensibility, and is a phenomenon that unites, or at least ameliorates, the tension between reason and humanity’s emotional and passionate nature. It is a cohesive quality, necessary to hold communities together, and without which the idea of society would be unimaginable. The growth of interest in the individual self brought about a fresh interrogation of the idea of ‘fellow-feeling’ in dealings with others. For Hume, individuals understand, often unconsciously, that their interest is best served by living in a well-organized, benign and harmonious society – thus there is a personal interest in curbing anti-social tendencies.

Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (6th edn, 1790), notes that sympathy causes one to associate the idea of another’s suffering or sorrow with one’s own experience:

we imagine that they happen to us or to those closest to us. Smith offers the example of surgical instruments for dissection or amputation. Most people would react with surprise and unease should such instruments be displayed for aesthetic admiration, even if they are as well-crafted and precisely-formed as other human artefacts.⁹ He implies, therefore, that we are innately sensitized to the infliction of pain. The expression of the sympathetic faculty is dependent upon the voice of our inner conscience, that calls to us to inhibit anti-social behaviour, or, in Smith's terms, that peculiar and curious device of 'the man within the breast, the abstract and ideal spectator of our sentiments and conduct' (*Moral Sentiments*, p. 153).

There is, however, a weak and strong, passive and active aspect to the regard for others and, in *Moral Sentiments*, this distinction is again gendered. Smith claims that women and men have a different moral response to others' welfare, alleging 'the fair-sex, who have commonly much more tenderness than [men's], have seldom so much generosity'. He makes a critical distinction between feminine and masculine 'humanity'. Feminine humanity is merely 'the exquisite fellow-feeling which the spectator entertains with the sentiments of the persons principally concerned, so as to grieve for their sufferings, to resent their injuries, and to rejoice at their good fortune'. This instinctual and natural faculty is passive, consisting in doing 'only what this exquisite sympathy would of its own accord prompt us to do'. By contrast, the masculine virtue of generosity is a more active faculty, requiring deliberate cultivation. It demands some element of self-denial or sacrifice on the part of the generous individual, thus transcending immediate self-interest for the benefit of the recipient (*Moral Sentiments*, pp. 190-91). It follows that advanced sympathy is only to be found in mature manhood. The man of the world alone has the breadth of experience of human society and has witnessed the results of immoral conduct and suffering. This may either corrupt him morally or cultivate within him manly self-command because, writes Smith, 'hardships, dangers, injuries, misfortunes, are the only masters under whom we can learn the exercise of this virtue' (*Moral Sentiments*, p. 153). This strenuously acquired virtue not only foretells Keats's idea of 'the vale of Soul-making', but also anticipates the critical distinction between authentic and affected sensibility found in Wollstonecraft's writings.¹⁰

Like blood, or the flow of capital in the free market economy that Smith commended in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), sympathy was conceived to circulate, and to be the mechanism whereby individuals interact, for the most part, benignly without daily conflict due to the identification of self with others and recognition of fellowship. Sympathy is an innate faculty, yet its expression is determined empirically by the subject's cultural

environment. Operating as the physiological grounding for feeling, it was understood to be the regulating mechanism for both the bodily parts and the body politic, harmonizing relationships between individuals, families, communities and institutions in an organic society. Sympathy, as characterized by Hume and Smith, therefore lent itself readily to a defensive approach to established institutions of a hereditary model of state, becoming a conservative impulse that naturalized social divisions in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the whole. The metaphor of the organic society was also shortly to be taken up by Burke, who held that in order to maintain the anatomy and physiology of state in good health, feelings had to be regulated, whether they consisted of the passion of an individual or an unruly mob. Burke was to find the notion of organic sympathy a particularly helpful concept when developing the rhetorical argument of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In his emphasis upon the value of loyalty between classes, the gradual, 'salutary', organic change practiced by states with 'a system of more austere and masculine morality' is contrasted to the bloodthirsty upheaval of a feminized France.¹¹ Burke's notion of 'natural' sympathy helped to justify social distinctions, that might otherwise lead to class antagonism, in order to maintain the harmony of a hierarchical society.

Commentators such as Janet Todd and Adela Pinch have regarded such conservatism as a framework for the representation of gender identities and roles in many novels of sensibility.¹² For Todd, 'the cult of sensibility stressed those qualities considered feminine in the sexual psychology of the time: intuitive sympathy, susceptibility, emotionalism and passivity' (*Sensibility*, p.110). At the same time, however, while women are held to be superficially more 'emotional' by 'nature', novels such as Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771) share Adam Smith's imputation that they lacked the true emotional depth attributed to men.¹³

G. J. Barker-Benfield, in *The Culture of Sensibility* (1992), finds this appeal to innate feeling ironic, even paradoxical, given sensibility's theoretical origins in the sensationalist (environmentalist) psychology of Locke as an explanation of human nature. While, potentially, sensibility constituted a theoretical critique of socially-constructed gender differentiation, the structural masculine/feminine dualism in relation to reason/emotion remained largely unchallenged. The call for a return to nature in manners was readily co-opted, by writers such as Hannah More, to espouse fidelity to 'natural' roles.¹⁴ However, sensibility appeared in very different forms and there were more radical expressions, despite, or sometimes in response to, its shortcomings. One of these, suggests Barker-Benfield, was the feminist movement (*Culture of Sensibility*, p. xviii). Another was sympathy for animals.

Women Writers and Tenderness Towards Animals

Historians of eighteenth-century humanitarianism have identified both women's emancipation and concern for animals as central causes among campaigns for reform. Women attained an increasing presence in the conventionally masculine public world. Condemnation of animal cruelty emerged alongside opposition to human exploitation, suffering and corruption in a wide spectrum of causes from the slave trade to domestic poverty. Paradoxically, such ills were partly intensified by the increased consumption and aggressive competition of a developing capitalist system which also brought about the ameliorating consequences of a higher standard of living for many and which required effective social control measures as a precondition for the successful expansion of markets.¹⁵

Notwithstanding, the way that, in practice, it was sometimes used to bolster separate spheres, sensibility theoretically shifted the emphasis from the determining influence of biology to that of cultivation by grounding personal identity in sense impressions, hence privileging nurture alongside nature. Sensibility focused women's growing awareness of themselves as a distinctive social group with a particular set of shared grievances, ultimately to be attributed to the cultural conditioning of patriarchy rather than the inevitability of nature. Barker-Benfield particularly attributes the development of this consciousness during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to increasing literacy and women's production of literature.

To care for other species was to demonstrate a tenderness of disposition that connoted a rejection of conventional masculine behaviour. Affinity for animals helped to affirm the construction of an intelligent, articulate and natural human identity, with a balance of reason, aesthetic awareness, emotion and altruism. In the coded discourse of the period, a character's concern for the welfare of animals conventionally signified two possible alternatives.

First, such concern may reflect excessive, indulgent attitudes that are disregarding of human concerns – particularly if the object of affection is a lap-dog whose very breeding is an affront to nature and whose diminutive size connotes the diminutive intellectual and moral stature of its carer. Sarah Trimmer presents a critique of this kind in *Fabulous Histories* (1786). In one episode, a visit to Mrs Addis reveals a moral stench as powerful as the combined stink of the parrots, monkeys, dogs, cats and squirrels with which she shares her house. She is neglectful of her children to an abusive extent. Addis's daughter, Augusta,

is reduced to wearing tattered clothes and held captive in the nursery, where she enjoys less freedom of movement than the animals. Addis is feckless, cruel and disproportionate in her affections. Augusta is physically malnourished and emotionally starved while, in an ironic reversal, the animals are maltreated through obesity and lack of exercise.¹⁶

Equally, however, characters that demonstrate sympathy for animals are likely to be forces for social harmony and possess more positive personal qualities. Compatibility with the entire natural order is conferred upon the man or woman that possesses such sensitivity and his or her affinity for other beings may also contribute to success in human relations (though, in an imperfect world, these qualities sometimes lead to tragedy rather than triumph). Again, in *Fabulous Histories*, a contrast to Mrs Addis is supplied by the Wilson family, who practice 'Universal benevolence' through kindness to humans and animals alike and, consequently, live to an old age distinguished by prosperity and respect. While concern for other species is continuous with decency in human relations, however, Mrs Benson, interlocutor for Trimmer herself, insists that it is 'wrong to elevate them from their proper rank in life'.¹⁷

These two approaches to sensibility illustrate an important distinction in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. One variety of sensibility is expressed in care for others, based upon understanding, imaginative sympathy and a willingness to follow virtuous rather than expedient conduct. This is distinct from the inauthentic sensibility of affected weakness, ignorance and hypersensitivity inculcated in young women because it is believed to make them attractive to men.¹⁸ The latter results in the self-regarding, emotional posturing of Mrs Addis or the meanness of spirit of a kind caricatured in Wollstonecraft's own novels. Wollstonecraft's opposition to affectation illustrates the recurrent tension that she finds between the authentic and inauthentic (for example in the discussion of aesthetic responses to nature in 'On Poetry'), and is in keeping with the key Romantic yearning for a *rapprochement* of intellect and feeling. 'I am, indeed, persuaded', she writes, 'that the heart, as well as the understanding, is opened by cultivation'.¹⁹

Kindness to animals was central to Wollstonecraft's programme to instil ethical virtue by raising children in the correct moral environment in *Original Stories* (1788). Initially, it is suggested, children are innately cruel rather than kind. There is a marked contrast between the sensibilities of the children, Mary and Caroline, who 'were regardless of the surrounding beauties; and ran eagerly after some insects to destroy them', and their carer, Mrs Mason.²⁰ Mason deliberately inconveniences herself by taking a diversion to avoid some snails, thus contriving an opportunity to draw attention to the importance of care for other creatures.

Wollstonecraft makes such humanitarian concerns a foundation for raising civilized and humane children by giving them structural priority in the three opening chapters. The theme is continued as Mary and Caroline encounter a young boy shooting at some larks that they had been listening to. Following some moral guidance, the girls learn to consider the larks' best interests and develop a humane understanding by acting like 'rational creatures'.²¹ In addition to the theological necessity for the considerate treatment of God's creatures, Mason advances a sociological argument. Young boys and girls, she explains, are limited in their abilities to fulfil duties towards adults because they do not have the social power to act in philanthropic ways that effect their lives: 'It is only to animals that children *can* do good; men are their superiors.'²² In this context, care for other species is significant for the future development of attentiveness, compassion and justice; ethical faculties which contribute to the well-being of society. Such sensibility, then, is clearly a matter of education not instinct.

So, while sensibility was deemed to be natural, in so far as it is latent in every human mind, it was essential to instil favourable and correct impressions from an early age if it was to be actively expressed in virtuous qualities such as benevolence. Wollstonecraft believed that 'humanity to animals should be particularly inculcated as a part of national education'.²³ Such ideas are axiomatic to the programme Catharine Macaulay sets out in *Letters on Education* (1790). For Macaulay, moral sentiment is not a self-defeating emotional indulgence but, grounded in sympathy, a fundamental expression of human reason. She argued that, 'it was the movements of sympathy which first inclined man to a forbearance of his own gratifications, in respect to the feelings of his fellow creatures; and his reason soon approved the dictates of his inclination'.²⁴ Each individual ultimately benefits by living in a more benevolent society by establishing the social principle of equity and fair treatment of all, even if immediate self-interest is contradicted. The treatment of animals is Macaulay's foremost example:

[...] Were government to act on so liberal a sentiment of benevolence, as to take under the protection of law the happiness of the brute species, so far as to punish in offenders that rigorous, that barbarous treatment they meet with in the course of their useful services, would it not tend to encrease sympathy? would it not highly enlarge our notions of equity, by pointing out to public observation this moral truth, that tenderness is due to those creatures, without whose daily labour society would be bereaved of every enjoyment which renders existence comfortable?²⁵

For Macaulay, writing more than thirty years before the first legislation to this effect, sympathy forms a direct link between cruelty to animals and other prominent causes for concern such as capital punishment.

Millenium Hall

The 'happiness of the brute species' is an important consideration in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762), in which kindness toward animals is emphasized as a Christian duty, one integral to a wider devotion to humanitarian virtue.²⁶ The subtitle explains that the novel is intended to 'excite in the reader proper sentiments of humanity', a quality that is partly expressed through the generous treatment of non-human species. This epistolary novel takes the form of a description of a female community in rural Cornwall related by a male narrator who is stranded nearby with his travelling companion, Lamont. The power of Christian virtue is accentuated by the worldliness of the narrator, recently retired after a life of commercial enterprise in colonial Jamaica. For the travellers, returning from a masculine world of slavery in Jamaica, the contrast offered by this idyll – 'so truly pastoral' that they began to imagine themselves back in the 'days of Theocritus' – was complete.²⁷ Ironically, after so much travel, it is only when a wheel falls off their chaise and they become immobile that the men discover another kind of wisdom. In spite of the prominence of an orrery and globe at Millenium Hall – emblems of the age of discovery and mercantilism – life there is one of sedentary seclusion.

In this retreat the attitude to other species in the rural environment surrounding the hall is reflected in care and kindly intervention:

The wood is well-peopled with pheasants, wild turkeys, squirrels and hares, who live so unmolested, that they seem to have lost all fear, and rather to welcome than flee from those who come amongst them. Man never appears there as a merciless destroyer, but the preserver, instead of the tyrant, of the inferior part of the creation [...] and a perfect equality in nature's bounty seems enjoyed by the whole creation.²⁸

This concern to preserve and protect animals is characteristic of a relationship that is neither one of exploitation and dominance, or a proto-Romantic celebration of untamed wilderness, but is rather in keeping with the Christian tradition of stewardship described by John Passmore in *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (1974).²⁹

In Scott's novel there is a clearly defined opposition between the narrator's masculine values of colonialism, and the feminine domain of sensibility, represented by the community at the Hall, in which, as critic Felicity Nussbaum indicates in *Torrid Zones* (1995), 'the opposite of the colonial pertains and nature is protected'.³⁰ In this feminine sphere ideas about virtue are agreed consensually, before implementation on the estate. However, the utopian space is circumscribed by the compass of the immediate locality. One

community resident, Miss Mancel, concedes, in contradistinction to the expansionist ethos of masculine politics, 'beyond that circle all is foreign to us'.³¹ The inhabitants of Millenium Hall appear to share with the narrator the Lockean belief that adult character develops by impressions upon a *tabula rasa* or 'sheet of white paper'.³² Goodness, therefore, is instilled by youthful immersion in a moral community which highly values female education.

The men's curiosity is excited by the presence of a huge and rather mysterious enclosure of railings and eight-foot evergreen trees. The presumption that this might be used to house a menagerie of exotic animals is derided by Mancel, horrified by the cruelty and disruption to God's order that she feels such forms of captivity represent. The enclosure turns out to be a refuge for otherwise excluded and unfortunate human groups such as giants, dwarves and people infirm through age or disability. The opposition between male values of acquisition and domination and female sensibility is clear here. Intrigued, Lamont expresses conventional anthropocentrism, observing that:

Nothing gave him greater entertainment than to behold those beautiful wild beasts, brought out of their native woods, where they had reigned as kings, and here tamed and subjected by the superior art of man. It was a triumph of human reason, which could not fail to afford great pleasure.

The treatment of animals is central to the contested versions of virtue and progress represented by Lamont and Mancel. Her forthright reply links the oppression of exotic animals to a wider critique of imperial ambition:

[...] To see a man, from a vain desire to have in his possession the native of another climate and another country, reduce a fine and noble creature to misery, and confine him within narrow inclosures whose happiness consisted in unbounded liberty, shocks my nature. [...] Every thing to me loses its charm when it is put out of the station wherein nature, or to speak more properly, the all-wise Creator has placed it. I imagine man has a right to use the animal race for his own preservation, perhaps for his convenience, but certainly not to treat them with wanton cruelty, and as it is not in his power to give them any thing so valuable as their liberty, it is, in my opinion, criminal to enslave them, in order to procure ourselves a vain amusement, if we have so little feeling as to find any while others suffer.³³

This grounding of respect for animals is based on a theological cosmology that still assumes human superiority. However, the love of nature, celebrated by those who view animals as part of the revelation of God's purpose, ensures that, while other species' interests are subordinate to human requirements (the estate animals are eaten as 'game'), duties to them must nevertheless be acknowledged and acted upon.

Emotional Literacy and the Lessons of Animals

In his lecture 'Duties Towards Animals and Spirits', Kant insisted upon the importance of sensitivity towards non-human animals because this was an indirect duty that encouraged sensitivity towards humans. He denied that humans had any direct duties to animals, arguing:

If then any acts of animals are analogous to human acts and spring from the same principles, we have duties towards the animals because thus we cultivate the corresponding duties towards human beings. [...] We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals. [...] Liebnitz used a tiny worm for purposes of observation, and then carefully replaced it with its leaf on a tree so that it should not come to harm through any act of his. He would have been sorry – a natural feeling for a humane man – to destroy such a creature for no reason. Tender feelings towards dumb animals develop humane feelings toward mankind.³⁴

As discussed above, Wordsworth went further in *The Prelude* where he asserted that humanity is 'kindred to the worm'. Blake was also particularly aware of a dynamic interchange – both symbolic and actual – between the microcosm and the macrocosm, a point that is driven home in his visionary and powerfully apocalyptic 'Auguries of Innocence' where he indignantly thunders against cruelty. As in karmic law, cruelty to tiny insects inevitably leads to dire consequences at the individual or social level: 'He who torments the Chafers sprite/Weaves a Bower in endless Night' (l. 35-6). In Eastern philosophy, compassion towards animals is worthy even in anthropocentric terms because it disciplines and centres the individual mind to constant attention and awareness. When Mahatma Gandhi observed that one can tell a lot about a country's moral health by the way it treats its animals³⁵ he was, consciously or unconsciously, echoing the sentiments of Kant and Blake.

Drawing upon Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Maria and R. L. Edgeworth likewise noted the value of developing children's natural sense of sympathy and teaching them consideration for animals as a foundation for nurturing sensitivity in interpersonal relations in adult life. In this respect, Christine Keynon-Jones, (borrowing psychoanalytical theories from Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*), argued in *Kindred Brutes* (2001) that children's interest in animals in fairy tales and games, causes them to project a spirit like their own on to animals and, through make believe, experiment and explore, thus structuring their own knowledge of the world. This helps children to develop an understanding of relations with others and familiarity with sexual differences essential to psychosocial maturation.³⁶ Care for real animals should extend the child's imaginative

capacity for sympathy beyond his or her self even further. Children often experience the emotions of love or grief in the form of attachment to a companion animal. In Wollstonecraft's *Mary* for example, animal deaths result in early contact with knowledge of mortality and the transience and fragility of life. The eponymous Mary 'had not any notion of death till a little chicken expired at her feet; and her father had a dog hung in a passion.'³⁷

The cultural characteristic of morality is derived from the natural and instinctual capacity for sympathy with other living beings. However, the Edgeworths warn, while sympathy might be the source of 'compassion, friendship, and benevolence', it can also cause partisanship and injustice if it is not guided by education.³⁸ Natural instinct alone cannot be relied upon to ensure the kind treatment of animals. Benevolence, it is suggested must therefore be cultivated under supervision and guidance:

Until young people have fixed *habits* of benevolence, and a taste for occupation, perhaps it is not prudent to trust them with the care or protection of animals. Even when they are enthusiastically fond of them, they cannot by their utmost ingenuity make the animals so happy in a state of captivity, as they would in a state of liberty. They are apt to insist upon doing animals good against their will, and they are often unjust in the defence of their favourites. A boy of seven years old once knocked down his sister for fear she would squeeze his caterpillar.
(*Practical Education*, I, p. 283)

The Edgeworths also advise that children should be taught to care for all animals, not just the conventionally appealing ones. Adults may pass on their own 'absurd antipathies' by, perhaps unconsciously, valuing 'lap-dogs and singing birds' above others. Today's conservationists recognize this problem when they refer to public preference for 'charismatic megafauna', meaning favouritism for high-profile species such as whales, elephants or baby seals to the neglect of other, perhaps equally threatened, species.

Again in keeping with Kant's ideas, it is primarily because cruel acts are damaging to individual sensibility and hence for the consequences of human moral character, not animal welfare, that killing is to be avoided:

It is fortunate for us that there are butchers by profession in the world, and rat-catchers and cats, otherwise our habits of benevolence and sympathy would be utterly destroyed. Children, though they must perceive the necessity for destroying certain animals, need not themselves be executioners; they should not conquer the moral repugnance to the sight of the struggles of pain, and the convulsions of death; their aversion to being the cause of pain should be preserved both by principle and habit. Those who have not been habituated to the bloody form of cruelty, can never fix their eye upon her without shuddering; even those to whom she may have in some instances been early familiarised, recoil from her appearance in any shape to which they have not been accustomed.

This personification of ‘cruelty’ as a female, again illustrates the ambivalent gendering of ideas about sensibility. Particular care should be dedicated to the socializing of girls because females are most susceptible to injustice, given that they are conventionally held to be motivated by the emotional heart rather than the reasoning brain, and hence more volatile in their behaviour. Although this makes them more compassionate in their dealings with others, if this compassion is thwarted or misplaced then the consequences can be inappropriate or even dangerous:

[...] It may be necessary to remind all who are concerned in *female* education, that particular caution is necessary to manage female sensibility; to make, what is called the heart, a permanent pleasure, we must cultivate the reasoning powers at the same time that we repress the enthusiasm of *fine feeling*. Women, from their situation in society, are called upon rather for the daily exercise of quiet domestic virtues, than for those splendid acts of generosity, or those exaggerated expressions of tenderness, which are the characteristics of heroines in romance. (*Practical Education*, I, pp. 296-97)

The gendering of the faculty of sympathy was made explicit in best-selling children’s books such as Barbauld’s *Evenings at Home* (1792) and Charlotte Smith’s dialogues. In Barbauld’s book an episode entitled ‘History of a Cat’ is presented from the cat’s perspective. The cat, one of a litter condemned to be drowned in a horse-pond, observes ‘the pleasure boys seem naturally to take in acts of cruelty’, though is eventually spared by the intervention of the farmer’s daughter. The objective of the episode is to teach children to control ‘savage appetites’.³⁹ Again, right conduct towards other species serves as a rehearsal for integrity in interactions within adult human society. A later dialogue between Sophia and her father considers: ‘What are Animals made for?’⁴⁰ Typical to the genre, this debate ensues when the broader wisdom of the voice of experience challenges and refines the beliefs of the girl who had initially dismissed flies as useless and offensive. What at first appears as a source of distaste is transformed by placing it in an enlarged, cosmic context. While human superiority is maintained because ‘man surpasses other animals in his powers of enjoyment’, the anthropocentric idea that all species exist for human benefit is refuted. This also demonstrates the value of placing the evidence of the immediate and particular in a wider theological context, thus becoming an exercise in effective thinking. In imaginatively entering into the persona of another, in this case a thinking fly who views a human being as a ‘great two-legged monster’, the child’s self-centred view is transformed from regarding flies as a source of annoyance to one of sympathy. By teaching Sophia to

distinguish between the 'reasonable use' of animals and 'wanton' killing, 'Papa' prepares her to be a sensitive and sympathetic adult woman capable of refined judgement.

Humanity for Animals and Social Campaigning

In Charlotte Smith's *Minor Morals*, the idea that empathy is a feminine virtue, and the violent domination of animals masculine, is directly challenged. The reader is able to eavesdrop at the point at which Mrs Belmour is scolding Lionel, who had been an accomplice to a friend who used a magnifying glass to burn a pig and set fire to an old woman:

A really manly heart is never cruel. Cowards are cruel; brave men are humane to every thing that lives; and some of the basest as well as the weakest men I know, are those who in their infancy were accustomed to acts of barbarity; who shewed mean jealousy and hatred towards their sisters, and, as they became older, were distinguished at school for nothing but a vulgar gluttony; and at the university or the army, for dirty vices [...]⁴¹

The socially admirable, hence desirable and powerful, quality of masculine chivalry is therefore reclaimed for humanitarianism. Nevertheless, in practice men were more likely to perpetrate the abuse of animals:

A horse is sometimes overworked by his barbarous owner, that he may make all the present profit he can of him; and the same thing has, I fear, been done in those countries where the unhappy negroes are purchased, and compelled to labour to raise sugar, and coffee, and cotton, for the use of Europeans.⁴²

Smith uses the issue of animal cruelty to raise a discussion about slavery (already likely to be unpopular with many of her readers' middle-class dissenting families), thus explicitly associating human exploitation with the cause of animal welfare. Both human slaves and animals are reduced to their use value as commodities and exploited for the material benefit of those able to pay for their services or products.

This link between anti-slavery and opposition to the cruel treatment of animals was to have concrete and practical consequences, significant in the history of political campaigning. It is evidence that, for many, the concern for animals was not an indulgent evasion of responsibility for human welfare but the foundation of an inclusive humanitarian fervour that embraced both 'the love of nature' and 'the love of human kind'. Several commentators – most comprehensively Margaret Spiegel in *The Dreaded Comparison* (1988), but also Peter Singer and James Turner – have observed that the founders of the

SPCA included prominent anti-slavery campaigners, notably William Wilberforce and Thomas Fowell Buxton.⁴³

I shall conclude with a small biographical detail about Ann Radcliffe, dog lover and best-selling novelist, which demonstrates a practical concern for animals and which bridges the private sensibility of late eighteenth-century writers and the organized campaigns for animal welfare emerging during the nineteenth century. Without Radcliffe's timely bequest it is clear that the seminal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals would have been bankrupted by debts and lack of revenue in 1826.⁴⁴ Radcliffe's direct contribution of a substantial legacy from the profits of her 'Gothick' sales to the early SPCA is a detail overlooked by all her literary biographers.

Several, however, have documented anecdotes that illustrate Radcliffe's love of dogs, particularly her rescue of Fanny and Dash, the last two that lived with her, from untimely deaths.⁴⁵ There are, furthermore, instances in Radcliffe's novels that make the connection between sympathy for animals and a broader humanitarianism based upon sensibility. For example, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), St. Aubert enjoys botanizing but 'for fishing-tackle he had no use, for he never could find amusement in torturing or destroying'.⁴⁶ Radcliffe expressed her own hostility towards bloodsports directly in the travelogue *Journey Made in the Summer of 1794*:

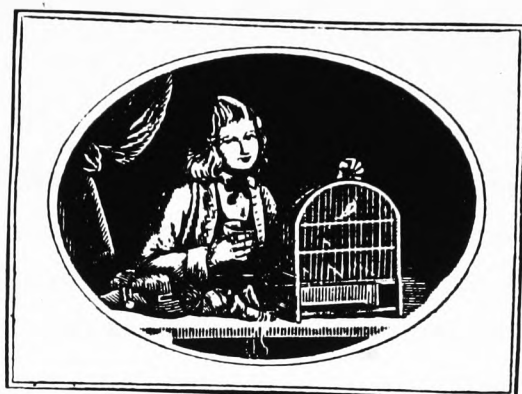
It is melancholy to consider, that the most frequent motives of man's retirement among the beautiful recesses of nature, are only those of destroying the innocent animals that inhabit her shades. Strange! that her lovely scenes cannot soften his heart to milder pleasures, or elevate his fancy to nobler pursuits, and that he must still seek his amusement in scattering death among the harmless and the happy.⁴⁷

The £100 that William Radcliffe left as a legacy on his late wife's behalf would, using the Phelps-Brown index, convert to approximately £4, 800 in today's currency. Unfortunately, we shall probably never know more about how she encountered the SPCA at the end of her life and whether there was any personal connection with its members, given that no examples of letters in Radcliffe's hand are extant and that her papers are assumed to be permanently lost.⁴⁸

- ¹ Mrs. Woodfield in Charlotte Smith, *Rural Walks*, I, pp. 92-3.
- ² See Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 60.
- ³ Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc* [1711], ed. by John M. Robertson, 2 vols (London: Grant Richards, 1900), I, p. 333.
- ⁴ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, II, p. 287. The adjectival use of 'profound' can, of course, only be interpreted as ironic in tone here, if the adverb 'resolutely' is not to be rendered contradictory. This amounts to an early intimation that other animals may possess enough attributes of sentience – such as rudimentary beliefs, memory, the capacity for pleasure and pain or welfare interests – to logically qualify them for moral concern as what Regan much later termed 'subjects-of-a-life'. See *The Case for Animal Rights*, p. 243.
- ⁵ [Benedictus de] Spinoza, *Ethics* [1677] and *Treatise on the Correction of the Intellect*, trans. by Andrew Boyle and rev. by G. H. R. Parkinson (London: Dent, 1910; rev. edn, 1993), p. 162. [Pt. IV. Prop. xxxvii, no. 1].
- ⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739-40], ed. by Ernest C. Mossner (London: Penguin, 1969; 1984 rpt), I, xvi., p. 226.
- ⁷ Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, I, xvi, p. 227.
- ⁸ See G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 27.
- ⁹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [expanded 6th edn 1790], ed. by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, Vol. 1, *The Glasgow edition of the works and correspondence of Adam Smith*, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 35-6.
- ¹⁰ See *Letters of John Keats*, pp. 249-50. Barker-Benfield writes that 'Wollstonecraft insisted that women toughen themselves by fully entering the world and subjecting themselves individually to all of the experiences possible to men' (*Culture of Sensibility*, p. 362).
- ¹¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings of Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event* [1790], ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 125.
- ¹² Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- ¹³ See Todd, *Sensibility*, pp. 47-48. Masculine sentiment reaches its epitome in *The Man of Feeling*. Edwards's heartbreak at the death of his 'shag house-dog', Trusty, is characteristic of the profound depth of sorrow attributed to masculine sensibility. The trauma of Trusty's death is a direct consequence of the human's trauma of eviction and his extreme loyalty is an implied foil to the landlord's treachery. Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* [1771], ed. by Brian Vickers, 2nd edn [1773], (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 88-9.
- ¹⁴ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 384-85.
- ¹⁵ The background context for these ideas is provided by Barker-Benfield in *The Culture of Sensibility*, esp. pp. 224-25.
- ¹⁶ Sarah Trimmer, *Fabulous Histories* [1786], and Rev. Legh Richmond, *The Dairyman's Daughter* [1810?], (New York: Garland, 1977 facsimile reprint), Chapter XIII, pp. 100-113.
- ¹⁷ Trimmer, *Fabulous Histories*, pp. 68-9.
- ¹⁸ Edmund Burke in particular writes of the attractiveness of feminine weakness and vulnerability. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* [2nd edn 1759] and *Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. by David Womersley (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 144.
- ¹⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* [1792], ed. by Miriam Brody (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 158.
- ²⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, The Female Reader, Original Stories, Letters on the Management of Infants and Lessons*, in *Works IV*, p. 367.
- ²¹ Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories, Works IV*, p. 370.
- ²² Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories, Works IV*, p. 372.
- ²³ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 291.
- ²⁴ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 275.
- ²⁵ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, p. 277.

- ²⁶ Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent, Together with the Characters of the Inhabitants and such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections as May Excite in the Reader Proper Sentiments of Humanity, and Lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue* by 'A Gentleman on his Travels' [1762], introd. by Jane Spencer (London: Virago, 1986). Spencer notes that the novel was possibly penned in collaboration with Lady Barbara Montagu.
- ²⁷ Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 4. However, a reference to 'poverty and boorish rusticity' (p. 5) indicates an awareness that this is not the usual condition of country life.
- ²⁸ Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 17.
- ²⁹ See John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* [1974], 2nd edn (London: Duckworth, 1980), Chapter Two.
- ³⁰ Felicity A. Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 150.
- ³¹ Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 118. Ruth Perry suggests that some details in the setting may be attributed to autobiographical aspects of the rural lifestyle Scott enjoyed with her sister, Lady Barbara Montagu, near to Bath. See 'Bluestockings in Utopia', in *History, Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. by Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1994), pp. 160-61.
- ³² Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p. 2.
- ³³ Scott, *Millenium Hall*, pp. 18-19.
- ³⁴ Immanuel Kant, 'Duties Towards Animals and Spirits', *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. by Louis Infield (London: Methuen, 1930; 1979 rpt; these lectures are believed to have been delivered between 1775 and 1781), pp. 239-241.
- ³⁵ Recalling the ideas of Charles Fourier, who suggested that society's health could be measured by the manner in which it treated its *women* during the early nineteenth century. The poet William Jones (1746-94) translated and made available Eastern literature and philosophy in the late eighteenth century.
- ³⁶ See *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic Period Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 53.
- ³⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Mary*, p. 6.
- ³⁸ Maria and R. L. Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, I, p. 265.
- ³⁹ Mrs. [Anna Laetitia] Barbauld and John Aikin, *Evenings at Home; or The Juvenile Budget Opened. Consisting of a variety of Miscellaneous Pieces, for the Instruction of Young Persons* [1792-5], 2nd edn, 6 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1794), I, pp. 106-19.
- ⁴⁰ Barbauld and Aikin, *Evenings at Home*, IV, pp. 148-51.
- ⁴¹ Charlotte Smith, *Minor Morals*, I, pp. 122-23. These sentiments were echoed by the later nineteenth-century writer, Ouida, who encouraged a young boy who read her children's stories to be kind to animals, on the grounds that 'real manliness is always indulgent and never tyrannical'. See Elizabeth Lee, *Ouida: A Memoir* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914), p. 308.
- ⁴² Charlotte Smith, *Natural History of Birds*, p. 88.
- ⁴³ Margaret Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (London: Heretic Books, 1988). Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, pp. 35-36. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* [1975], 2nd edn (London: Pimlico, 1995), p. 221.
- ⁴⁴ See Arthur W. Moss, *Valiant Crusade: The History of the R.S.P.C.A.* (London: Cassell, 1961), p. 25. Chris Reed, RSPCA Information Officer, verifies that an entry from the RSPCA Committee Minutes for 15 May 1826, confirms that William Radcliffe promised this amount, which is duly recorded in a further entry in the 1832 RSPCA Annual Report listing the payment of the legacy. E:mail correspondence 6 October 2000.
- ⁴⁵ Aline Grant, *Ann Radcliffe* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1951), pp. 23-4, 49 and 137. Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), pp. 226-27 and 234.
- ⁴⁶ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* [1794], ed. by Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 8.
- ⁴⁷ Ann Radcliffe, *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794, Through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany, with a Return Down the Rhine: To Which are Added Observations During a Tour to The Lakes of Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), pp. 127-28.

⁴⁸ Norton writes: 'The complete disappearance of Ann Radcliffe's papers is probably due to the circumstances of her husband's remarriage and his death abroad. They may have been destroyed just prior to the removal to France, but if any of her journals or manuscripts still exist, they may survive in an archive in France, unsigned and unattributed, provenance unknown.' *Mistress of Udolpho*, p. 249.



DANCING LIKE A HARLEQUIN: THE NOBLE SAVAGERY OF THE OURANG-OUTANG

What is the ape to men? A laughing-stock or a painful Embarrassment.
(Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*)¹

The Kindred of Apes

Inevitably, the smoothest extension of sympathy was to those animals with an obvious human resemblance: apes and monkeys. The multiple and varied representations of these species reveals much about the way that the literary presence of animals formed the discursive ground for a broader moral debate about social progress, human well-being and improvement. The gloomy proclamation by Nietzsche's Zarathustra, 'Once you were apes, and even now man is more of an ape than any ape,'² perfectly encapsulates the extreme cultural ambivalence towards the great apes since they first became familiar to Western commentators. While many have believed that the very existence of apes is a symbolic tribute to human progress in transcending our instinctual and bestial species origin, others have looked to them as uncorrupted beings, exemplifying a state of innocent simplicity, denizens of an Elysium that existed before the selfishness, materialism and mass warfare which have accompanied human civilization.

The great apes' appearance in the corpus of European knowledge, first anecdotally in travellers' tales, and more gradually in mainstream natural history, coincided with, indeed in part precipitated, the profound paradigm-shift from Classical to Modern understandings of organic life. The full scientific confirmation and classification of the great apes was an incremental process.³ It was not until the early nineteenth century that the main non-human species were distinguished: the orang-utan, chimpanzee, gorilla, gibbon and siamang. Indeed, the authentication of gorillas as a species occurred just twelve years before Darwin announced the theory of natural selection.⁴

The intimation of simian origins, suggested by the discovery of the great apes, illustrates the way in which contrasting and even conflicting images of the natural world profoundly touched upon the ontological problem and mystery of human identity.⁵ The appearance and development of both primatology and anthropology as branches of European thought during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was, to a significant extent, a corollary of the Imperial venture. Hence the insights that such studies revealed were frequently understood and interpreted within the hierarchical conceptual

framework of a colonial *mentalité*.⁶ The debate about great apes derived from the discoveries made during an unprecedented period of global exploration and ongoing colonial expansion. The possibility of a kinship with apes made the definition of human uniqueness a matter of urgency and anxiety by bringing into question the fundamental distinction between humans and other species.⁷ The new demands of comparative natural history radically transformed the structures of knowledge that provided the context for the fundamental ontological distinction between the human and non-human. It became possible, indeed imperative, to contextualize existing beliefs about the natural world within the recently enlarged global context, as Old and New World environments and species were compared, and fresh geographical mappings were complemented by biological ones.

When Darwin and Wallace independently identified the importance of the sexual economy of reproduction by natural selection as the origin of the Earth's biotic profusion and diversity, the full philosophical and political significance of primatology in particular became evident. Both writers extrapolated natural selection as the mechanism which explained the proliferation of species through attentive readings of Malthus's *Essay on Population*. Whilst initially Darwin's theories were expounded with particular reference to such species as the Galapagos finches and barnacles, the challenge to human uniqueness already implied by Linnaean taxonomy was confirmed by the evolutionary narrative of the descent of humanity from apes in Huxley's *Evidence as to Man's Relation to Nature* (1863); groundwork which aired the controversy before Darwin's own more comprehensive publication, *The Descent of Man* (1871).⁸ The presence of apes in Romantic novels previous to this transition therefore provides a rich source of contesting narratives and depictions of the natural world, which in turn signify contrasting attitudes towards the human condition.

Apes in the Enlightenment

The orang-utan was the beast that both physically and symbolically came to occupy the periphery between humanity and nature.⁹ The creature was cited on both sides in debates about slavery and white supremacy, on the noble savage, simplicity and deteriorationism and concerning the origins of language. Speech, reason and the possession of a soul had long been upheld as guarantors of human uniqueness, but was the divide one of degree or of kind?

The raw facts about the behavioural patterns of the great apes as biological entities could be put to a variety of rhetorical and polemical uses. Evidence of human kinship with other animals could be welcomed as an opportunity for a broader reconnection with the

natural world. This, in time, became a part of a progressive strategy for ending human separation and alienation from nature. In Harriet Ritvo's words, for those that were persuaded of its truth, evolution 'eliminated the unbridgeable gulf that divided reasoning human being from irrational brute'.¹⁰

The consequences, therefore, were far-reaching. Opponents of the idea of human kinship with apes feared the breakdown of difference as a dangerously Jacobin inclination to level downwards; an excuse to return humanity to a pre-civilized state and obliterate distinctions between human categories and institutions. Isaac D'Israeli's novel, *Flim-Flams!* (1805), illustrates the political nature of this contention and brings together some leading names in the eighteenth-century ape debate:

[...] *Is man naturally a biped or a quadruped?* Until this point can be decided, he who walks uprightly does not walk surely; every step he takes may transgress the fundamental law of nature. — ROUSSEAU, MOSCATI, Lord MONBODDO, &c. have done their utmost to bend the stubborn neck of man down to the earth; BUFFON, ZIMMERMAN, and BLUMENBACH unite their efforts to set him up again.¹¹

The origins of the modern ape controversy are to be found in Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755).¹² Here, Rousseau raises the possibility of organic evolution, yet remains uncharacteristically reticent about offering an opinion:

I shall not ask [...] whether [natural man's] whole body, like that of a bear, was not covered with hair; or whether the fact that he walked upon all fours, with his looks directed toward the earth, confined to a horizon of a few paces, did not at once point out the nature and limits of his ideas. On this subject I could form none but vague and almost imaginary conjectures. Comparative anatomy has as yet made too little progress, and the observations of naturalists are too uncertain, to afford an adequate basis for any solid reasoning.¹³

Rousseau's second *Discourse* is a narrative that considers a possible social evolutionary pattern of human development but does not directly address the implications of organic evolution.¹⁴ However, the possibility that the noble savage was not anatomically identical to *Homo sapiens* in its present state is cautiously postulated by default. Rousseau's care to stress the hypothetical nature of the *Discourse's* argument was often overlooked in criticism of this deeply controversial text. In the second *Discourse*, pristine beings are described who live in the woods existing in a state of consciousness characterized as *amour de soi*; one which left them at peace with the world after their immediate physical needs were met.¹⁵ While Rousseau's sylvan beings are usually considered as noble savages, this was a term applied retrospectively to those living in a primal state, before the self-reflexive experience

of self/subject and other/object that Abrams terms 'the splintering of the primal man' into a self-concept characterized by the more egotistical state of *amour-propre*.¹⁶ They are a part of the text's rhetorical strategy, constituting a provisional control experiment from which the accretions of culture are ideally absent. In much the same way, the great apes have since been regarded as ideal subjects for behavioural experiment on the basis that they exist free from the contamination of culture.¹⁷ The evolutionary tale of the social transition from primal beings to humans represented a new metanarrative and amounted to a secular version of the biblical fall from a virtuous, pre-lapsarian existence.

The second *Discourse* is a deteriorationist narrative that registers human history as a gradual rupture of the self. Separation from other species initiates a process in which the individual self becomes a discrete entity distinct from, and increasingly in conflict with, the rest of the human community. Ultimately, this makes possible the division of labour. Initially, man became divided from, and privileged over, woman, providing the model for the later inequity of rich and poor.

Despite Rousseau's reticence, his account of social development from solitary life in the woods was widely disparaged. Rival philosophe, Voltaire, sent a characteristically querulous acknowledgement when he received a complimentary copy:

I have received, Monsieur, your new book against the human race, and I thank you for it. [...] Never has so much intelligence been deployed in an effort to make us beasts. One wants to walk on all fours after reading your book, but since I lost the habit more than sixty years ago, I fear I cannot recover it.¹⁸

Another critic ended a satirical letter purporting to come from 'Rousseau, until now [...] citizen of Geneva, but at present ORANG-OUTANG.'¹⁹

There is no clearer instance of the controversy provoked by the great apes than the ridicule that confronted Lord Monboddo (1714-1799), following his more direct assertion that the orang-utan was in fact a tree-dwelling sub-species of humanity:

Monsieur Rousseau [...] agrees with me in opinion, that he belongs to our species; rejecting with great contempt the notion of those who think that speech is natural to man. Now if we get over that prejudice, and do not insist, that other arts of life, which the Ouran Outangs want, are likewise natural to man, it is impossible we can refuse them the appellation of *men*.²⁰

Twentieth-century work in genetics has in part vindicated the outrageousness of the eccentric Lord. His intuition of the physical descent of humanity is prophetic of organic

evolution. Comparison of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) has established that our closest evolutionary relative, the rare central African pigmy chimpanzee, or bonobo, shares with humans a 98.4% identical genetic make-up, though, of course, reproductive incompatibility ultimately confirms the distinction in species.²¹ Monboddo's belief that orang-utans were humans in their natural state ensured that the species came to represent both the physical and symbolic peripheries between humanity and nature. His assertion of the great apes' capabilities directly challenged former guarantors of human uniqueness such as the use of tools and the ability to communicate in signs.

Buffon's attitude towards the humanity, and certainly the nobility, of the orang-utan was more sceptical. He believed that the mammal could only mechanistically 'ape' human behaviour and resided entirely outside the realm of rationality. Buffon's approach indicated that there existed an absolute discontinuity in the physiological relationship between humans and non-human species given that rationality, underpinned by the possession of language, amounted to an unbridgeable gulf.²²

By the eighteenth century's close, reference to the apes appeared in contentions about racial distinction and hierarchy and also primitive virtue. To mention the orang-utan immediately recalled an entire philosophical context for the educated lay reader, familiar with ongoing developments in natural history and anthropology. The writings of Rousseau, Monboddo and Buffon demonstrate that the issue of the similarity and otherness of the apes was widely believed to have consequences for human progress and advancement. They were a blank slate onto which could be sketched assumptions regarding human nature (particularly ethnicity and gender), and a theme for ongoing contentions about civilization and barbarity. From one perspective, commentators revered the great apes as living examples of the primeval noble savage. Vegetarians of enormous strength, they were idealized as a desired 'other', beings who enjoyed simple and contented existences in harmony with nature, beyond the corruption and depravity of modern industrial society. For others, however, they represented a threat to human uniqueness because they were reminders of an animal nature that must be tamed if civilization was to advance, thus reflecting substantial cultural anxieties about the human-animal boundary.²³ Wakefield only assessed the positive characteristics of apes and monkeys in the context of a firm distinction from humanity:

[...] Many species are said to be fierce, ill-natured, malicious, revengeful, thievish, mischievous, and immodest; exhibiting a picture, if it may bear that term, of man in the most debased condition, a slave to vice and his own unrestrained inclinations. Yet these creatures are domestic favourites, and, it must be

confessed, that some of the smaller tribes are not always destitute of beauty, if considered as an animal, and not as a counterpart to the noble, intelligent race of mankind.²⁴

For Rousseau and Monboddo, the orang-utan was a magic mirror, able to reflect both a possible primeval past and the human potential to develop and change. While their hypothesis about our great ape kinship clearly anticipated later thought, both feared that ostensible advances in development had merely contributed to the misery of the human condition, and had exacerbated the conflicts of interest between the individual and mass society.

**‘Apes, mere apes of us!’²⁵:
Gender, Ethnicity and Lascivious Apes**

The great ape presence in Romantic literature provides yet another instance of the appropriation of natural history as a reservoir of truths about human nature, and its use to affirm protean interpretations of human identity. In our own period, Donna Haraway explores the way in which attitudes towards non-human species have consistently been mediated by social assumptions, especially prevailing constructions of gender and ethnicity, in her study of twentieth-century primatology, *Primate Visions* (1992).²⁶ The great apes’ anomalous status, as inhabitants of the threshold between nature and culture, connects them to other beings, particularly women, that Haraway designates as ‘odd boundary creatures’ in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991).²⁷ Among advocates for those human groupings for whom such an identification has traditionally been a part of a hostile taxonomy, there remains an understandable suspicion of the project to acknowledge a great ape kinship. The association of these groups with ‘nature’ by the dominant culture had formed the philosophical foundation for political inequality. The historical belief that women and people with non-European origins are somehow closer to nature problematizes any positive interspecies identification with objectified animals. Haraway explains the reluctance to look sympathetically upon the notion of redemptive contact with other species:

European culture for centuries questioned the humanity of peoples of colour and assimilated them to the monkeys and the apes in jokes, medicine, religious art, sexual beliefs and zoology. That a person of colour would seek a healing touch from these animals borders on the absurd.²⁸

Schiebinger’s research into eighteenth-century primatology reveals a significant bias in scientists’ disproportionate focus upon sexual characteristics in comparative studies of female apes and humans; female subjects were constructed almost exclusively as sexual

beings. Among male scientists, there was a marked emphasis upon the biological similarities between women, particularly women of colour, and apes, Schiebinger argues, resulting in distortion because 'studies of female anatomy designed to reveal the exact boundary between humans and apes interrogated aspects of their sexuality'.²⁹ Nevertheless, during the next century, sympathy with animals was to become a significant aspect of women's increasingly public role in promoting humanitarian reform.

Throughout recorded history the bodies of known apes and monkeys have provided a convenient site for an anthropomorphizing projection of the range of human attributes. Comparison in such terms can diminish conceptions of both humans and non-human primates. Contributors to the *Great Ape Project* (1993), who seek to transform the cultural and legal status and physical treatment of apes, have challenged both anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism and have been sharply critical of such a legacy. On the one hand anthropomorphism has distorted the recognition of species' otherness in such a way as to obstruct the particular and different needs and potentialities of the great apes, thus making acceptable travelling menageries and circuses in which they are ridiculed as surrogate 'actors'. It has also made possible the comparison between animals and those humans deemed 'bestial', and sometimes legitimated the denial of fundamental human rights. At the same time anthropocentrism, while obscuring genuine affinities between species, has relegated or abolished apes' interests with the result that their autonomy and terrain has been so much reduced that all species face a real threat of extinction in their natural environment. Such disconnection and insensitivity has also led to an impoverishment of human culture, as ironically, the quest for intelligent life through prestigious space travel is contemporaneous with a failure to conserve viable populations of highly evolved primates from which a wealth of scientific knowledge may yet be learned.

However, more sympathetic attitudes towards the great apes, represented by scientific, anthropological and legal coalitions such as the *Great Ape Project*, may be traced back to origins in the Romantic period. Richard Grove, while making a revisionist critique of what he regards as Keith Thomas's overemphasis upon Western urban sentiment as the origin of new attitudes, likewise looks to this period as the source of an emerging environmental sensibility. He particularly identifies the scientists Pierre Poivre, Philibert Commerson and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre as conservationists who made 'strong associations' between habitat destruction, and fears about extinctions, and programmes for social reform in the human sphere.³⁰

Nevertheless, despite a new scientific interest in, and admiration for, simians,

anthropomorphism remained conventional, both in its idealizing and its more common derogatory varieties. Simians were seen as diminished humans and parodied as frivolous jokers and fools, endearing and childlike in their mischievousness and simplicity. Comparison with them therefore afforded the perfect insult, belittling the object of scorn as disgusting or trivial. In Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778), the foppish Mr Lovel suffers the utmost public humiliation when he is set up by Captain Mirvan to meet his 'twin-brother' who turns out to be 'a monkey, full dressed, and extravagantly *à-la-mode*'.³¹ In Sarah Scott's *History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), Lamont is forced to adjust his attitudes towards women, 'that weak sex, which he had hitherto considered only as play-things for men; a race somewhat superior to monkeys'.³² The unwelcome sexual advances and behaviour of Maria's drunken husband, Mr Venables, in Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman* (1798), invite comparison with the people of the poorest and most disreputable quarters of the city, who in turn are considered to be closer to apes than humans:

They had excited sensations similar to those I have felt, in viewing the squalid inhabitants of some of the lanes and back streets of the metropolis, mortified at being compelled to consider them as my fellow-creatures, as if an ape had claimed kindred with me.³³

The Irish woman that Keats encountered and named the 'Duchess of Dunghill' is another telling instance. He described her as:

a squalid old Woman squat like an ape half starved from a scarcity of Biscuit in its passage from Madagascar to the cape [...]³⁴

More sinister and unfortunate for monkeys was the older tradition which designated them as earthly demons incarnate: a vicarious embodiment of human sin, the accomplices and familiars of witches, subject to life-long damnation and punishment for their dirtiness and unrestrained sexuality.³⁵ The grotesque beast squatting upon the prone figure of the sleeping woman in Henry Fuseli's 'The Nightmare' (1781) is frequently assumed to be an incubus. However, Erasmus Darwin, who knew Fuseli personally as the illustrator for the *Botanical Garden*, describes the creature as a 'Demon-Ape'.³⁶ His portrayal accords with the proverbial understanding of monkeys and apes as synonymous with sexual heat and promiscuity. Persecuting and purging the apes could therefore be encouraged and justified as a civilizing redress for sin. Such a stigma was not only dangerous for simians but also instrumental in designating and policing humans as uncontrolled and threatening. Racial theorists stigmatized black slaves with fears about uncontrolled sexual carnality and bestial behaviour. Edward Long gleefully alleged in his *History of Jamaica* (1774) that sexual relations between black women and orang-utans were frequent and added: 'Ludicrous as the

opinion may seem, I do not think that an orang-outang husband would be any dishonour to an Hottentot female.³⁷ Even the naturalist, Thomas Pennant, makes a distinctly moralizing assessment of the 'anthropomorphous' quadrupeds, noting in 1781 that they:

[...] have many actions in common with human kind: most of them are fierce and untameable; some are of a milder nature, and will shew a degree of attachment; but in general are endowed with mischievous intellects: are filthy, obscene, lascivious, thieving [...]³⁸

However, those Romantics that took a deteriorationist view of civilization, began to shape primates into forms more worthy of reverence, and, as knowledge of their anatomy and habits increased, the apes came to be viewed with new interest and admiration. Nevertheless this interest remained anthropomorphic. Schiebinger records that the apes were understood in terms of the social developments of the day. Just as the rise of 'affective individualism' provided the structure for interpretations of botany, it likewise marked attitudes towards ape behaviour: 'naturalists were quick to attribute this new-found romance to simian couples'.³⁹ An anecdote told by Monboddo in the *Origin and Progress of Language*, and footnoted by Peacock,⁴⁰ indicates just such a notion of the romantic chivalry of natural justice, though Monboddo is careful to attribute the description of the orang-utan as a 'husband' to the author of the account. After a female ape was shot, her male partner chased her assailant relentlessly, then:

he seized the negro and dragged him out of the house to the place where his wife lay dead or wounded, and the people of the neighbourhood could not rescue the negro, nor force the oran to quit his hold of him, till they shot him likewise.⁴¹

Isaac D'Israeli and the *Mixing of Kinds*

The fictional presence of the 'ourang-outang' in early nineteenth-century novels provides an accessible insight into some of the popular preoccupations of the Romantic literary intelligentsia, on the threshold of the transition from creationism to evolutionism.⁴² There is a conflation of species' boundaries and boundaries of gender and 'race' in *Flim-Flams!*⁴³ by Isaac D'Israeli (1766-1848). Remembered today chiefly as the father of Benjamin D'Israeli, Isaac D'Israeli was a prolific writer with a reputation established over a period of five decades as a writer.⁴⁴ *Flim-Flams!* (1805), his now largely forgotten second novel, is a provocative and encyclopaedic satire upon scientific quackery.

Flim-Flams! is a Shandean collection of anecdotes about the life and adventures of Uncle Jacob who, in his capacity as county recorder, explores every fashion in philosophic

thought. These are retold by an admiring, though perplexed, nephew who accompanies his Uncle throughout a series of bizarre occurrences that lay bare the enthusiasms and obsessions of the age. The characters in *Flim-Flams!* are strongly reminiscent of those that make up the banner-waving crowds in the satirical caricatures of fellow anti-Jacobin, James Gillray.

In *Flim-Flams!*, the Great Chain of Being still provides a paradigm for racial human categories of intelligence. Such categories were ‘objectively’ confirmed by measurements of the proportion of the skull, work mostly undertaken by Johann Friedrich Lavater (1741-1801) and the anatomist, Pieter Camper, who made comparative studies of human and ape skulls. As noted in the introduction, there was considerable debate during the eighteenth century concerning the dilemma of whether the black man or the white woman should be ranked first in this hierarchy.⁴⁵ In *Flim-Flams!*, the orang-utan first appears in a discussion about craniometry. In Volume One, an engraving by Richard Dagley illustrates this science and is directly derived from Camper’s theories. It depicts facial angles, and, using male skulls as human norms, the ‘ourang-outang’ is measured in a racial hierarchy and compared to human heads, suggesting both the acceptance of Monboddo’s inclusion of the animal as a racial category within the human race, and the polygenist refusal to include ‘Negroes’ in the same category as ‘Europeans’. According to the biological determinism of this gradation, ‘Negroes’ at 70° are mostly closer to the ‘ourang’ at 58° than to ‘Europeans’ at 80° or 90° or the ‘Grecian Antique’ skull which improbably has a facial line that projects degrees beyond the limits of the right-angle frame of measurement.⁴⁶ D’Israeli’s preoccupation with craniometry and facial angles reflects an interest in a ‘science’ that retained influence throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ Stephen Jay Gould’s study, *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981), examines the ‘a priori commitment to ranking’ that determined and distorted the interpretation of much of the ‘objective’ scientific data that imputed the inferiority of those underprivileged human groupings designated as being inherently closer to nature – women, the working classes and ethnic groups deemed ‘savage’.⁴⁸

The joke in *Flim-Flams!* is at the expense of Uncle Jacob, representative of the ‘*Philos*’ or ‘*WRONGHEADS*’, a small clique of radicals who dabble in various sciences and cause mischief.⁴⁹ The orang-utan’s initial placing sets the context for a more thoroughgoing consideration of the dangerous transgression of categories in terms of race and gender. Underlying D’Israeli’s anxiety about the ‘mixing of kinds’ appears to be a conservative desire to protect the cultural institution of social ranking, using the strategy of satire. Despite his initial sympathy for the French Revolution, D’Israeli had, subsequently, attacked what he considered to be the political enthusiasm of the perfectibilians among the

This so-called 'mixing of kinds' is a central and consistent theme in *Flim-Flams!* The abhorrent 'unnaturalist', Gobbo, represents the immorality of such mixing and the separation of knowledge from ethics. His experiments include poking out bats' eyes with red-hot needles and stitching their ears together to test the function of their sensory organs, making his maidservant hatch hens' eggs between her breasts, dissecting live geese to investigate digestion and gobbling down live spiders. However, Gobbo confides that his central scientific quest is to cross species, 'RE-CREATING the world as one may say, and cover the earth with creatures not of God's making!' and that he is making progress to this end, using 'anti-physical experiments' to create what he calls '*the mixtures of kinds*'.⁵¹ As Gillian Beer notes, early readers shuddered at the idea of evolutionary theory because 'one of the lurking fears it conjured was miscegeny'.⁵² D'Israeli satirizes the experiments of Mon. de Sales which he associates with the very mixtures of kinds that provide the model for later events in the novel, for example the supposition that 'an ourang outang in uniting itself to a negress, acquires for its *posterity*, more extensive rights to intelligence'.⁵³

Into this scientific setting a character is fanfared, indeed with some justification, as 'a personage [...] of a more extraordinary nature, than hath yet been recorded, in authentic or fictitious History!' The homunculus that Uncle Jacob and his nephew meet entirely inhabits the periphery between nature and culture. The being is a caricature of the effeminacy of men of sensibility, one that defies and disrupts categories of human and non-human, and male and female (he is described as '*a new man of feeling*', the subtitle of William Godwin's most recent novel, *Fleetwood*). 'He', (D'Israeli's pronoun), is a physical personification and embodiment of certain radical theories carried to ridicule. The homunculus is very cultured, not only in as much as he is learned and noble but also in the literal sense that he is made from a culture of 'veal broth [...] poured hot from a bottle', and is described as an 'uncreated man'.⁵⁴ Uncle Jacob's cordial bonding with the homunculus, – he eventually works up enough courage to smooth the creature's tail – underscores his own affinity with the unnatural. The androgyny and hermaphrodite nature of the homunculus parodies Erasmus Darwin's suggestion that men have nipples because humans were once androgynous.⁵⁵ The fact that the creature walks upon three, and later four, legs is a satire upon Monboddó's idea (then unorthodox) that humans once progressed on all fours, a gibe also apparent in Voltaire's derision of Rousseau (see p. 227 above). Furthermore, D'Israeli may also have been familiar with Buffon's allusion to the ape as an homunculus.⁵⁶ References to Linnaeus and to Monboddó's tailed men are footnoted,⁵⁷ and explicitly link the homunculus with those other 'boundary creatures', the orang-utan and apes in general.⁵⁸ The homunculus is a

boundary creature in several senses. He is 'unsexed', existing on an androgynous sexual periphery as a masculine creation marked by his effeminacy. Indeed, when he asserts that he is 'no man', Uncle Jacob mocks him by asking him if he is 'of the lovelier sex?'⁵⁹ Furthermore, by implication, his creator, Gobbo, not only mimics God, but also usurps a maternal role by making the homunculus. In addition to human characteristics, including a 'gigantic Chinese face' (*Flim-Flams!*, III, p.12), the bestial nature of the homunculus is established by his comparison to numerous non-human animals – rattlesnake, spider, fox, hen, grasshopper, tiger, eel, newt, frog and serpent. At the same time, he is 'the sport, not of nature, but of science!' (*Flim-Flams!*, III, p. 10). His ungainly physical characteristics are in contrast to his impeccable manners and deportment and D'Israeli's description of him – 'so virtuous, so urbane a being!' (*Flim-Flams!*, III, p. 5) – suggests a certain nobility.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the dangers of scientific experiment provided a ready metaphor for the kind of political experiment that confronted the established order. The description of the homunculus as 'the miserable fruit of *experimental philosophy*!' can be understood in both a scientific and political sense.⁶⁰ The type of thought that he represents is outside nature, beyond the created 'rank of being', and therefore ungodly. D'Israeli sides with those that most uphold the species' barrier and maintain human uniqueness, caricaturing as creators of monsters those that challenge the fixity of species.

Film-Flams! next shifts its focus to an attack upon women and science for which the purpose of the apes in the 'mixing of kinds' will now become clear. D'Israeli's apparent dislike of the presence of women in science is evident in his discussion of the homunculus who once:

[...] Cherished a fatal passion for that masculine-feminine, the late Princess DASHKOFF — she sat in the president's chair in the Royal Society at Petersburg; yet I considered her as an *imperfect president*; for though she had a beard, she wore no breeches.⁶¹

The text insinuates that such a position is an unnatural, transgressive and hence unwelcome one for a woman and that her gender identity is threatened by such a role.⁶² That this supposed usurpation of a conventional male role is considered to be politically dangerous, is accentuated by the implied association of scientific women and *sansculottism* here and the explicit identification of the Princess with a 'despotic reign'.⁶³ D'Israeli continues to express his horror at this unacceptable mixing of sexual kinds by hoping that all such 'institution ladies', (as he terms female members of scientific associations), should be metamorphosed

into men (*Flim-Flams!* III, 33 n).

D'Israeli's awareness of science and natural history as potentially disruptive of the existing social order is further emphasized in his allusion to Bernardin's ideas. The comic centre of the novel concerns Uncle Jacob's search for a wife. Uncle Jacob first shocks his coterie by announcing his intention to marry a black woman, in keeping with Bernardin's theory, in the *Studies of Nature* (1784), that black and white form complementary opposites in a cosmos ordered in a providential harmony. Bernardin's friendship with Rousseau and prominence in revolutionary Paris made him politically suspect in England. Bernardin's *Studies in Nature*, footnoted in *Flim-Flams!*, includes a discussion of harmonies and contrasts in nature, as evidence of a providential system underlying all creation. According to Bernardin's belief in contrasts, black men admire white women above all others. D'Israeli's fear of the 'mixing of kinds' is such that the mixing of human 'races' is held to be as unnatural and monstrous as the mixing of species. In polygenist theory, human categories were themselves considered as different racial species, created separately.

As events unfold, however, Uncle Jacob selects a white female astronomer to be his wife, loosely based upon Caroline Herschel, who not only tirelessly supported her brother William's work but discovered several comets in her own right.⁶⁴ Shortly after their marriage Urania, as her husband renames her,⁶⁵ develops a fondness for a performing ape.⁶⁶ So fixated is Aunt Urania by the creature that she becomes enthralled by him and eventually gives birth to an ape, who is therefore, cousin to the narrator. Uncle Jacob's worst fears that his new wife's scientific propensities might in some way affect her labour are confirmed:

When my Aunt was advanced in pregnancy, in spite of all my Uncle could say, she resolved, being fair time, to give sixpence to look at a rope-dancing ape. This animal did so enter into her imagination, and so titillate her animal spirits, ramping along her exquisite nervous system, dancing at all hours on the vibratory cords of her cerebellum — that, till her time came, she was observed to skip over every rope she met with, clapping her hands, and tittering like the ape! What Jacob observed at the time was only laughed at, though WILMOT did hope that such a philosophical pair might produce an offspring that could never be christened! My Uncle persisted in saying, — "Rely on it, that I am cuckolded by an ape!" To the mortification of our family did my Aunt lie-in of a perfect *ape*, with the *white cap*, and the *red waistcoat*, just as the ape wore and my Uncle predicted!⁶⁷

The reason for the severity of this particularly vicious satire upon Caroline Herschel is a question that is immediately raised but remains a mystery.⁶⁸ The Aunt, already pregnant, either physically seduces the ape or, possibly, the cerebral fascination that thrills her nervous system may be enough to mould the simian character of her offspring. The idea that

the physical characteristics of an infant were directly shaped by the habits and environment of its mother was widespread and reputable.⁶⁹ Paul-Gabriel Boucé's research has uncovered a lengthy tradition and a school of so-called imaginationist thought among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gynaecological physicians who believed in the determining influence of sight and touch upon a pregnant mother's offspring.⁷⁰ Boucé cites one such example of a doctor who postulated the existence of a 'mimetic plasticity in pregnant women, thanks to the ever-present force of their imagination', namely John Maubray, author of *The Female Physician* (1724) which explicitly makes mention of apes in this respect:

It is very wrong and highly impudent in *Women* that have conceived, to please themselves so much in playing with *Dogs, Squirrels, Apes*, etc. carrying them in their *Laps* or *Bosoms*, and feeding, kissing or hugging them.⁷¹

Furthermore, the physiological expression of Aunt Urania's hypersensitivity bizarrely implies that the mental visual stimulus of the dancing ape in some way illustrates an instinctual bond between her mind and 'animal spirits' and reveals her own, essentially primal, inner self. By implication, despite her immersion in scientific culture, her fundamentally bestial nature is left untouched. Such a description mocks the language of sensibility that conventionally unites physiological responses with psychological metaphors.⁷² Certainly, after an eleven-month gestation period it is an ape to which she gives birth.

In 1806, D'Israeli wrote a predictably unapologetic *Apology for Flim-Flams!* in which he declined to identify the object of his satire, but made it clear she was associated with comets:

The philosophical Amazon lays an astronomical quadrant among the 'Olympian dews,' in her commode – holds a chit-chat on a new comet – and sits like an ecstatic Sybil at a tea-table!⁷³

D'Israeli's modern biographer, James Ogden, suggests that the satire 'betrays bad taste rather than ill-nature'⁷⁴ but does not explain why Caroline Herschel in particular was singled out in this vicious lampoon that suggests her ability to conceive by an ape and hence her proximity to them. Caroline Herschel appears to be a curious choice. She may have been targeted as a prominent female scientist who became a public character, but even this accords little with a woman who was a self-effacing handmaid and amanuensis to her brother, William.⁷⁵ However, it is the footnote regarding one Donna Agnesi that strengthens the idea that the intended target for D'Israeli's satire is the intrusion of women into science. The episode is indexed in the novel as:

AGNESI, DONNA, a young lady, *master* of all sciences, outmonkies my Uncle's educated monkey, and outparrots his green parrot.⁷⁶

The conflation of the two famous mimic animals, the monkey and the parrot, undermines the authenticity of the woman's scientific comprehension and rationality. Evelyn Fox Keller (1985) finds that the gendered inscription of science as a masculine enterprise, concerned with hard facts rather than soft feeling has a long lineage.⁷⁷ Keller, drawing upon the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget, argues that such values have frequently been internalized given that 'our earliest experiences incline us to associate the affective and cognitive posture of objectification with the masculine, while all processes that involve a blurring of the boundary between subject and object tend to be associated with the feminine'.⁷⁸ D'Israeli comically denies the capacity of women to 'master' the faculties of analysis and discrimination necessary to science. Donna Agnesi's erudition is merely reproductive; she lacks the productive knowledge of masculine learning. The condescension continues with a gibe that recalls the earlier craniometrical episodes:

At twenty, had this lady wedged into her *cerebellum* so many *large ideas*, that it actually *split*! This I am sorry for, but the *crania* of the ladies when overflowing with *hot sciences*, are like those transparent, but friable, vases of Porcelain, that filled with *hot water* to the *brim* must inevitably *crack* and *fly into pieces*! Poor DONNA AGNESI could not hold a drop more! And so she retired to a convent of *Blue Nuns* — (apparently a *blue stocking Club*)[...] ⁷⁹

The attack is extended with a topical reference to the scientific and literary interests of the so-called Bluestocking circle which included such notable literary and scientific women as Elizabeth Vesey, Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More, Elizabeth Carter and Hester Thrale.

Thomas Love Peacock and the Art of the Satyrist

While Isaac D'Israeli's representation of the ape is a hostile one, his near contemporary, Thomas Love Peacock, likewise a satyrist⁸⁰ or *mockman*, introduced a more sympathetic literary orang-utan who aped the norms of the day with devastating effect.⁸¹ In *Flim-Flams!*, women who take an interest in scientific education, and their sympathizers, are characterized as misguided and degenerate eccentrics whose behaviour inevitably leads to the most unfortunate consequences. For D'Israeli, as later for Mary Shelley, experimental science was a source of the grotesque sublime, which was pointed up by the time-honoured prerogative of the satirist: the strategy of *reductio ad absurdum*. Aunt Urania's relationship with an ape marks her as a figure of shame and ridicule, Donna Agnesi's frail female

cranium is filled with so much knowledge that it eventually splits, and Uncle Jacob spontaneously combusts in a denouement as spectacular and improbable as his own life. These characters' associations with apes and homunculi are indicative of an unnatural merger between nature and culture, signifying a monstrous relationship that is out of kilter with creation and subversive of conventional social order.⁸²

By contrast, in Peacock's *Melincourt* (1818) the ape is a redemptive and consoling presence whose loyalty and simplicity defeat the mercenary intrigues of his foes. The virtuous characters, who are companions to an amiable orang-utan, enjoy a more harmonious and balanced coexistence with nature and attempt to uphold positive values in a corrupt society. Aesthetic and moral sensibilities are integrated in these characters with intellectual qualities and 'the heretical notion that women are [...] rational beings' is celebrated.⁸³

No ape was more noble in his savagery than Peacock's endearing creation, Sir Oran Haut-ton. Sir Oran becomes truly noble as a titled baronet and provides a fascinating insight into the incorporation of the great apes into debates of the Romantic period concerning slavery, women's education and primitivism. Peacock remarked that he 'condensed Lord Monboddo's views of the humanity of the Oran Outang into the character of *Sir Oran Haut-ton*' in *Melincourt*.⁸⁴ Meticulously underpinned by reference to Rousseau, Linnaeus, Monboddo and Buffon, the result is a revealing caricature; a literal embodiment of the periphery between the human and non-human, dividing culture from nature, and separating reflexive non-verbal gesturing from mechanistic imitation. In Haraway's terms, Sir Oran is an 'odd boundary creature'; truly an eighteenth-century 'cyborg' (see p. 229 above).

Ironically, no one that is introduced to Sir Oran ever guesses that he is an orang-utan. Sir Telegraph Paxarett is astonished to be told upon first making his acquaintance that the 'gentleman' was 'caught' in Angola.⁸⁵ This reference to Angola suggests that Peacock did *not* have in mind the Asian species, now called the orang-utan. Given Sir Oran's African origins, it is more probable that he was a chimpanzee.

As his name suggests, Sir Oran's patron, Sylvan Forester, enjoys an affinity for the woods equal to that of his companion.⁸⁶ Peacock amused himself by giving Forester a character identity which is a compound of the ideas held by Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Frank Newton, both prominent among his own circle of friends at Marlow. Forester is at once a deteriorationist and a perfectibilian, thus continuing a Romantic primitivism that has its roots in Rousseau, Bernardin and Chateaubriand. He is convinced of civilization's steady

decline through selfishness, luxury and vanity, yet hopeful enough of the possibility for social improvement to organize 'anti-saccharine fêtes'. The autobiographical fact of Peacock's own abstention from slave-produced sugar suggests some sympathy with Forester.⁸⁷

Forester shares Monboddo's view that the orang-utan differs from other humans only in its previous isolation from culture and is a living instance of humanity in its pristine state. Its existence, therefore, raises the fundamental question: of what does the 'essence of a man consist?'⁸⁸ In Forester's opinion:

Some presumptuous naturalists have refused this species the honours of humanity; but the most enlightened and illustrious philosophers agree in considering him in his true light as the natural and original man. One French philosopher, indeed, has been guilty of an inaccuracy, in considering him as a degenerated man; degenerated he cannot be; as his prodigious physical strength, his uninterrupted health, and his amiable simplicity of manners demonstrate. He is, as I have said, a specimen of the philosophical Adam.
(*Melincourt*, pp. 44-45)

From the first sight Sir Oran appears on the boundary between both the natural and the cultural. Wearing 'green coat and nankins' (*Melincourt*, p. 34) and sitting next to an oak, the ape is immediately associated with nature and with his arboreal kin, even if the landscapes he inhabits owe much to Romantic constructions of the natural sublime and picturesque. At the same time his modish refinement, theatre-going and penchant for high London fashion align him with the centre of cultural life (*Melincourt*, p. 48). Furthermore, Sir Oran's alleged expertise as a gardener reveals an unexpected ability to convert nature through cultivation (*Melincourt*, p. 47), and his proficiency at playing the flute and French horn also signifies a well-developed aesthetic sense. His personal appearance as a dandy is at once ridiculous and a little grotesque:

Sir Telegraph looked earnestly at the stranger, but was too polite to laugh, though he could not help thinking there was something very ludicrous in Sir Oran's physiognomy, notwithstanding the air of high fashion which characterised his whole deportment, and which was heightened by a pair of enormous whiskers, and the folds of a vast cravat.
(*Melincourt*, p. 34)

Nevertheless, while Sir Oran is an excessively anthropomorphized ape, his human attributes do not prevent the frequent display of his own innate species being. He is both figuratively and physically apt to revert from a cultural context to a natural one in a sudden bound. A dinner party is unexpectedly interrupted when 'Sir Oran [...] having taken a glass too much,

rose suddenly from table, took a flying leap through the window, and went dancing along the woods like a harlequin' (*Melincourt*, p. 37).

And, 'like a harlequin', Sir Oran retains a protean quality in his ability to shape-shift theatrically in an unlikely dance that takes him from jungle ape to musical *bon vivant* to Member of Parliament as the novel progresses. It is precisely by way of such shifts and through the exploitation of the uncanny and the unexpected that Peacock consistently, facetiously and subversively exposes the shallowness of the civilization upon which modern society is based and its continued proximity to the nature that it has supposedly transcended. Ironically, the humans often follow and 'ape' Sir Oran. In this instance it is Forester, Sir Oran's companion and fellow incumbent of Redrose Abbey, who is in pursuit. Shortly after Sir Oran's abrupt break with table etiquette, Forester 'apes' his behaviour, by bounding out of the window and disappearing by the same track among the trees (*Melincourt*, p. 37).

For the twentieth-century critic, Howard Mills, Peacock 'wavers between the serious and the farcical, attempting irreconcilables' in the character of Sir Oran. Through the orang-utan Peacock both illustrates the absurdity of an electoral system in which representation can be bought, even for an ape, and takes an opportunity to 'ridicule Monboddo' while at the same time 'to entertain the idea of the noble savage so as to criticise modern manners'.⁸⁹ It is the dual purpose and complexity of Peacock's creation that make the exact role of Sir Oran as a literary orang-utan interesting. After a half-century of mockery about tailed men on all fours, Rousseau and Monboddo had become well-worn targets; too obvious for a satirist of Peacock's ability and stature. However, Peacock was able to rework this parodic heritage, subtly doubling the satire back upon some of Monboddo's detractors, while at the same time not rendering himself vulnerable to ridicule. Critics have debated the exact target and success of Sir Oran's position in the satire but the centrality of his character is unquestionable. He is undoubtedly the novel's most memorable character, more so than Forester or Anthelia Melincourt, and indeed *Melincourt* is subtitled 'Sir Oran Haut-Ton'. Whilst this novel does not explicitly endorse Monboddo's ideas, Peacock gives them much attention and also aligns them, through the 'persona' of Sir Oran, with the characters who advocate women's education and oppose slavery – perspectives that are incontrovertibly Peacock's own.

No characters are spared Peacock's satire and even Sir Oran is portrayed as a comic, and occasionally clownish, figure. This comedy hinges upon the tension between nature and culture that underlies his every action. His aspirations to culture are hilariously betrayed by behaviour that consistently breaks the etiquette of the society around him. However, while

Sir Oran is a figure of fun he is never an object of ridicule. In part, this is a parable of the humanity of the ape and the beastliness of some human members of society. With their avarice and affectation, the sycophantic visitors and suitors at Melincourt Castle often prove far more thoroughgoing in their duplicity than Sir Oran. The joke, therefore, is not ultimately at the expense of the good-natured and well-intentioned ape.

Attitudes towards the non-human are excellent examples of the hypocrisy of society. Peacock reserves his most bitter satire for the crude machinations of the social climbing *nouveau riche*. The first encounter between the mercenary Mrs Pinmoney and Sir Oran is typical. She asks: 'who is that *very* tall and remarkably ugly gentleman?', and is told: 'That is Sir Oran Haut-ton, Baronet; to which designation you may shortly add M.P. for the ancient and honourable borough of Onevote.' She quickly revises her opinion: 'A Baronet! and M.P.! Well, now I look at him again, I certainly do not think him so very plain: he has a very fashionable air. Haut-ton! French extraction, no doubt. And now I think of it, there is something very French in his physiognomy.'⁹⁰

If there are limits to Sir Oran's socialization, it is also true that the civilized natures of those around him are similarly doubtful. Propriety among the self-interested coterie that visit Melincourt Castle is merely a thin veneer. Furthermore, while Sir Oran consistently betrays the refinements of fashionable society in continual transgressions – his drinking and leaping from windows is invariably overlooked because of the social standing conveyed upon him – his innate sense of natural justice always carries the day. He is untainted by the hypocrisy of the Featherneests and Pinmonneys. Indeed, as I have demonstrated, Sir Oran, despite being mute, unfailingly appears at the fore in taking the initiative. Ironically, his energetic spontaneity causes others to follow and 'ape' him and he consistently proves prescient in deducing the moral right of social situations.⁹¹ His spontaneous actions demonstrate integrity and a shrewd intuition about 'natural justice'. It is Sir Oran's initiative and timely intervention in vanquishing the wicked aristocrat and would be rapist, Lord Anophel, that finally secures a happy ending and particularly marks his own behaviour as chivalrous and noble. He 'seized on Lord Anophel Achthar, and was preparing to administer natural justice by throwing him out at the window', with the result that 'the terrified sprig of nobility' has to be rescued from the ape (*Melincourt*, p. 320).

Even when Sir Oran does 'ape' those around him his mimicry takes the form of what might be described as creative repetition (in contrast to D'Israeli's negative association of mimicry with monkeys, parrots and women). Amidst the deferential and hypocritical society in which he is situated, Sir Oran's reproduction of gestures curiously results in the most

original and rather subversive behaviour:

Lord Anophel now came up, and surveyed Sir Oran through his quizzing-glass, who, making him a polite bow, took his quizzing-glass from him, and examined him through it in the same manner. Lord Anophel flew into a furious passion.[...] (*Melincourt*, p. 83)

This artfully constructed aping is indicative of an unwitting refusal to be the object of the Lord's gaze and innocently redoubles Anophel's impertinence upon him, with its implied indifference to the private property upon which his inherited power lies. As the conventional subject/object split between human and non-human is reversed, for one fleeting moment the latter assumes agency. Sir Oran's repetition, with his habitual openness of gesture is subversive in its transparency, and contrasts interestingly with the mere duplication of expected behaviour by the sycophants who are in reality duplicitous. Again, such behaviour aligns Sir Oran with the ideas of Forester. His absolute sincerity has political connotations in the form of Rousseauist *vertu* represented by Sylvan Forester and Anthelia Melincourt. The playfully sceptical Paxarett points out in rather Wildean tones that:

Really, Forester, you are a very singular fellow. I should not much mind what you say, if you had not such a strange habit of practising what you preach; a thing quite unprecedented, and, egad, preposterous.⁹²

Sir Oran himself, though mute, demonstrates a complementary form of transparency in his gestures; he weeps when he is upset, lashes out when he is angered by injustice, and is unable to deceive. Interestingly, a distinction was made during the eighteenth century between the language of innate 'natural' gesture, expressive of immediate inner emotion and associated by Kames with the language of Eve and animals, and the less direct, symbolical and formalized gestures of speech associated with Adam.⁹³

In the division of values that exists in *Melincourt*, Sir Oran is aligned with those characters sympathetic to social justice and Godwinian perfectibility. Virtuous characters in *Melincourt* combine the best of culture and nature and harmonize feeling with intelligence.

It is the nature of Sir Oran's special bond with Anthelia Melincourt, the other central figure in the novel, to which I would now like to turn. While in one sense Anthelia is a physical embodiment of sensibility and is shaped by her experiences of mountain liberty, it is also clear that her father took pains, against prevailing conventions, to ensure that she received the best education available to her and made regular visits to experience London (*Melincourt*, pp. 9-10). The novel's denouement unfolds according to a conventional fairy-

tale structure, in which a damsel in distress is rescued from a wicked man in a castle, following the intervention of the virtuous characters who appear owing to a coincidence so abrupt that it does not even aspire to plausibility. Yet Peacock's damsel, Anthelia, does not conform to the passive model of the heroine of sensibility, but is, by contrast, an early example of a 'new woman', fully able to hold her own and wittily outpace the opinionated men around her. A devotee of Condorcet, she has more strength of character than the gothic heroines that Peacock's novel recalls. As a 'romantic heretic', the dynamic Anthelia represents the progressive harmonization of sensibility and intellect, and is motivated by a desire for self-development. Her aspirations collide directly with the objectives of profit and status, those acquisitive values of fulfilment upheld by Mrs Pinmoney, who contends that 'feelings are very troublesome things, and always stand in the way of a person's own interests' (*Melincourt*, p. 20). Olwen W. Campbell credits Anthelia as being 'one of those women with cultivated and independent minds whom Peacock seems to have put for the first time into English literature'.⁹⁴

In this respect it is significant that Sir Oran's special bond with Anthelia Melincourt associates him with the progressive and radical cause of women's educational development. Given Sir Oran's instinct for natural justice, his affinity for her values is quite in accord with the long association between the social emancipation of women and the widening of the moral community to make it inclusive of other species.⁹⁵ Both ideas were parodied together in Thomas Taylor's *Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (1792) as a part of an attack upon democratic tendencies. Supporters of such democratic rights increasingly made the connection too.⁹⁶

When Anthelia and Sir Oran eventually encounter each other, however improbably, there is much about their relationship that has a likeness to a romantic attachment; there is mutual fascination, trust and adoration. She immediately 'riveted him in silent admiration' (*Melincourt*, p. 85). Each experiences the other as a vision. Anthelia first comes 'bursting upon him like a beautiful vision' (*Melincourt*, p. 85). Similarly, Anthelia's intuitive trust in Sir Oran is also based upon her recognition of a spiritual quality:

She could not[...] apprehend that this remarkable vision portended any evil to her; for, if so, alone, and defenceless as she was, why should it be deferred?
(*Melincourt*, p. 76)

Furthermore, after their acquaintance is made, Sir Oran is discovered to be 'crazed for love of his young mistress' in her absence (*Melincourt*, p. 251). However, the particular sympathy that exists between them is a mutual, selfless and rather elevated love between

beauty and beast. Unlike the lascivious ape in *Flim-Flams!*, Sir Oran is a well-mannered ape characterized by his nobility and virtue. There is nothing brutish about Sir Oran and his non-possessive spiritual bond contrasts sharply with the bondage intended for Anthelia by Lord Anophel. Anophel's determination to coerce her into union ultimately results in a conspiracy to 'lie in ambush for Anthelia in one of her solitary rambles', to carry out a violent abduction and hold her in 'close custody' until she agrees to marriage.⁹⁷

It is therefore the representative of the old, oppressive social order, within the unreformed parliamentary system, who proves to be more truly brutish and lascivious than the virtuous orang-utan. Anophel attempts to tame and domesticate Anthelia by coercion.⁹⁸ After the marriage between Forester and Anthelia, Sir Oran lives with them and 'formed for [Anthelia] the same kind of reverential attachment as the Satyr in Fletcher forms for the Holy Shepherdess' (*Melincourt*, p. 324). Indeed, Marilyn Butler's discussion of *Melincourt* detects the immediate literary antecedents for the character of Sir Oran in two satyrs present in Renaissance literature: Sir Satyrane in Spenser's *Faerie Queen* as well as the Satyr in Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*.⁹⁹

Both Sir Oran and Anthelia are associated with France, and hence with Jacobin ideas. Mrs Pinmoney had thought she could discern 'something very French' about Sir Oran. Such a connection might make him not only fashionable but, also, a potentially subversive ape. Hester Piozzi noted dressing up as satyrs in her description of French political disorder:

Contagious phrenzy seemed to seize mankind. [...] Infants of three years old were taught *literally* to suck their fellow-creatures' blood; ladies wore little guillotines as ornaments.[...] members of the political assembly leaped from their seats, and danced the carmoghole, like frantick bacchanals, their partners dressed up in priest's [*sic*] vestments, and their musicians habited like satyrs.¹⁰⁰

Anophel felt able to push aside the remonstrances of Anthelia (reader of Rousseau and Condorcet) on the grounds that 'all reasonings to point out absurdity and injustice were manifestly jacobinical'.¹⁰¹

In *Melincourt*, however, written in a spirit of opposition to the ostensibly civilized aristocracy, satyriasis is evident in the rapacious figure of Anophel, not in Sir Oran, the pristine man. In several texts this purity of conduct characterizes the Romantic construction of the orang-utan as a noble savage and as an authentic relict, recalling the original Adamic man. When Uncle Jacob taunts his black manservant in *Flim-Flams!*, 'I can see no difference between thee and the ape!', Caesar defends himself: 'Not all your philosophers

call me an ape – I have heard from you that the FIRST MAN was a BLACK!’ (*Flim-Flams!*, II, p. 189) D’Israeli indexes this exchange: ‘ADAM, probably a negro and a monkey!’ (*Flim-Flams!*, III, p. 287) and further footnotes for amusement Camper’s suggestion that black people ‘originated from the commerce of the WHITES with OURANGS and PONGOS, or that these MONSTERS by *gradual improvement*, finally become MEN!’ (*Flim-Flams!*, II, p. 189). However, the writers of the Shelley circle, who were hostile to slavery, rejected such racism and undertook a more enquiring exploration of human origins.

As we have seen, for Sylvan Forester, a representative of those thinkers who took a deteriorationist view of human civilization, the orang-utan was ‘a specimen of the philosophical Adam’. Even if Monboddo was wrong and the orang-utan was not a human being, Peacock’s interest suggests that he felt that the species was worthy of significant attention and, potentially, could teach humans a great about their own culture and, furthermore, that it would be wise to treat the apes with reverence and a degree of humility or even awe.

The comedy of *Melincourt* coincided in its year of publication with the tragedy of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818).¹⁰² There are several points of comparison with Mary Shelley’s monster, who undergoes a Miltonic fall from grace. The initially innocent monster shares attributes with the noble savage until he is corrupted by experience. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have suggested that, despite his anatomical maleness, the monster as doppelgänger embodies an ‘otherness’ from patriarchal culture that is a metaphorical trope for women’s situation in society.¹⁰³ The novel also concerns itself with a theme of perfectibility and deterioration. In a particularly resonant phrase, the articulate monster taunts his maker on the frozen wastes, ‘I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel.’¹⁰⁴

However, unlike Shelley’s *fallen* monster, several Romantic writers continued to construct the orang-utan as a pre-lapsarian creature. The representation of the orang-utan as natural man is prominent in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s programme for a simpler lifestyle, important aspects of which were naturism and ‘natural diet’ (vegetarianism). Forester consistently compares the natural man with civilized man ‘muffled as he is in clothes, pent in houses, smoke-dried in cities’ (*Melincourt*, p. 129) and his diminished stature:

The mortality of a manufacturing town, compared with that of a mountain village, is more than three to one, which clearly shows the evil effects of the departure from natural life, and the coacervation of multitudes within the narrow precincts

of cities, where the breath of so many animals, and the exhalations from the dead, the dying, and corrupted things of all kinds, make the air little better than a slow poison.[...]
(*Melincourt*, p. 270)

John Frank Newton was a central figure in the circle of writers at Marlow and another great admirer of the orang-utan. Newton's *Return to Nature or A Defence of the Vegetable Regimen* (1811), was an important inspiration for Shelley's vegetarian diet and the immediate source for his essays. In the *Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813), Shelley identifies the anatomical similarities between humans and orang-utans in order to enforce his claim that humans were originally frugivorous.¹⁰⁵ For Newton too the orang-utan embodied many of the physical virtues that he believed one would naturally enjoy from practising a vegetarian diet: health, endurance and vitality. He is, writes Newton, 'an animal which lives on fruit and vegetables in so vigorous a state, that half a dozen men are required to hold him when he is taken'.¹⁰⁶ Sir Oran demonstrates such vigour, indeed almost supernatural strength, on an occasion on which he physically uproots a pine tree as easily as 'a mushroom' in order to assist Anthelia across a chasm (*Melincourt*, p. 80).

Newton, furthermore, (anticipating the great Huxley-Wilberforce débâcle of the 1860s), was willing to acknowledge human kinship with the creature:

Dr. Lambe's opponents are called upon to shew, either that classification in the natural sciences means nothing, or that the human teeth and intestines do not resemble those of the Orang Outang, so as to mark us as *the first link in the same chain of animals*. This is the grievous truth from which, though God himself be the author of it, man turns aside with shame or with scorn. What an habitual reluctance there is in the rogue to acknowledge his poor relations!¹⁰⁷

While avoiding proto-evolutionary heresy, Newton challenges bad faith in his denial of the absolute separation of humanity from other species. He prompts a comparison in which his sympathies lie with the orang-utan.

As I have demonstrated, the orang-utan may be regarded as emblematic of wider debates about luxury and simplicity, primitivism and civilization which are rehearsed in *Melincourt*. Lorna Sage points out that the chief characters are based upon Peacock (Mr Fax) and Shelley (Mr Forester).¹⁰⁸ Peacock and Shelley were in substantial agreement about such issues to the extent that any difference was of emphasis rather than principle. However, in making Sir Oran not only a meat-eater but also a rather epicurean ape with a marked fondness for Madeira, Peacock creates an opportunity to have a joke at the expense of his own teetotal friends, Newton and Shelley. The 'natural man' proves to be less primitivist

than Forester.

Another feature that has been used to support the claim that the orang-utan is in fact a 'natural man' rather than a separate species is the ability to use tools. The use of tools had been one of Monboddo's criteria for asserting the orang-utan's humanity. Sir Oran is so disturbed by his victory parade that when attempts are made to hoist him up on the shoulders of his supporters he seizes a walking stick and cudgels them as tormentors.¹⁰⁹ In Peacock's *Headlong Hall* (1815), Mr Cranium, the 'craniological orator', ponders the difficulties of classifying human kind:

Again, man has been defined to be *an animal that carries a stick*: an attribute which undoubtedly belongs to man only, but not to all men always; though it uniformly characterises some of the graver and more imposing varieties, such as physicians, oran-outangs, and lords in waiting.¹¹⁰

Trelawny's Adamic Man

Equally characteristic of the Romantic treatment of the great apes as 'noble savages' is Edward John Trelawny's description of an orang-utan that reputedly attacked him in Borneo, in *Adventures of a Younger Son* (1831). The uninhabited, pristine jungle wilderness which Trelawny and Zela (his Arabian lover) explore is not only fragrant with flowers and laden with tropical fruits, but also conceals a lethal snake.¹¹¹ The appearance of the cobra-di-capella, that gazes at Zela in particular, again makes this setting reminiscent of the prelapsarian Garden of Eden. Another inhabitant of the jungle is, at first sight, taken to be an old hermit. Trelawny's curiosity causes him to pursue the 'wild man' while Zela more cautiously urges forbearance. They observe him and find he is a tool-user who carries a club and uses a sharp stone to knock shellfish from rocks, ties up wood with wire-grass and even lives in a 'neat hut, built of canes wattled together' (*Adventures of a Younger Son*, p. 300). The hut 'might have been mistaken for the abode of a mangy mongrel Scottish philosopher', the latter presumably a derogatory allusion to Monboddo (*Adventures of a Younger Son*, p. 301). While it is true that orang-utans fashion large 'nests' for themselves these cannot accurately be described as 'huts'. Nevertheless, despite Trelawny's satirical intent, some ape behaviour in respect of tool use has profound ontological significance as rudimentary evidence of seminal culture. In Haraway's words:

Observing apes put sticks together or stack boxes to reach bananas was really watching the origin of adaptation of the environment to the needs of the self versus self-adaptation to environmental determinism.¹¹²

Trelawny is forced to kill the 'gaunt old man' in self-defence when he lunges at them

wielding a club. They lead Van Scolpvelt (the ship's surgeon and an amateur naturalist), to see the wild man's body. Scolpvelt's description of the orang-utan, remarkable for its republican virtue, is clearly influenced by the eighteenth-century discourse about the noble savage. He identified it as:

[...] an orang-outang; the first full-grown one I ever saw, and really very like the genus *homo*. But feel, – he has thirteen ribs. There is little other distinction between him and you: Buffon says they have no sentiment of religion, and what have you? they are as brave and fierce as you are; and are very ingenious which you are not. Besides they are a reflective and considerate set of beings; and have the best government in the world: they divide a country into districts; are never guilty of invasion; and never infringe on the rights of others. All this is because they have no meddling priests, kings or aristocrats. They are ruled by democratic chiefs, go about in bodies, build houses and live well.¹¹³

The political nature of the creature that is encountered in the woods situates it on the cusp of an existential transition from, to use Rousseau's ontological terms, the state of *amour de soi* to one of *amour-propre*. For primitivist admirers, the species possessed qualities of vitality and innocence that rendered it in some ways superior to the human. In an age when nature was conceptually aligned with virtue, the orang-utan amounted to a perfect foil against which human artifice was found wanting. They do not make war on their own kind and are powerful yet gentle; vegetarians unsurpassed in physical strength and vitality. Orang-utans represented family harmony and were revered for the mute sagacity of 'the old man of the woods', living simple and apparently contented existences without the clothes and material possessions that make humans slaves to the tyranny of work. And if it is true that they do not have the capacity of speech then they do not share the ubiquitous human capacity for intrigue, gossip, lies and deceit. The orang-utan killed in the passage has an extra rib, thirteen, a feature that distinguishes him from humans and that surely owes as much to Genesis, in which the first man's rib is taken by God to create Eve, as to anatomy.¹¹⁴

In keeping with the novel as a whole, the intent of the incident is to give yet another example of the narrator's desire to demonstrate his own manly courage in rescuing the beautiful Zela from the beastly orang-utan. The masculine triumph over the orang-utan is underscored by the fact that this is not only the most highly developed and most human animal in this environment, but also 'more dangerous, cunning, and cruel than any wild beast'. Haraway found that the hunters of the mountain gorilla prized the large male specimens above all others because its 'similarity to man [makes it] the ultimate quarry, a worthy opponent. The ideal quarry is the "other", the natural self'.¹¹⁵

I would now like to knot together the contradictory strands that the orang-utan

represents. There is a dialectical relationship between the material fact of the discovery of the great apes as an historical event by Europeans and the cultural assimilation of this fact into the corpus of Western knowledge according to the demands of the literary imagination.

The Ourang-Outang: Moral Ethics and the Discontinuous Mentality

The actual species of *Pongo pygmaeus* coexists with the 'ourang-outang' as a literary construct, a metaphorical trope incorporating a complex of ideas. This composite construct is fluid and is pieced together from many sources, in the way of Frankenstein's creation, as an embodiment of the qualities best suited to service the rhetorical priorities of its author. It is a chimerical creature half-beast, half-human, like the satyr to which Peacock explicitly compares it. Indeed the orang-utan possesses qualities in common with that other politically amorphous creature which stalks literary habitats as diverse as the writings of Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine and the Shelleys: the monster.¹¹⁶ In Rosi Braidotti's phrase, the monster is a 'nomadic subject' that links together several categories of being characterized as 'other' and marginalized as such.¹¹⁷ The orang-utan is a 'nomadic subject' which shares this countericonic quality. It appears in Romantic texts contemporaneous with the socially divisive political tensions brought about by the confrontation between the *ancien regime* and emergent liberal democracy, industrialization and colonial expansion. Also increased scrutiny of human sexual identity, interrogated with particular attention and suspicion as the site of the natural/cultural boundary and the merging of human selves, caused the notion of relations and consanguinity with apes to be entertained with fascinated horror.

It is well-documented that social continuity and change shape, and are shaped by, perceptions of the natural world, for example by the metaphorical traffic across the human/non-human divide in Thomas and Ritvo's accounts of a changing sensibility dating from the late eighteenth century. However, the projection of moral debates about human society onto the physical bodies of the great apes, whether as unrestrained monsters or vigorous natural beings, is particularly significant because their precarious coexistence with humans on the threshold of nature and culture marks them out for special attention, both during the Romantic period and today.

So fluid is the literary construct of the orang-utan, it has, like 'nature' itself, been placed at the service of contradictory and antagonistic ideas that are apparent in the identification of the species with the noble savage. This treatment goes beyond the conventional anthropomorphism of non-human animals to Monboddo's assertion that the

species is actually human. These divergent qualities are implicit in the phrase ‘noble savage’ itself; an oxymoron given that the concepts of nobility and savagery are near opposites in European thought. While today the expression is, legitimately, dismissed as an instance of idealizing colonial condescension, the original force of the term consisted in its capacity to undermine the supremacist convention that non-European, pre-industrial societies were inferior, more chaotic, morally depraved and aggressive than those of European origin. After all, nobility suggests grace and integrity of character, virtue, honour and orderly existence. This linguistic tension in part explains the contradictory versions of the orang-utan in Romantic novels and travel writings. In these texts are encountered apes that are virtuous and lascivious, wild and mannered, disruptive and amiable, aggressive and pacific, even natural and unnatural. Debates about virtue and lasciviousness, and wildness and domesticity, equally provide the contextual framework for debates about the situation of categories of people who were politically disenfranchised and economically marginalized at this time, most numerous of whom were, of course, women, people of non-European origin and the working classes. In an essay entitled ‘Sur les femmes’ (1772), Diderot assured his readers, presumed to be male, that while women are ‘more civilised than us on the outside, they have remained true savages within’.¹¹⁸ Given that both women and people of colour were assumed to be innately closer to nature, it was to be expected that black women would be alleged to be most likely to have sexual relations, by coercion or even consent, with apes. Such conventions and alleged affinities make the human-ape comparison a dangerous one, underpinned as it has been by profoundly chauvinist assumptions about those who were supposedly closest to nature, in the pejorative sense of extracultural and irrational.¹¹⁹ The traditional use of the comparison as a form of verbal abuse therefore renders it a deeply problematic one. Human history provides many examples, (most notoriously the animal imagery underpinning the fatal taxonomy of Nazi categories of ‘subhumans’), of the use of animal comparison as a form of abuse and invective that has been used to demarcate tribal insiders and outsiders, to include and exclude.¹²⁰ Frantz Fanon knew well that the habit was fundamental to the colonial mentalité, noting with bitter humour in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), that the native ‘laughs to himself every time he spots an allusion to the animal world in the other’s words’.¹²¹ To be semantically designated as bestial and less than human is to be placed on dangerous ground.

However, the great ape/human identity can be more liberating in its ethical implications for both humans and apes. This is suggested by the significant correlation between campaigns for the advancement of the economic and political situation of women in society, the abolition of the slave trade and the appearance of organized movements for the improved treatment of non-human species.

So, contradictory attitudes towards the anthropoid apes, underpinned by eighteenth-century debates about nature and civilization, reflect two contesting narratives about improvement in society. The prevailing view stressed that human progress was achieved by dominating the forces of nature. 'Nature' has two senses here, first the natural environment and second human nature: in particular the instinctual and innate aspects of the human psyche. Progress was to be measured by the extent to which the natural world could be cultivated and made to suit human needs, for example by deforestation, the captivity and domestication of other species and land improvement through drainage and enclosure. Improvement was synonymous with regulation, control and the exploitation of wild nature for human benefit. According to this approach, aspects of human nature reminiscent of the pre-civilized state were to be policed and tamed, together with those stigmatized human groupings deemed less rational and hence closer to 'animal' nature.

Against such a position, 'Romantic' views regarded nature as complementary rather than antagonistic to civilization. These anticipate more oppositional attitudes towards social progress which hold that human needs are best met as a part of a wider biotic community when they are able to flourish without damaging nature's sustainability and diversity. Such an approach, doubting the efficacy of dominating nature, emerged in the eighteenth century, developed during the nineteenth century, and would now be considered as an environmentalist discourse. Such opposed outlooks do not exist in a pure form but represent, rather, different subjective positions on a broad continuum. Indeed, concise synopses of vast cultural perspectives that gloss over and erase the nuances and complexities of actual philosophical positions risk crude caricature.¹²² Nevertheless, these contested versions of improvement have consequences for human identity in multiple contexts: for individual conduct, for social and political relations in the wider human community and for approaches to the natural environment and the treatment of other species.

Such contentions are clearly pertinent to the central question of this thesis: whether the proposal that the 'love of nature' leads to the 'love of man' has validity. Wordsworth's phrase suggests a causal and dynamic continuity between the ideas of respect for human and non-human nature. To believe in this particular kind of improvement is to refuse the absolute binary antagonism between nature and culture. This distinction might be productively addressed by reference to what Richard Dawkins characterized as the 'discontinuous mind'. Dawkins is critical of morality based upon the fiction of absolute species' boundaries, given that all great apes, including humans are 'linked to one another by an unbroken chain of parent-child bonds' (as indeed, ultimately, are all species)

according to evolutionary biology.¹²³ A world-view that divides the external world into discontinuous categories is characterized in biological terms by the creationist notion of the fixity of species, which denies that the anatomical similarity of humans and apes implies any evolutionary continuity. Such a paradigm fitted perfectly the social institutions of the *ancien regime* with its philosophical foundations in notions of inherited hierarchy and the Divine Right of Kings. This 'discontinuous mind' is, for Dawkins, both bad science and the root of 'much evil' in social and moral terms, being not only a pretext for speciesism but a rationale for the racist mentality that underpinned apartheid.

Philosophical and literary texts that began to propose the truth of the human-ape affinity, anticipated Darwin's intuition that 'we may be all netted together'.¹²⁴ This notwithstanding, the discontinuous mentality was not to be so readily dispelled. The Darwinian hypothesis affirms the continuity of species and refuses genetic essentialism. Furthermore, in anthropological terms, Darwin was a monogenist who rejected polygenist categories. Nevertheless, even the environmentalist accounts of human identity held by Darwin, and previous thinkers such as Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, retained demarcated categories of racial distinction and gradation.¹²⁵ The discontinuous mentality is now, however, being challenged by a combination of environmentalist and animal liberationist critiques of speciesism and postmodernist suspicion of biological essentialism. In a critique in *Ever Since Darwin* (1978), Stephen Jay Gould finds the idea of 'race' wholly unsatisfactory as a viable analytical tool for assessing the multiple nuances of ethnic diversity.¹²⁶ In a living world composed of dynamic boundaries, the analogous difficulties that confront taxonomists attempting to identify discrete species (although species' difference has a more authentic empirical grounding), have also, ultimately, proved to be insurmountable. James Rachels has explored the far-reaching ethical consequences of natural selection for the relationship between humans and other species.¹²⁷ Nowhere is this challenge to the discontinuous mind more significant than in the treatment of the great apes. Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer's *Great Ape Project* (1993) suggests that, ultimately, moral consistency demands that protection and respect be granted to the apes in order to ensure that there is an unequivocal grounding for the ethical treatment of all humans.

Given that the paradigms for understanding and classifying animals and attitudes towards humans are inextricably and interchangeably linked, the point at which ethology appears to meet anthropology, for example in some versions of social Darwinism, has all too readily weighed against the interests of oppressed human categories. Habits of thinking in atomistic, discrete categories, characteristic of the discontinuous mind, have justified the subjection of other species on the grounds of an alleged absolute difference. Such radical

Manicheism that assumes *absolute* discontinuity with other species is also a way of looking at life that makes racism possible, with its propensity for absolute distinctions in human categories, and sexism, which asserts an absolute division of labour on the basis of biological difference.¹²⁸ We make more likely difference of treatment and inequality by designating entirely discrete identities and absolute distinctions: as Regan suggests, one kind of chauvinism can easily provide a model for others.¹²⁹

In D'Israeli's *Flim-Flams!* the consistent abhorrence of the 'mixing of kinds' is clearly indicative of the taboos that anti-Jacobin novels could impose upon behaviour that was regarded as subversive of fixed categories of order. D'Israeli satirizes interracial relationships, women's participation in science and notions of an evolutionary kinship of humans and apes as transgressive instances of the type of consorting between opposites that subverts the moral and cosmic order. D'Israeli's initial sympathy for the changes in France¹³⁰ was quickly dispelled by the bloodshed that the Revolution occasioned and he became a conservative upholder of the certainties of the older order, anxious to support fixed categories in biology as in social institutions. In upholding this species' barrier, D'Israeli is emblematic of the discontinuous mind at work in the Romantic period.

By contrast, in the radical circle of Peacock and the Shelleys the possibilities of social change are looked upon more favourably and there is agitation for the liberation of both black slaves and women. Furthermore, their writings draw upon Rousseau and Monboddo, in representing other species as worthy of respect and as possible sources of wisdom. The notion of interspecies connection and communication is explored in a playful way in *Melincourt* through the celebration of the orang-utan. Percy Bysshe Shelley's vegetarian treatises upon natural diet, which allude to the vigour of the orang-utan, influenced later nineteenth-century writers including the Brownings, Thomas Hardy and Bernard Shaw who were advocates of animal welfare measures.¹³¹ The latter are among a significant number of nineteenth-century writers who, in the context of the evolutionary debate, found that it is difficult to articulate differences between humans and non-humans that convincingly establish philosophically coherent grounds for a morally distinct category for humans. Such biological categories are supported by reference to discontinuous and absolute divisions that are discredited by the moral implications of Darwinism itself.

Historically, non-humans have often been excluded from ethical treatment on the grounds that they do not fulfil Cartesian definitions of rationality. To uphold these and other traditional pretexts for absolute breaks is to set an extremely dangerous precedent for those humans that are also held to be without these qualities – the mentally defective, those

deemed inherently irrational or subhuman according to dominant ideologies – those designated ‘lower class’, Jews, native Americans, Irish people, black slaves, gypsies, even women.

Bentham’s condemnation of those who inflict unnecessary suffering upon animals is frequently quoted. What is sometimes overlooked is the context in which he explicitly links the case for the better treatment of animals with support for the liberation of black slaves in an extension of the moral community. Both forms of liberation, it is suggested, are moral improvements that have a beneficial and spiritually edifying effect on those that carry out such reforms. The campaigns of Richard Martin (‘Humanity Dick’), the charismatic M.P. for Galway, provide one example of the correlation between the two. Chief architect of the first animal protection on the statute, the 1822 Martin Act, Humanity Dick was also committed to the abolition of slavery. His unsuccessful attempt to add an amendment to this act, which protected cattle, explicitly aimed to extend its provisions to include ‘dogs, cats, monkeys and other animals’.¹³²

The case for the ethical treatment of animals rests upon a finely nuanced theoretical position. It holds that humans are simultaneously like other animals (mature vertebrates) and unlike them. First, that animals share with humans a requirement to satisfy physiological needs, their sentience, their capacity to suffer and an innate impulse to realize their potential. In Paul Taylor’s phrase, an individual organism is a ‘teleological center of life’.¹³³ They are integral co-dependents in same ecosystem and indeed, again like humans, cease to exist or have an identity outside the context of an ecosystem. Second, that humans are sufficiently different from other animals to have a unique ethical responsibility, a *noblesse oblige*. The Marxist commentator Ted Benton argues for a non-dualist ‘naturalism’, acknowledging that humans are continuous with other animals but not identical with them in a reductionist way and must therefore accept the responsibilities our unique ‘species being’ entails.¹³⁴ The evolution of human consciousness has given humanity a power of intervention over the living world that would make it suicidal to act upon immediate biological impulses like other species. Humanity has evolved a cultural and moral framework that is, so far as is known, developed far beyond the capabilities of other species. Because human minds can abstract information in the form of symbolic language we can alter and develop our behaviour at the species level and we become historically contingent in a rapid and immediate way that causes us to be completely different from any other species in our ability to intervene and consciously modify the global environment.¹³⁵ All mature human beings without mental impairment share this ability, regardless of class, gender or ethnicity, in distinction to non-human species. This unrivalled capacity to modify

the environment compels *Homo sapiens* to assume unique responsibility for its own behaviour.

This authentic species difference is significant because it confers a separate role for humans within the biotic community of the planetary ecosystem. A philosophical difference is underpinned by the genetic incompatibility that makes interbreeding between humans and the great apes impossible, despite the xenophobic fears of earlier racial theorists. While the human situation might be anomalous in resting upon a narrow categorical position between nature and culture, nevertheless this is precisely where we are situated. By consciously acting upon this ecological responsibility we give meaning and focus to our own self-realization as humans. Eastern belief systems such as Hinayana Buddhism and Jainism, which involve the practice of *ahimsa* (universal non-violence), harmonize human spiritual growth with continuous awareness and mindfulness in dealing with other species. From the eighteenth century onwards these beliefs influenced Western philosophy, given the increasing preoccupation with the Orient. Shelley was influenced by both Eastern and Classical traditions when he expounded his intuition that attention to diet and the well-being of 'beasts' encourages both mental alertness and social feeling, thus linking the progressive development of virtue, happiness and concord with animal welfare in 'On the Vegetable System of Diet' (circa 1814-18).¹³⁶

Tailpiece: An Insuperable Line?

The Romantic literary treatment of the orang-utan provides a concrete illustration of the way that paradigms of understanding and classifying animals and attitudes towards humans are inextricably and interchangeably linked. The discontinuous mentality, exemplified by the Great Chain of Being that rationalizes the subjection of other species by asserting an absolute difference from humans, is also a way of seeing that makes racism possible, by assuming absolute distinctions in human categories, and sexism which supports an exaggerated division of labour on the basis of absolute biological difference. The interspecies connection that is explored in a playful way in *Melincourt* and countenanced with horror in *Flim-Flams!* challenges such a world-view. I shall close with the anti-slavery language of Bentham that explicitly challenges the idea of an 'insuperable line', suggesting rather that the designation of entirely discrete identities and absolute distinction make difference of treatment and inequality possible. The greatest good, therefore should not apply only to human beings:

The day *may* come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights

which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate? What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog, is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversible animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *Suffer*?¹³⁷

Environmentalists and theorists of animal liberation have defended themselves from charges of indifference to human concerns on the grounds that such causes constitute a farther logical moral trajectory that reinforces other forms of liberation. They are defended, not as a deviation from concerns with human welfare and liberation (from deprivation due to prejudices about gender and ethnicity), but as the ultimate guarantor of the claims of other liberations.¹³⁸

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One* [1883-5], trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1969), pp. 41-42.

² Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 42.

³ T. H. Huxley noted that the existence of 'man-like apes' was first acknowledged only at the close of the sixteenth century in accounts of the explorers, Eduardo Lopez and Andrew Batell (*Man's Place in Nature*, pp. 10-11). Edward Tyson's account of his dissection of a young infant chimpanzee, which died in captivity in 1698, was accepted, in an empirical age, as the defining moment in which the fabled great apes' existence was eventually verified. See Reynolds, *The Apes*, pp. 46-49. Huxley confirmed that Tyson's 'Pygmie' was in fact a chimpanzee. Tyson's granddaughter contributed the ape's skeleton as a part of her wedding dowry. Huxley was able to carry out an examination of the original skeleton through the offices of a friend after it was donated to the Cheltenham Museum. Schiebinger observes that Tyson also had access to a female chimpanzee but chose only to dissect the male, *Nature's Body*, p. 88.

⁴ See Huxley, *Man's Place in Nature*, pp. 59-60. Another contender credited with finding the gorilla is Paul Du Chaillu, who later wrote of his discovery in *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa* (1861). See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, pp. 208-9.

⁵ The discovery of the skull of so-called 'Tourmaï' man in Chad, in July 2002 – apparently a non-human African primate with distinctly human qualities – has now added fresh impetus to the debate about human origins. This 7 million-year-old fossil appears to confirm the ape origins of humanity, while at the same time complicating the evolutionary sequence. It provides not so much a 'missing link' as an evidential basis for a linear progression from apes to humans but rather supplies data that supports palaeoanthropologists who propose a bush-like pattern of development in which *Homo sapiens* appears as merely the most durable branch among other, now extinct, hominids.

⁶ 'Specimens' of great apes were almost exclusively supplied by the East India Company. See Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, Chapter 3, 'Gendered Apes', *passim*. It is known that the importation of orang-utans was underway by the 1770s. See Wokler, 'Tyson and Buffon on the Orang-Utan', p. 2312.

⁷ Designations borrowed from peoples indigenous to the apes' own habitats, confer near-human identity upon these species; the chimpanzee meaning the 'mockman' (see Reynolds, *The Apes*, p. 51) and orang-utan meaning the 'man of the woods'.

⁸ In 1859, Darwin had been careful to omit explicit reference to the implications of natural selection for human development in the *Origin of Species*.

⁹ While the Dutch anatomist, Pieter Camper (1722-89) clarified and resolved the confusion between the African chimpanzee and the Asiatic orang-utan in the late eighteenth century, the term 'ourang-outang' continued to be used, somewhat confusingly, in the early nineteenth-century lexicon, as a generic term that referred to all apes. The origins of the words 'ape' and 'monkey' are both obscure. 'Ape' was formerly used to describe any simian, and only later became linguistically specialized, its meaning restricted to simians without tails. It is probable that the origins of the noun are associated with mimicry of the human in the sense that it survives in the verb 'to ape'. See Stephen Potter and Laurens Sargent, *Pedigree: Words from Nature* (London: Collins, 1973), p. 293.

¹⁰ Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, p. 39.

¹¹ Isaac D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams! Or the Life and Errors of My Uncle and His Friends* [1805], 2nd edn (London: John Murray, 1806), III, p. 24. All quotations are from the second edition. D'Israeli is alluding here to the Swiss philosophical writer and physician, Johann Georg Zimmerman (1728-1795).

¹² Christopher Frayling and Robert Wokler, 'From the Orang-Utan to the Vampire: Towards an Anthropology of Rousseau' in *Rousseau After Two Hundred Years: Proceedings of the Cambridge Bicentennial Colloquium*, ed. by R. A. Leigh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 110.

¹³ Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, p. 52.

¹⁴ It should also be remembered that Rousseau's fellow *Encyclopedist*, Denis Diderot, was one of the first philosophers to contemplate more directly the possibility of organic evolution:

A– How does he explain the existence of certain animals on islands separated from every continent by a vast expanse of sea? Who could have transported wolves, foxes, dogs, deer and snakes there?

B– He explains nothing; he only confirms the fact.

A– And what about you? How do you explain it?

B– Who knows the early history of our earth? How many great tracts of land, now isolated, were

once joined? The only clue on which we might base some conjecture is the shape of the bodies of water which divide them.

C—How so?

A— I mean from extrapolating from the missing pieces. One day we'll fool about with that problem, if it suits us. For the moment, do you see this speck, called Lancer's Island? In considering its position on the globe, wouldn't anyone ask how it was that men came to be there? What form of communication once linked them to the rest of their species? What will become of them if they go on multiplying in a space no more than a league in diameter?

Diderot, *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, from *Political Writings*, ed. and trans. by Mason and Wokler, pp. 37-38.

¹⁵ Rousseau posits a fundamental distinction between two developmental stages in human nature. *Amour de soi* refers to an early period in which humans existed in an essentially pre-social state, motivated by the most basic instinct for self-preservation, the drive to secure shelter and to satisfy rudimentary appetites for food and sex. In this primary state behaviour is not mediated through others and is amoral, not existing in a socially derived moral framework. However, such beings, living in a state of nature, have an innate capacity for *pitié* (compassion) – an empathy for the suffering of other beings for whom the subject can recognize something of his or her own self. By contrast, *amour-propre* refers to a social self that is relational to others. This state may be identified as one of self-consciousness, in which behaviour takes place in the context of comparison with others and, as an egotistical concept of self, can lead to conflicts of interests with them. See *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, p. 73.

¹⁶ Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 55.

¹⁷ During the 1940s Robert Yerkes felt this to be an important factor in accounting for the significance of primatology, observing that the 'study of the other primates may prove the most direct and most economical route to profitable knowledge of ourselves, because in them, basic mechanisms are less obscured by cultural influences'. Robert M. Yerkes, *Chimpanzees: A Laboratory Colony* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1943), p. 3. Cited in Haraway, *Primate Visions*, p. 62.

¹⁸ 30.8.1755. Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Neuchâtel, MS R296, ff. 155-6 (CC, III, 317). Cited in Maurice Cranston, *The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1754-1762* (London: Allen Lane, 1991), p. 9.

¹⁹ *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. by R. A. Leigh, 52 vols (Geneva: Oxford, 1965-1998), XII, appendice 286, p. 306). Cited in Frayling and Wokler, 'From the orang-utan to the vampire', p. 113.

²⁰ James Burnet, [Lord Monboddo] *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* [1773-92], 6 vols (Menston, Yorkshire: Scholar Press, 1967), I, p. 176.

²¹ See Jared Diamond, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee* (London: Radius, 1991), pp. 17-19. Edward O. Wilson cites a figure of 99% (*Biophilia*, p. 130).

²² Human status and dignity was upheld in a category that was exclusive of the great apes, in which thought and soul were entirely absent. Buffon originally contended that all animals were divinely created according to a basic archetypal plan, though such types might, over generations, exhibit a degree of diversity according to the actions of climate and environment. During the course of the collation and the composition of the *Histoire Naturelle*, however, he significantly modified his position. In later life he edged towards transformism, while never entirely abandoning his belief in an underlying fixity of species existing in a continuous network. For a full discussion of Buffon's attitudes to the Great Chain of Being, see Jeff Loveland, 'Rhetoric and Natural History: Buffon in Polemical and Literary Context', pp. 77-99 in *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (2001: 03).

²³ Sigmund Freud later suggested that a country's level of civilization is often measured by its success in controlling and domesticating other species and the forces of the physical world. See *Civilization and its Discontents* [1930], rev. and newly ed. by James Strachey, trans. by Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 29.

²⁴ Wakefield, *Instinct Displayed*, p. 229.

²⁵ Dismissal of women by the misogynist, Robert Lovelace (Letter XXI, Lovelace to Belford), in Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa. Or, The History of a Young Lady: Comprehending the most Important Concerns of Private Life. And particularly shewing, The Distresses that may attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, In Relation to Marriage*, 7 vols (London: A. Millar, Ja. Rivington, and John Osborn, 1748), V, p. 189.

²⁶ Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*

(London: Verso, 1992).

²⁷ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association, 1991), p.2. Elizabeth Cobb, one of the members of the 'Men and Women's Club' researched by Lucy Bland, complained that in practice women not men were always the objects of study, objecting in a letter to Karl Pearson of 6 July 1885 that it was 'as if *man* were the only human being and women only another species of monkey'. See Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality: 1885-1914* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 40.

²⁸ Haraway, *Primate Visions*, p. 154.

²⁹ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, p. 89.

³⁰ Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 9.

³¹ Fanny Burney, *Evelina or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* [1778], ed. by Margaret Anne Doody (London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 443-46. Mortified by the public insult of this inverse singerie, Mr Lovel strikes the monkey with his cane, which immediately responds by sinking his teeth into his ear.

³² Sarah Scott, *The History of Sir George Ellison*, 2 vols (London: A. Millar, 1766), I, pp. 106-7.

³³ Wollstonecraft, *Mary and Wrongs of Woman*, p. 168.

³⁴ Letter to Tom Keats, 9 July 1818. *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. by Gittings, p. 120.

³⁵ See Reynolds, *The Apes*, pp. 34-35. Medieval Christian theologians had redefined simians from amiable and entertaining mischief-makers to more sinister scapegoats for original sin. The delightfully lewd became reconstructed as the wickedly lascivious. At the height of his jealous delirium, Shakespeare's *Othello* cries 'goats and monkeys' as an expression of anguish provoked by Desdemona's supposed sexual infidelity (*Othello*, IV.i.1.259).

³⁶ Darwin, *Loves of the Plants*, Canto III, Line 75, p. 94.

³⁷ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* [1774], 3 vols (London: Frank Cass, 1970), Book III, Chapter I, p. 364. The blurring of the periphery is also evident in Thomas Jefferson's assertion that apes raped black women, mentioned by Desmond Morris. See the introduction (pp. 9-12) to *A Complete Guide to Monkeys, Apes and Other Primates*, by Michael Kavanagh (London: Cape, 1983). Morris adds: 'There was a time, of course, when monkeys were looked upon as dirty, filthy, and obscene, and apes as either funny little clowns or great, hairy, raping monsters. [...] As late as the Reformation, Martin Luther, used the terms "ape" and "devil" interchangeably', p. 12.

³⁸ Thomas Pennant, *History of Quadrupeds*, 2 vols (London: B. White, 1781), I, p. 164-65.

³⁹ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, p. 87.

⁴⁰ Thomas Love Peacock, *Melincourt, or Sir Oran Haut-Ton* [1818], (London: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 143-44.

⁴¹ Peacock quotes from Monboddó's *Origin and Progress of Language*, Book II, Chap.4.

⁴² This pre-Darwinian tradition was continued after 1859 in the form of novels such as Élie Berthet, *The Wild Man of the Woods: A Story of The Island of Sumatra* (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1868), Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914), John Collier, *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimpanzee* (1930), Aldous Huxley, *After Many a Summer* (1939), The tradition is kept alive by Will Self, *Great Apes* (London: Penguin, 1997), set in a chimpanzee cityscape in which the lead character, Simon Dykes, suffers a delusional breakdown in which he images he is a human, consequently becoming catastrophically, yet comically estranged from the prevailing (ape) culture.

⁴³ Isaac D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams! Or the Life and Errors of My Uncle and His Friends*, 2nd edn (London: John Murray, 1806).

⁴⁴ James Ogden, *Isaac D'Israeli* (London: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 1.

⁴⁵ See Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, pp. 144-45.

⁴⁶ See illustration in D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, I, p. 45.

⁴⁷ Lewis P. Curtis Jr explored the use of racial iconography by political cartoonists during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* [1971], rev. edn (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997). A distinctly simian morphology was used to characterize Irish people as 'white negroes' (p. 1). This was Gustave de Molinari's description (in the *Journal des Débats*, 1880) of the way that the English portrayed the Irish as a disorderly and dangerous 'race'. Curtis's own measurements of Victorian depictions of facial profiles indicate that nineteenth-century artists continued to make use of facial angles based upon Camper's craniometry in order to epitomize character. Nevertheless, Wallace's appendix to *The Malay Archipelago* indicates that scientific faith in the study had considerably diminished by 1877:

A few years ago it was thought that the study of *Crania* offered the only sure basis of a

classification of man. Immense collections have been formed; they have been measured, described, and figured; and now the opinion is beginning to gain ground, that for this special purpose they are of very little value. Professor Huxley has boldly stated his view to this effect; and in a proposed new classification of mankind has given scarcely any weight to characters derived from the cranium. It is certain, too, that though Cranioscopy has been assiduously studied for many years, it has produced no results at all comparable with the labour and research bestowed upon it. No approach to a theory of the excessive variations of the cranium has been put forth, and no intelligible classification of the races has been founded upon it.

Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan and the Bird of Paradise: A Narrative of Travel, With Studies of Man and Nature* [1869], 6th edn (London: Macmillan, 1877), p. 599.

⁴⁸ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* [1981], (London: Penguin, 1992). Not only were such groups held to be closer to 'nature', but were also associated with infantilism and believed to be less than fully mature human beings; during the nineteenth century, therefore, they were directly comparable to the apes which were not fully evolved. See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁹ Uncle Jacob's head is described as like that of a snipe, a bird with a very low facial angle, ironically throwing into question his judgement, intelligence and human status. D'Israeli was, presumably, inspired by the craniometrical engravings of a racial and animal chain of being that open Charles White's *Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables* (London: C. Dilly, 1799). White's book places this particular bird, the snipe, at the end of the list of many human types and other animals, including the 'orang outang' and the 'man of the woods'.

⁵⁰ See Ogden, *Isaac D'Israeli*, Chapter One.

⁵¹ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, I, p.195. Van Scolpvelt shares Gobbo's appetite for cauterizing the eyes of live bats in Edward John Trelawny, *Adventures of a Younger Son* [1831], (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 215-17. Both writers were no doubt alluding to the notorious experiments of this nature conducted by the Italian scientist, Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729-99).

⁵² Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 9.

⁵³ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, I, pp. 198-99. 'Mon. de Sales' was Jean de Sales, author of *De la Philosophie de la nature, ou trait de morale pour le genre humain* (1789). D'Israeli was also familiar with Taylor's *Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (according to Louise Shutz Boas's introduction to the facsimile reprint, p. xiii). Taylor, writing in 1792, was amused by accounts, attributed to Plutarch, of relations between women and elephants and dragons, speculating that 'if elephants were to associate with ladies in common (each at the same time understanding the other's language) great and unexampled gallantries would take place on each side, and a mixt kind of species would be produced, in which the enchanting elegance of women would be united with the prodigious strength and terrific bulk of the elephant'. He concluded that 'prodigious benefits must arise from the mutual converse and copulation of species, which have hitherto been considered as unallied and inimical to each other'. Thomas Taylor, *Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (1792), a facsimile reproduction with an introduction by Louise Shutz Boas (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966), pp. 77-80.

⁵⁴ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, III, p. 31 and p. 5.

⁵⁵ A footnote labels Darwin's ideas as 'exquisite madness'. *Flim-Flams!*, III, 17 n.

⁵⁶ Buffon writes: 'The ancients knew only one [ape]. The *pithecos* of the Greeks, and the *simia* of the Latins [...] if this ape had been still more similar to man, the ancients would have been justified for regarding it only as an *homunculus*, an imperfect dwarf, a pigmy, capable of combating with cranes; while man knew how to tame the elephant and conquer the lion'. Count de Buffon, *Natural History: General and Particular*, trans. by William Smellie, 9 vols (London: W. Strachan and T. Cadell, 1785), VIII, pp. 39-40. The *homunculus* is also described by D'Israeli as a 'hodmandod' (*Flim-Flams!* III, p. 6), again suggesting his extremely anomalous condition. This now almost wholly obsolete word is one that has both animal and racial undertones. It is defined in the OED as: a snail; a deformed person; an early corruption of Hottentot; any strange creature; a scarecrow; short and clumsy.

⁵⁷ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, I, Chapter XLII, *passim*. D'Israeli had also introduced the character of the Sublime Pedestrian, (possibly based upon 'Walking' John Stuart, author of *Apocalypse of Nature*), who cursed the chair as the foundation of human degeneration, in II, p. 242, which he footnoted with reference to Monboddod: 'Lord Monboddod practised the moral motion on all fours to bring him back to the pristine state of nature. But his Lordship was querulous that he had not a tail hanging between his legs.'

⁵⁸ Steve Baker records the designation of the 'classification-threatening interstitial animal' as *l'impropre* in *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 135.

⁵⁹ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, III, pp. 8-9. 'Unsexed' is an allusion to Lady Macbeth's utterance, 'Unsex me here', (William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I.v.41).

⁶⁰ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, III, p.10. He is particularly likened to Godwin's Fleetwood. Godwin (as Caconous), the radical author of the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), was a favourite target for D'Israeli's satire.

⁶¹ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, III, 32-33 n. Yekaterina Dashkova (1743-1810) gave political support to the 'Enlightened Despot' Catherine II the Great of Russia during the *coup d'état* that brought her to power. She was appointed to the Petersburg Academy of Arts and Science in 1782 and became first President of the Russian Academy during the following year.

⁶² He writes 'I do not approve of *ladies* as presidents of Royal Societies; their meetings will be consumed in awkward gallantries.' (*Flim-Flams!*, III, p. 33).

⁶³ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, III, pp. 32-33.

⁶⁴ Adrienne Rich celebrates Caroline Herschel as a successful comet-sweeper in a poem entitled 'Planetarium' (1968). She is ironically described as:

A woman in the shape of a monster
a monster in the shape of a woman

reflecting common attitudes towards women scientists. See *Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Women's Poetry*, ed. by Fleur Adcock (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp. 219-20. Mr. Stelling, when questioned by Maggie Tulliver, speculated that astronomers hated women 'because [...] they live up in high towers, and if the women came there, they might talk and hinder them from looking at the stars', Eliot, *Mill on the Floss*, p. 220.

⁶⁵ Caroline Herschel's brother William famously discovered Uranus in 1781. As an amateur astronomer herself, Caroline was also associated with exploring the 'heavens' (Aunt Urania's name is possibly a play on *Ouranos*, the Greek for heaven), and discovered comets in her own right.

⁶⁶ There was a long established tradition of associations between women, apes or monkeys and sexuality. Leigh Hunt described Marylebone, where 'ladies would be amusing themselves with coquetting with monkeys', in 'A Ramble in Mary-Le-Bone' [1833], *The Townsman*, nos. II, III, IV, *Leigh Hunt's Political and Occasional Essays*, ed. by Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 295. Originally cited in Kean, *Animal Rights*, p. 43. The association is more powerfully made in the bawdy early-modern play, *Ram-Alley* by Barry in which a 'city dame' goes with her friends to watch some baboons do tricks. Next morning she takes off her clothes in bed and attempts to imitate, or ape, the baboons' tricks but unfortunately gets her legs stuck behind her head and 'truss'd up like a football', with 'her face where her rump should stand', she has to be untangled by her maid, husband and neighbours who are torn between laughter and fearing that she might have become possessed by the devil. Barry, *Ram-Alley*, 1.1, in Dodsley, ed. *Old English Plays*, Vol 10, p. 280. As I have suggested previously, women were regarded as being closer to nature (and therefore unrestrained sexuality), and, like apes, as boundary creatures. James Knowles (University of Newcastle) drew attention to Barry's play and to the puns that existed in drama of this period around the theme of 'merrytrix' (prostitutes) who were engaged in 'performing' (sexual) tricks. ('Why you monkeys, what caterwauling do you keep?': Of monkeys, men (and others) in early modern theatre. Lecture given 3 July 1999 at the 6th Annual Humanities Conference, *Animals in History and Culture*, Bath Spa University College).

⁶⁷ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, III, pp. 155-56.

⁶⁸ The reviewer in the *Anti-Jacobin* objected to the

[...] want of distinction in the author's censure, [...] involving names of just and deserved celebrity in the same ridicule with those of foolish and imprudent pretenders to science, whose only merit lies in imprudent assertion and extravagant paradox: besides the immorality of this, it frustrates the whole intent of the work, and converts satire into the highest strain of panegyric; for what can be higher praise to such ephemeral dreamers than to see themselves named with such persons as Dr. Herschell [*sic*] and his sister, and Sir Joseph Banks'.

(*Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, XX, April 1805, pp. 375-76.)

⁶⁹ Both Buffon and Blumenbach, scientists whose ideas were in accord with D'Israeli's own, held such beliefs. See Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, pp. 134-35.

⁷⁰ Erasmus Darwin sets out his 'imaginationist' belief in the determining influence of the male imagination on the sex of the human embryo in *Zoonomia, or The Laws of Organic Life*, 2 vols (Dublin: P. Bryne and W. Jones, 1794), I, pp. 571-75.

⁷¹ Quoted from Dr John Maubray, *The Female Physician* (London: 1724), p. 62 by Paul-Gabriel Boucé, 'Imagination, Pregnant Women, and Monsters in Eighteenth-Century England and France', in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. by G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 93.

⁷² See Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 12.

⁷³ 'Mr. Bobtail' [Isaac D'Israeli], *An Apology for Flim-Flams!* (London: John Murray, 1806), p. 14.

⁷⁴ Ogden, *Isaac D'Israeli*, p. 65.

⁷⁵ Caroline Herschel politely declined honorary membership of the Royal Astronomical Society on account of her age and unsuitability in 1835. In a private letter to her niece, Lady Herschel, her irritation was more palpable – 'God knows what for' she disclaimed in reference to the offer – declaring herself 'somewhat disturbed' by unwelcome visits of congratulation in her later years. See Mrs. John [Mary Cornwallis] Herschel, *Memoir and Correspondence of Caroline Herschel* [1876], 2nd edn (London: John Murray, 1879), pp. 271 and 276. The aforementioned Princess Daschkoff, one-time president of the Petersburg Academy of Science, the same Princess Dashkoff [*sic*] for whom Uncle Jacob's homunculus had an erotic appeal, was in regular correspondence with the Herschels. See Patricia Phillips, *The Scientific Lady: A Social History of Women's Scientific Interests 1520-1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), p. 162.

⁷⁶ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, III, p. 287. The attack is strongly reminiscent of David Hume's dismissal of the cognitive powers of black people: 'In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly.' David Hume, 'Of National Characters', in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* [1741-1742], (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 213. Tania Modleski notes that 'the female other, regardless of race, has been frequently consigned to categories that put her outside of the pale of the fully human', in *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 126.

⁷⁷ Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 77.

⁷⁸ Fox, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, p. 87.

⁷⁹ D'Israeli, *Flim-Flams!*, III, p. 127.

⁸⁰ The archaic spelling, 'satyrst' was retained in usage during the late eighteenth century. Charlotte Smith, for example, speaks of 'severe satyrists' with the 'liveliest sense of the absurd and ridiculous' (*Conversations Introducing Poetry*, II, p. 96).

⁸¹ The similarity in the prose of the two satirists was evident at the time. When Byron received a letter 'full of fun and ferocity', purporting to be from John Bull in 1821, both D'Israeli and Peacock were leading suspects (the real author was John Gibson Lockhart). *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-82), VIII, p. 145. It is apropos that satire is a genre that is believed to take its name from Greek plays in which human actors dressed up as hairy satyrs. Priscilla Wakefield writes:

Their form, indeed, approaches to ours; yet it is but a hideous resemblance, characteristic of vice and deformity. The satyrs and bacchanals in heathen mythology, were symbols of every inordinate passion: the model from which they were delineated, was evidently taken from the ape tribe, as may be seen by the strong similitude of the countenances of the one to the other.

Instinct Displayed, pp. 228-29. Both D'Israeli and Peacock locate humour in the human-animal boundary when humans behave like animals and animals behave like humans.

⁸² It is agreed that it should not be suicide if the homunculous relinquished its own place in creation (*Flim-Flams!*, III, pp. 35-36) and Uncle Jacob immediately pickles the ape in alcohol on its birth (*Flim-Flams!*, III, p. 157). Both are deemed ripe for annihilation on account of their otherness and status as 'unnatural' beings in *Flim-Flams!*

⁸³ Peacock, *Melincourt*, p. 9.

⁸⁴ See *The Letters of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by Nicholas A. Joukovsky, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), I, p. 187.

⁸⁵Peacock, *Melincourt*, p. 44. Angola was a significant destination for slave traders who filled ships there before disembarking for the notorious Middle Passage. Sir Oran is initially 'caught' in Angola and later bought from his indigenous owner who reluctantly gives him up only after receiving an 'irresistible bribe' (p. 46). The coercion and 'deep grief' (p. 46) involved in this transaction associates the pathos of Sir Oran's abduction with that suffered by black slaves. Sylvan Forester's emphasis upon the 'civilized and sophisticated natives of Angola' (p. 44) is surely an implied attack upon the Imperialist and racist assumptions of supremacy that facilitated the violent ravaging of Angolan culture by slave traders.

⁸⁶Sir Oran 'resides' (p. 324) with Forester and Anthelia; he is never owned by them.

⁸⁷Peacock's sugar boycott is recorded by Carl Dawson, *His Fine Wit: A Study of Thomas Love Peacock* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 197.

⁸⁸Peacock, *Melincourt*, p. 53.

⁸⁹Howard Mills, *Peacock: His Circle and His Age* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 99.

⁹⁰Peacock, *Melincourt*, p. 120.

⁹¹Without waiting for 'sylogistic reasoning' (*Melincourt*, p. 278), Sir Oran's exploits include putting out a fire at Mr. Mystic's Cimmerian Lodge, (*Melincourt*, p. 241) and liberating two young lovers in rebellion against the mercenary and tyrannical force of their elders (*Melincourt*, pp. 277-78).

⁹²Peacock, *Melincourt*, pp. 188-89.

⁹³See Robert N. Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 20.

⁹⁴Olwen W. Campbell, 'Melincourt and the Peacock Heroine', in *Peacock: The Satirical Novels*, ed. by Lorna Sage (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 169.

⁹⁵Sir Oran communicates through gestures and seems to understand present circumstances but does not learn language. He is capable, indeed adept, at aping manners by bowing and shaking hands. In this respect Peacock's intuition was correct in so far as the most promising communicative exchanges with great apes have been made using AMESLAN (American Sign Language), based on gesture, rather than verbal or textual language. For the purposes of the plot, however, Sir Oran's silence is articulate. For Jonathan Bate: 'His silence witnesses against cant with all the eloquence of Byron's wit.' Bate, 'Apeing Romanticism', p. 237.

⁹⁶According to Dix Harwood, the word 'rights' was first ascribed with respect to their possession by animals by Francis Hutcheson in 1755. See Dix Harwood, *Love for Animals and how it Developed in Great Britain* (New York: Columbia University, pp. 163-64).

⁹⁷Peacock, *Melincourt*, p. 139. While Anophel's plan is thwarted, the experience was subsequently responsible for 'taking the feeling of safety from her solitary walks, and unhinging her long associations with the freedom and security of her native mountains' (p. 147) – another instance of the difficulties that confronted the women who attempted to be solitary wanderers, discussed in the first part of my thesis.

⁹⁸Carol J. Adams notes that parallel legal categories once existed for married women ('*femme covert*'), and for domesticated animals ('*beste covert*'), in *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 74.

⁹⁹Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 69. Edward Tyson appended an essay to his account of the *Orang-Outang*, contending that the satyrs, among other mythological beings of the ancients were in fact apes or monkeys.

¹⁰⁰Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Retrospection: or, A Review of the Most Striking and Important Events, Characters, Situations, and Their Consequences, Which the Last Eighteen Hundred Years have Presented to the View of Mankind*, 2 vols (London: John Stockdale, 1801), II, p. 511. Perhaps the most famous instance of simian Jacobinism is the (probably apocryphal) story of the monkey mascot who survived the wreck of a French ship off the coast of the North Sea in 1805. The fisherman of Hartlepool are said to have hung the monkey from the masthead of a fishing boat, fearing that he might have been a spy, when the threat of French invasion was at its height during the Napoleonic Wars. World wide web, accessed 21 July 2002: <http://www.thisishartlepool.co.uk>

¹⁰¹Peacock, *Melincourt*, p. 309. He had earlier dismissed Anthelia's insistence that she would marry according to the 'spirit of the age of chivalry', as a set of beliefs akin to 'a rank Jacobin', pp. 64-5.

¹⁰²The comparison, and the contrast, is made clear in episodes in which Sir Oran and the Monster meet children. Children are terrified by the fearful creature in *Frankenstein*. By contrast in *Melincourt*, while the initial response is similarly one of extreme alarm, Sir Oran is able to win children's favour by playing his flute and making friends (p. 114).

¹⁰³Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that 'Victor Frankenstein's monster may really be a female

in disguise', given the textual and circumstantial parallels that can be drawn between Mary Shelley, her monstrous literary creation and the Biblical Eve. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 237.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* [1818], ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 142.

¹⁰⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Two Essays on Vegetarianism: A Vindication of Natural Diet* [1813] and *On the Vegetable System of Diet* [circa 1814-1818], ([n.p.] Folcroft Library Editions, 1975), pp. 13-14. While J. F. Newton was an immediate personal influence, Shelley's diet was also inspired by the earlier work of Joseph Ritson, who had much to say about the orang-utan and its anatomical similarity to humans:

Man, therefor, in a state of nature, was, if not the real ourang-outang of the forests and mountains of Asia or Africa at the present day, at least, an animal of the same family, and very nearly resembling it. The formation, the anatomy, the strength, the general appearance, of the two animals, are much the same, or would, at least, be so in a state of nature. Each would make the like use of its hands and feet; for it can be prove'd, not onely, that man, in such a state, would frequently make use of his hands for feet, and walk upon all-four; but, allso, that the ourang-outang frequently stands and walks, erect, like a civilize'd man, and occasionally usees a staf. Their food, their habits, their employments, and mode of life, would, likewise, be precisely, or nearly similar; and, in a word, without depriving man of his preëminent situation at the head of his class, the resemblance between him and the ourang-outang is too strong to deny that they are, at least, distinct species of one and the same genus.

Joseph Ritson, *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food, As a Moral Duty* (London: Richard Philips, 1802), pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁶ John Frank Newton, *The Return to Nature, or, A Defence of the Vegetable Regimen* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1811), pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁷ Newton, *Return to Nature*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁸ *Peacock: The Satirical Novels*, ed. by Lorna Sage, p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, Peacock did not follow through Sir Oran's progress in the unreformed Parliament.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Love Peacock, *Headlong Hall* [1815] and *Gryll Grange* [1860], ed. by Michael Baron and Michael Slater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 63. In this novel Mr Escot, a more hypocritical prototype for Mr Sylvan Forester, also fervently expounds the virtue of the vegetarian natural man. For an extensive present-day study of apes and the use of tools, see W. C. Grew, *Chimpanzee Material Culture: Implications for Human Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹¹¹ Trelawny, *Adventures of a Younger Son*, p. 300.

¹¹² Haraway, *Primate Visions*, p. 76.

¹¹³ Trelawny, *Adventures of a Younger Son*, p. 302.

¹¹⁴ See Trelawny, *Adventures of a Younger Son*, p. 301. This discrepancy in the number of ribs had been noted by Buffon. See Robert Wokler, 'Tyson and Buffon on the Orang-Utan', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 155 (1976), 2301-2319 (p. 2313).

¹¹⁵ Haraway, *Primate Visions*, p. 31. Similarly, in Wallace's account of his travels in the Malay Archipelago, the full grown, powerful male orang-utans are the most highly prized prey (*Malay Archipelago*, Chapter 4).

¹¹⁶ See Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

¹¹⁷ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

¹¹⁸ Diderot, *Political Writings*, p. xvii.

¹¹⁹ Many critics, (again, most characteristically, Horkheimer and Adorno's seminal and influential *Dialectic of Enlightenment*), have indicated the extent to which this convention seriously problematizes the Enlightenment project with its central metaphor of the penetration of darkness too readily put to the service of notions of white supremacy and patriarchal thought and revealing the partial and exclusive shortcomings of its 'universalism'. This characterization of the Enlightenment in terms of the shadows that it cast, particularly manifest in the violence of the French Revolutionary Terror, was one largely created from the perspective of critics in the immediately succeeding generation. See Ludmilla Jordanova, 'The Authoritarian Response', pp. 202-16 in *The Enlightenment*

and its Shadows, ed. by Peter Hulme and Ludmilla Jordanova (London: Routledge, 1990).

¹²⁰ James Boswell's recollection of Samuel Johnson's anti-Scottish gibe mischievously locates Scots, native americans and apes outside the pale of civilization. Its proposal of *inclusion* is therefore a rhetorical device for *exclusion*: 'We have taught you and we'll do the same in time to all barbarous nations – the Cherokees – and at last to the Ourang-outangs.' Cited in John Bailey, *Dr. Johnson and his Circle* (London: Williams and Norgate, [1913]), p. 149. The theories of Lord Monboddo, Johnson's Scottish acquaintance and protagonist are the target for this satire.

¹²¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961], trans. by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 32-33.

¹²² Mill, in assuming the inevitability of the antagonism between nature and human impact, describes a confrontational relationship that constitutes the Promethean emphasis. He asserts that, when conceived in such a way, nature is by definition a foe implacably opposed to successful human endeavour and that capitulation to such a nature would be counter to the whole direction of human civilization:

Everybody professes to approve and admire many triumphs of Art over Nature: the junction by bridges of shores which Nature had made separate, the draining of Nature's marshes, the excavation of her wells, the dragging to light of what she has buried at immense depths in the earth; the turning away of her thunderbolts by lightning rods, of her inundations by embankments, of her oceans by breakwaters. But to commend these and similar feats, is to acknowledge that the ways of Nature are to be conquered, not obeyed: that her powers are often towards man in the position of enemies, from whom he must wrest, by force and ingenuity, what little he can for his own use, and deserves to be applauded when that little is rather more than might be expected from his physical weakness in comparison to those gigantic powers. All praise of Civilization, or Art, or Contrivance, is so much dispraise of Nature; an admission of imperfection, which it is man's business, and merit, to be always endeavouring to correct or mitigate.

(Mill, 'Nature', p. 381). Mill describes an anthropocentric perspective, with its binary opposition between the human and natural, that marks the ground of an ongoing debate about the extent to which humans can, in one emphasis, realize ourselves as a species whose unique powers are dependent upon an ability and willingness to intervene in and modify the environment, yet, at the same time, accept an inevitable continuation of dependence upon the health of that environment and the well-being of other species. We may have much control over the non-human aspects of the Earth but in order to flourish we remain absolutely dependent upon this realm. Friedrich Engels acknowledged humanity's ambivalent situation, being at once a part of and apart from other animal species: 'we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst'. Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature* [1872-82], trans. and ed. by Clemens Dutt, with a preface and notes by J. B. S. Haldane (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1941), p. 292.

He made a critical, masculinized distinction between labouring humans and other animals:

the animal merely *uses* external nature, and brings about changes in it simply by his presence; man by his changes makes nature serve his ends, *masters* it.

(Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, p.291).

¹²³ See Richard Dawkins's inference that lacunae exist not between species but in people's mental perceptions in 'Gaps in the Mind', in *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity* ed. by Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer, (London: Fourth Estate, 1993), pp. 80-87.

¹²⁴ *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836-1844: Geology, Transmutation of Species, Metaphysical Enquiries*, transcribed and ed. by Paul H. Barrett, Peter J. Gautrey, Sandra Herbert, David Kohn and Sydney Smith (Cambridge: British Museum (Natural History)/Cambridge University Press, published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1987), p. 229.

¹²⁵ See Susan Meyer, *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 17. J. F. Blumenbach (1752-1840) was the first anthropologist to formulate a taxonomy of racial groups, based upon 'scientific' craniology.

¹²⁶ See Stephen Jay Gould's essay entitled 'Why We Should Not Name Human Races – A Biological View', pp. 231-36, *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* [1978], (London: Penguin, 1991).

¹²⁷ James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 1990).

¹²⁸ Indeed, such a corollary of evolution was anticipated by no less an authority than Darwin himself. Harriet Ritvo cites the awareness of both Darwin and Lyell of the fluidity of categories of species and 'race' in *The Platypus and the Mermaid and other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 85-86. Despite occasionally reverting to conventional terms such as the lower orders of humanity, Darwin remarked: 'On the view that species are only strongly marked and permanent varieties, and that each species first existed as a variety, we can see why [...] no line of demarcation can be drawn between species, commonly supposed to have been produced by special acts of creation.' He added that those taxonomists who accepted the process of natural selection need 'not be incessantly haunted by the shadowy doubt whether this or that form be in essence a species'. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species: A Facsimile of the First Edition* [1859], ed. by Ernst Mayr (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 469-70 and p. 484. Charles Lyell recognized that this had immediate implications for the taxonomic difficulties of 'race' and made reference to 'the difficulty of defining [...] the terms "species" and "race", [...] [and to] the surprise of the unlearned [...] when they discover how wide is the difference of opinion' among experts. Charles Lyell, *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man, with remarks on theories of the Origin of Species by variation* (London: John Murray, 1863), p. 388.

¹²⁹ Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, p. 31.

¹³⁰ *Vaurian* was perhaps the first novel to take a firm anti-Jacobin and also anti-Godwinian position.

¹³¹ In the same tradition, Anna Kingsford made much of the dietary consequences of the resemblances between human anatomy and physiology and the simiæ, particularly the orang-utan, in her overview of the Victorian case for vegetarianism, 'The Best Food for Man'. Ninon Kingsford [pseud., Anna Kingsford], 'The Best Food for Man', *Westminster Review*, 102 (1874), 500-14 (p. 501).

¹³² See Shevawn Lynam, *Humanity Dick: A Biography of Richard Martin M.P. 1754-1834* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), p. 227.

¹³³ Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, p. 119.

¹³⁴ Ted Benton, *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights and Social Justice* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 47.

¹³⁵ See Lovelock's discussion of these implications in *Gaia*, pp. 132-33.

¹³⁶ Shelley, *Two Essays on Vegetarianism*.

¹³⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. by J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (University of London: Athlone Press, 1970), *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham* [1968-], 38 vols, p. 283.

¹³⁸ Indeed, Jagtenberg and McKie have suggested that the natural environment constitutes a fourth dimension of social space, a further determinant that maps individual identity in addition to class, gender and ethnicity. See *Eco-Impacts and the Greening of Postmodernity*, pp. 46-48.



THE ‘WAILINGS OF SILLY WOMEN’: ANIMAL POLEMICS FROM PRIVATE SYMPATHY TO PUBLIC OUTRAGE

*We shudder but to dream our maids should ape
Those monstrous males that carve the living hound*
(Tennyson, *The Princess*)¹

Antivivisection and Human Progress

Late nineteenth-century contentions about human civilization and the treatment of other species were articulated in part through a vigorous debate concerning vivisection. As I shall show, for critics animal experimentation became a synecdoche for the abuses perpetrated by a callous society willing, they claimed, to sacrifice powerless individuals for the abstract greater good of scientific progress. This was because vivisection involved the infliction of extreme physical pain upon sentient beings, deliberate in so far as this pain was incidental rather than accidental – a telling instance of a civilization which prioritized curiosity over ethical considerations. Hilda Kean cites a writer for the British Union Against Vivisection who believed ‘a victory against vivisection would mean a general advance for all humane causes’, identifying an ongoing contest between ‘the forces of egoism’ and ‘the forces of humane progress’ in which the former was, regrettably, making headway.² This recalls the familiar and fundamental difference in emphasis between Promethean and Arcadian outlooks. The works of antivivisectionist women, most notably Frances Power Cobbe, ‘Ouida’, Sarah Grand, Dora Greenwell and ‘Michael Field’, clearly situate the issue in the wider debate about morality and human progress.

Late nineteenth-century antivivisectionist ethics gained substantial support as advances in physiology and anatomy discredited mechanistic notions with regard to non-human animals. While little experimental physiology was carried out in early nineteenth-century England,³ an exponential increase in the practice provoked the rise of a mass antivivisection movement from the 1870s onwards. That empirical evidence of the exquisite complexities of animal nervous systems was perhaps due to vivisection itself, particularly early experiments in blood transfusion, implied an awkward contradiction for both sides of the debate.

Mary Ann Elston notes a significant correlation between first- and second-wave feminism and the highpoints of antivivisection campaigns.⁴ Antivivisectionists made more than figurative comparisons between masculine interventions in women’s bodies – such as

the invasive practices of male gynaecological surgeons and the implementation of the *Contagious Diseases Act* – and the invasive nature of animal experimentation. Kean suggests that in the emerging nineteenth-century animal welfare movement ‘women’s particular view of “commonality” and hence empathy with animals was employed in campaigns’.⁵ This sense of inter-species solidarity was consciously adopted as a strategy for the improvement of the condition of women and disenfranchised and oppressed human groupings, on the grounds that a radical sensitization of society in terms of animal welfare would logically entail better treatment for all humans. This is a development of the familiar Kantian principle that cruelty towards non-human species leads to cruelty towards humans.⁶

During the late nineteenth century, women, notwithstanding their absence from the Parliamentary arena, could be full participants and enjoy a public role in the politics of pressure groups. Women made up a significant proportion of Victorian animal-welfare group membership. Turner suggests that female members had probably outnumbered males since the SPCA’s foundation, despite exclusion from official leadership committees until the 1870s.⁷ Richard D. French contrasts the ‘very active and decisive role’ for women in the antivivisection movement with the Victorian RSPCA which, ‘despite its very substantial female support, provided much less opportunity for women like Cobbe to take on a public leadership position within its ranks’.⁸

Antivivisection campaigns were therefore a useful repository for the energies of women excluded from parliamentary involvement. In *Women and Philanthropy in 19th Century England* (1980), F. K. Prochaska records that, in 1895, women amounted to 66% of life subscribers to the Victoria Street Society for the Protection of Animals from Vivisection.⁹ Women’s role in establishing prominent pressure groups such as the Plumage League (1886), the Society for the Protection of Birds (1893) and the People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals (1917) was equally consequential.¹⁰ Many women shifted their energies from charity work to political campaigning, a process that began with popular participation in anti-slavery organizations.

Committed Voices: Cobbe, Kingsford and ‘Ouida’

The Tory humanitarian and advocate for women’s interests, Frances Power Cobbe held the highest profile among Victorian antivivisectionists due to her absolute dedication to this cause. Indeed, Barbara Caine describes Cobbe as ‘unquestionably the ablest and most prolific writer amongst the mid-Victorian feminists’.¹¹ Cobbe’s autobiographical *Life* (1894) concludes with a retrospect upon twenty years of campaigning against vivisection. A

gregarious and tireless activist, Cobbe applied reason, moral force and passion to petitioning and lobbying for 'the claims of brutes'. Cobbe claims that she was the first writer to engage with the moral implications of vivisection in a sustained and systematic way, estimating that she personally wrote more than four hundred leaflets and pamphlets on the subject.¹² Well-connected in Britain, France and Italy, Cobbe inaugurated a debate that had an immediate response, including the support of several prominent members of the literary intelligentsia, notably Alfred Tennyson, John Ruskin, Walter Savage Landor,¹³ Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, Leslie Stephen and Thomas Carlyle. She also appealed to aristocratic patrons of the anti-vivisection cause and adopted a strategy of petitioning through influential and distinguished circles in preference to mass agitation.¹⁴ While Cobbe's approach reflects her own innately conservative sentiments as the daughter of a landed magistrate, it was also shrewd and pragmatic *realpolitick* in the context of the mid-Victorian power structure. However, in the longer term, such a strategy was to align her cause with a class base that was to undergo a gradual diminution of authority.¹⁵

Cobbe was always careful to stress that she wished to advance human well-being and was not what she termed a 'morbid *zoophilist*', meaning someone driven to support animals out of misanthropic despair of human nature.¹⁶ In anticipation of conventional objections, Cobbe set out to dispell such allegations:

I do not say, "the more I know of men the more I love dogs"; but "The more I know of dogs the more I love *them*," without any invidious comparisons with men, women, or children.
(*Life*, II, p. 243)¹⁷

Cobbe was persuaded that it was imperative to address the excessive wrongs she felt were inflicted upon other species as a complementary adjunct to her humanitarianism and theism. She explicitly attempted to neutralize the gender exclusions suggested by opponents who would tactically marginalize the issue by identifying it with the sentiment of unfranchised women:

The command "open thy mouth for the dumb," seems the very echo of our consciences. Everything in us, manly or womanly, (and the best in us all is *both*) answers it back.
(*Life*, II, p. 244)

However, Cobbe does link the subordination of women and the exploitation of animals in a way that was to become characteristic of much Victorian antivivisectionist literature. The location of 'The Claims of Brutes' as the penultimate chapter in the two volume *Life* confers

a structural privilege as the cause that she regarded as the culmination of her life's work. It is tellingly paired with the previous chapter, 'The Claims of Women'; possibly Cobbe believed that her antivivisection work would be her foremost legacy, given that it was in this campaign that she achieved most prominence. It is clear that the polemical stress she places upon the violent domestic abuse of women parallels the language of repulsion and outrage used in her antivivisectionist writings. Indeed the similarity of the cases of violence against women cited in 'Wife-Torture in England', strengthened the often rehearsed argument that moral indifference made it easier for one to inflict suffering on humans and non-humans alike. However, while comparisons may be made between the consequences for animals and women of objectifying scientific reductionism, it is a problematic rhetorical strategy for feminist reform, given the established patriarchal identification of women with animal nature.¹⁸

Cobbe's efforts contributed to the inauguration of a Royal Commission, which placed regulatory legislation for vivisection on the statute, in the form of the *Cruelty to Animals Act* of 1876. Vigorous lobbying by the medical establishment, however, caused this legislation to be so diluted that critics feared that even the previous, very limited, animal protection afforded by the 1822 Martin Act was partially nullified. Cobbe despaired, 'the world has never seemed to me quite the same since that dreadful time [...] our enjoyment of the beauty of this lovely land had in great measure vanished' (*Life*, II, p. 280). Nevertheless, despite such devastation, Cobbe's resolve was unabated. Widespread disappointment with the Act's provisions accounts for its failure to assuage doubts about the efficacy of animal experimentation, and for the subsequent upsurge in antivivisectionism. Cobbe founded the Victoria Street Society for Protection of Animals from Vivisection with George Hoggan, in 1876, and remained Honorary Secretary until 1884.¹⁹ However, outraged by lack of progress, she began to advocate the total abolition of vivisection and, following a schism between reformists and abolitionists, Cobbe later set up the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection; both remain the leading pressure groups for antivivisection.²⁰

The profoundly disturbing contradiction she sensed between the elevated understanding of the male intellectual, and the conscious inflicting of pain, is a consistent theme in Cobbe's writings. Unlike earlier animal welfarists in the RSPCA, who confined their moral distaste to working class brutality, Cobbe shifted her attention to the activities of the new professional élite:

The new vice [...] is not like most other human vices, hot and thoughtless. The man possessed by it is calm, cool, deliberate; perfectly cognisant of what he is doing; understanding, as indeed no other man understands, the full meaning and

extent of the waves and spasms of agony he deliberately creates. It does not seize the ignorant or hunger-driven or brutalized classes; but the cultivated, the well-fed, the well-dressed, the civilized, and (it is said) the otherwise kindly-disposed and genial men of science, forming part of the most intellectual circles in Europe.²¹

The extent of Cobbe's public commitment to antivivisectionism was matched only by that of Anna Kingsford. It seems that there was considerable rivalry between these two powerful personalities. There were strategic differences between them, particularly over vegetarianism (an issue central to Kingsford's world-view while Cobbe continued to eat meat). It is also probable that personality clashes emerged because, despite their mutual respect, the extraordinary intensity of purpose that they possessed made each reluctant to accommodate the other's prominence within the single issue of antivivisection. Kingsford not only undertook a perpetual round of physically and emotionally punishing lecture tours, but went so far as to study medicine professionally in France in order, as she put it, 'to achieve the abolition of the slaughter and torture of animals, whether for food or for science'.²²

Kingsford articulated the central contradiction upon which the debate pivots; if the utility of vivisection is justified by reference to the homology of the anatomy and physiology of animal and human nervous systems, then their respective capacities for suffering are comparable, with all the moral consequences that the intentional infliction of pain entails. Her objections echo Cobbe's disillusionment with the terms of the 1876 *Cruelty to Animals Act*:

[...] It is precisely the subtle but enormous differences existing between the manifestations and character of the nervous system as we see them in man and as we see them in other animals, which distinguishes the former from the latter, and which endows vivisectors with the legal right they now possess to inflict on anthropoid apes injuries and mutilations which, if they inflicted the same on men, would be held to render the perpetrators guilty of crime. When, therefore, it is understood that this occult nervous differentiation is capable of constituting a distinction so vast, how is it possible to suppose that the study of biological function in the beast is capable of explaining satisfactorily the mysteries of human life?²³

While few women writers devoted themselves to antivivisection with the tenacity of Cobbe and Kingsford, many enthusiastically offered their support to the cause and attacked vivisection in their work. None was more vitriolic than the novelist, 'Ouida', who, while not sharing the total abolitionism of Cobbe and Kingsford, exceeded both in the ferocity of her diatribes against vivisection.²⁴ In *The New Priesthood* (1893), Ouida opposed scientific

accusations of sentimentalism by alleging that the fervour with which vivisection was pursued was a modernized superstition, entailing a longing for sacrificial victims, and therefore an essentially anti-human practice, in the tradition of ‘burning sorceresses, drowning witches, or torturing Jews’. She rhetorically throws the charge of irrationalism back at male scientists. Ouida challenges scientists’ claims for the progressive search for truth and the alleviation of suffering, objecting that: ‘we are wearied to nausea with the self-admiration of the medical profession, with their own philanthropy, their own charity’, as if ‘they never in all their lives took a fee, or sent in a bill’, thus implying that animal researchers were primarily motivated by profit and self-interest rather than wider human well-being. She further alleged that, while scientists’ honesty of intention might be genuine, their work was carried out with the single-minded fanaticism of the *auto-da-fé*, being secretive, unaccountable and violent in nature, and of largely unproven benefit.²⁵ For Ouida, as for other critics, antivivisection was a distillation of a wider debate about the direction society ought to take. She opposes a narrowly utilitarian approach, characterized by vulgar materialism, with a more compassionate attitude toward laboratory animals. Ouida excoriates the ‘hideous employment’ of the physiologist in the language of physical revulsion and sexual distaste:

[...] think of him, eating and drinking, jesting and love-making, filling his belly and indulging his desires, then returning to his laboratory to devise and execute fresh tortures, his hands steeped in blood, his eyes greedily watching the throes he stimulates; think of what his daily and yearly existence is, and then judge if he be fit to consort with men of gentle temper and decent habitudes, or if he and such as he, be fit to be trusted with the care of sick and suffering humanity.
(*New Priesthood*, pp. 13-14)

Ouida’s greatest fear, moreover, was that women might become involved in animal research. The success of some women in winning places in medical schools was a trend that particularly worried her, fearing an unremitting sex war would be unleashed in the ensuing battle between men and women in the ‘fierce, brutal, pitiless competition for place and for practice’ (*New Priesthood*, p. 23). The female cruelty imputed in *The New Priesthood* recalls the Edgeworths’ earlier feminized personification of cruelty:

Woman also, who, when she is cruel, is tenfold more cruel than man, and when she is pitiless is tenfold more pitiless than he, is now in the laboratory, causing and watching the agonies of tortured animals, with all the thirst and avidity of the neophyte, for the unknown. As the inquisitor had his female witch-searcher who drove the pins into the breasts of his accused sorceresses, so the male physiologist had his female pupil, who may be trusted to outrun his teachings in ingenious cruelty and patient torture, even as the female prover of witchcraft outran the instructions of priest and of judge.
(*New Priesthood*, p. 18)

So, besides long-standing condemnation of working-class cruelty, there emerged an anxiety about the behaviour of middle-class professionals who had consolidated their status during the nineteenth century. Kathleen Kete suggests that the profit-orientated bourgeoisie appeared to be increasingly uneasy and internally divided by their attempts to reconcile the mismatch between romantic values of sentiment and the values of enterprise. A significant proportion of the middle class was dismayed by its own creations. Humane values could, however, be redeemed through relations with the non-human; a relationship with pets and other domesticated animals was one almost entirely determined on human terms. An idealized relationship could therefore be enjoyed with non-human species in the home, even if ironically, many domestic creature comforts were sustained by exploiting non-human species. Kete's study of middle class pet-keeping in France, *The Beast in the Boudoir* (1995), outlines resistance to amoral materialism that equally pertains to Britain:

by the late 1860s and 1870s the affective behavior of canines offered dramatic contrast to an increasingly cruel bourgeois and urban world, male, alienating, and relentlessly unsentimental.²⁶

Invasion and Repulsion

Dora Greenwell targets the reductionist arrogance of masculine science which treated other species as instruments and commodities in her poem, entitled, with blunt irony, 'Fidelity Rewarded'.²⁷ Greenwell's verse is epitaphed by a quotation from vivisector, Professor Rutherford: 'We experimented on dogs – old, and otherwise useless.' The dog's unfailing loyalty (explained by ethologists as the instinctual affinity with other beings regarded as pack members), contrasts sharply with human perfidy and is presented as a love match:

I knew my master's voice,
My nature's bounded plan
Had left my love no choice,
And he I loved was man.
(stanza 6)

The invasive practices represented by the unfaithful scientist and the penetration of the objectified victim echo the older Baconian project to unveil and subdue female nature:

Some secret hint to track
Of life's poor trembling flame,
He nailed me to a rack,
He pierced and tore my frame.
(stanza 10)

This rhetorical tradition was still current in the words of the nineteenth-century vivisector, Claude Bernard who described nature ‘as a woman who must be forced to unveil herself when she is attacked by the experimenter, who must be put to the question and subdued’.²⁸ Such analogies were popular in antivivisectionist criticism of invasive science. In Elston’s words: ‘The metaphor of medical science, and medical practice on women, as rape, became a dominant theme in anti-vivisection literature.’²⁹ Greenwell shared the concern of her friend, Josephine Butler, that the *Contagious Diseases Act* punished women for men’s sexual vice.

Antivivisectionism and opposition to the *Contagious Diseases Act* were just two of many humanitarian causes that Greenwell addressed as a Christian philanthropist. Her intervention in several controversial issues contradicts Turner’s conjecture that compassion was safely channelled into animal welfare in preference to human issues that more directly challenged the political status quo. He wonders:

Might not some of these uneasy Victorians have subconsciously transferred their charitable impulses from the forbidden ground of the working class slums to a more acceptable object of benevolence? And what more acceptable than suffering animal-kind? [...] This sort of displacement of guilt from exploited workers to maltreated brutes would be impossible to document; no animal lover would confess such motives, even if conscious of them.³⁰

Turner’s image of the ‘uneasy’ Victorian possibly lapses into unfair caricature. While his book is one of the most detailed and informative studies of nineteenth-century attitudes to animals, Turner’s scepticism does not explain the diversity of the political allegiances among animal welfarists and the correlation between campaigns upon this issue and other human-centred causes. In Greenwell’s case these included support for female prisoners in Durham Prison, mill workers and miners, child agricultural workers, workers suffering appalling conditions in match factories, sufferers during the Irish Famine and the anti-slavery movement. She was also an early advocate of votes for women before the struggle for female suffrage gathered momentum and drew mass support.³¹ For Greenwell at least, support for animals was certainly not a sentimentalized evasion of other controversies. Her privileged class position as a country squire’s daughter might suggest that Greenwell ultimately had a vested interest in upholding the social structure she benefited from, while ameliorating its worst deprivation. However, a more immediate explanation of such political initiatives, and for antivivisectionism, is that all are part of a critique of the perceived desensitization of society and based upon an extended form of sympathy. While such radicalism may therefore be explained by motives that are in keeping with women’s

traditional ameliorative roles, Greenwell's social engagement is unquestionable.

This kind of participation demonstrates two significant and closely connected historical developments in the nineteenth century. First, it confirms the enlarged scope of moral concern since the mid-eighteenth century, thus conforming to Nash's model of a progressive extension of rights theory.³² Second, the nature of the engagement of writers such as Cobbe and Greenwell suggests a shift from the domestic influence of children's literature to the public arena of political agitation through open debates and pressure groups.

Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1898), further documents how far the vivisection debate was embroiled in Victorian sexual politics. Coral Lansbury notes that critics of the antivivisectionists held as medical fact that energies put into compassionate campaigns for animals screened sexual frustration.³³ In *The Beth Book*, Grand polemically draws parallels between vivisection and the invasive medical assaults upon women sanctioned by the *Contagious Diseases Act*.³⁴ Beth's husband, Dan, is a doctor in a Lock Hospital as well as a vivisectionist. The novel is a heavily autobiographical account of Grand's marriage to David McFall, whom she left in 1890.³⁵ Dan does not carry out his experiments on generic dogs but, rather, on a particular dog, a black-and-tan terrier, and would-be companion animal, whom Dan had made 'welcome' to his house. The dog is not only anthropomorphized but mistaken for a human by Beth, who immediately assumed upon first hearing its shrieks that she was listening to the cry of a distressed child. There are several points of comparison between the treatment of the terrier and Beth's own situation. Both are victims of Dan's abusive behaviour, both find their initially amiable natures betrayed by his deceit. There are also strong similarities between the hidden room, to which Beth escapes as a place of retreat from Dan's violation of her personal space, and the concealed laboratory, in which Dan surreptitiously carries out vivisection. Within this desperately failing and claustrophobic marriage, both spouses seek to create physical interior spaces, unseen and inaccessible, that are analogous to the psychological need of each to conceal aspects of their inner selves from their partner's surveillance.

The chilly emotional alienation in Dan and Beth's relationship is indicative of a clash in values between their different versions of humanity. Dan's justification of scientific altruism, that 'these experiments must be made, in the interests of suffering humanity, more's the pity', is refuted by Beth who counters that 'cruel and ambitious scientific men [...] were ready enough in the old days to vivisect human beings when it was allowed, and they would do it again if they dared'.³⁶ Beth dismisses Dan's claim that vivisectionists are dedicated to furthering the true interests of humanity, implying that their true motivation is

egotistical self-aggrandizement (her own arguments for social improvement are, however, unfortunately underpinned by fashionable eugenic ideas).

Beth's denial of Dan's humanitarian pretensions is further vindicated by the disregard shown by him, and the wider medical profession, for women's sexual health in the lock hospitals. Grand thus weaves a literal unity of the plight of women and vivisected animals into her narrative. Such parallels between assaults upon women and attacks upon animals were stock tropes among Victorian and Edwardian antivivisection authors. As Lansbury notes, domestic violence and pornography were a side of male authority echoed by invasive gynaecology and vivisection:

If was as if animals, particularly the vivisected animal, embodied all the fears of sexual surgery: images of women strapped to chairs or tables, feet held high in stirrups, and the gynaecologist standing over them with a knife.³⁷

The ready recourse to ovariectomy among some surgeons was especially controversial and bitterly opposed by medical reformers and feminist critics such as Elizabeth Blackwell, who objected to this 'spaying' and considered the operation to be vivisection upon women.³⁸

Katherine Bradley and the Bristol Debates

The involvement of literary figures in antivivisectionism sometimes took the form of direct involvement in the establishment of local animal-welfare pressure groups. Dora Greenwell and Katherine Bradley were instrumental in the creation of one of the principal regional groups, the Bristol and Clifton Anti-Vivisection Society. Greenwell, as a member of Bristol and Clifton Ladies' Branch of the RSPCA, was involved with the dissemination of antivivisectionist literature and the organization of public meetings on the issue in Bristol from the late 1870s until her death in 1882. These meetings provide a link to Katherine Bradley's involvement.

Katherine Bradley, together with her niece, Edith Cooper, wrote under the pseudonym 'Michael Field' and their literary collaboration is one of the most extraordinary of the nineteenth century. Most critical attention has been concerned with their situation as a lesbian couple during the Victorian and Edwardian periods and their social connections with Robert Browning, Oscar Wilde, George Meredith, Havelock Ellis, Walter Pater, W. B. Yeats and other prominent members of the literary intelligentsia.³⁹ Their contribution to the antivivisectionist cause, however, has not been previously examined, although, especially in the case of Katherine Bradley, it appears that this was much more than a passing gesture of

sympathy for a topical issue.

R. B. Nicholetts (1897) describes the Bristol and West of England Anti-Vivisection Society as one of the most important of the twenty-seven regional antivivisection societies.⁴⁰ In 1882, Katherine Bradley represented the antivivisectionist side in a debate at the University College, Bristol, organized by the Ladies' Debating Society. Both Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper also took part in debates in which they supported votes for women at this time.⁴¹ On this night, Nicholetts writes, Miss K. H. Bradley 'made a very excellent speech' and the outcome of the succeeding vote was an exact draw after which the chair cast her vote in favour of vivisection. The antivivisectionists, 'appalled to find so many women should be found as supporters of the practice', consequently founded the Bristol and Clifton Anti-Vivisection Society.⁴² Katherine Bradley became the new society's Honorary Secretary and was presumably instrumental in helping to formulate the opening resolution:

That this meeting being of opinion that the experimental vivisection of animals is morally wrong and therefore ought to be abolished, resolves that a Society for gaining this object be now formed, and be called the Bristol and Clifton Anti-Vivisection Society.

Katherine Bradley held her position as Honorary Secretary until 1887 when 'to the great regret of the Society' she resigned, presumably due to the Michael Fields' imminent move from Stoke Bishop, Bristol, to Surrey. Nicholetts writes in tribute that 'she was one of the most energetic and able founders of the Society, and helped to place it upon the firm basis it now occupies', and commended the care the Society took to ensure that it was represented by 'the able men and women of the day, not only as anti-vivisectionists, but in the literary and professional world as well'.

How do we account for the demise of the first wave of antivivisectionism? There are several explanations. In 1908 the death of Cobbe, the movement's most prominent figure, was a direct organizational setback for the campaign. However, broader social changes offer a more thoroughgoing historical explanation. In the early twentieth century, other issues took up activist energies and were felt to have greater urgency, such as the campaign for women's suffrage, Home Rule in Ireland, the outbreak of the First World War and several large-scale industrial disputes.⁴³ Harriet Ritvo also suggests that the discovery of the diphtheria antitoxin in 1894, a breakthrough attributed to animal research, was a 'decisive blow' to the anti-vivisectionists.⁴⁴ Elston also points to the increasing socialization of women into the values of experimental medicine, resulting in fewer leading women

scientists such as Elizabeth Blackwell, Anna Kingsford and Louise Lind-af-Hageby, taking an initiative in anti-vivisection.⁴⁵

The Darwinian hypothesis intensified the moral dilemma about the ethics of scientific research upon animals given its evidential support for the idea of the continuity of species. If we are indeed 'netted together', as Darwin suggests, then the notion of an absolute genetic distinction between humanity and other species is abolished. While, on the one hand, this might support the idea that anatomical and physiological similarity vindicated comparisons made possible by vivisection, it also introduced huge moral implications for such research, particularly if it involved painful and invasive work on animals that resembled humans, such as the great apes. Such contradictions no doubt account for the continuation of the sharply contested and deeply divisive vivisection debate.

¹ Alfred Tennyson, 'The Princess: A Medley', III. l. 292-93, *Tennyson's Poetry*, selected and ed. by Robert W. Hill Jr, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 158.

² Hilda Kean, 'The "Smooth Cool Men of Science": The Feminist and Socialist Response to Vivisection', *History Workshop Journal*, 40, (Autumn 1995), 16-38 (p. 19).

³ See Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, pp. 83-88. Furthermore, Kean writes: 'Because anaesthetics had been unavailable in the 1830s and 1840s, British scientists had tended to dissect reptiles rather than mammals, although even this invoked ethical discussions within the scientific community,' *Animal Rights*, p. 97.

⁴ Mary Ann Elston, 'Women and Anti-Vivisection in Victorian England, 1870-1900', in *Vivisection in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Nicolaas A. Rupke (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 263.

⁵ Kean, 'The "Smooth Cool Men of Science"', p. 17.

⁶ This was not a view that seemed probable to Oscar Wilde who mocked the enthusiasm of 'Violet Fane' (Mary Montgomery Lamb) for vegetarianism:

[...] If you abandon 'the harmless necessary cauliflower' for a diet of roast snipe and burgundy I feel sure that you will not regret it. However, even vegetarianism, in your hands, would make a capital article – its connection with philosophy is very curious [...] and so is its modern connection with socialism, atheism, nihilism, anarchy, and other political creeds. It is strange that the most violent republicans I know are all vegetarians: Brussel sprouts seem to make people bloodthirsty, and those who live on lentils and artichokes are always calling for the gore of the aristocracy, and for the severed heads of kings. Your vegetarianism may have given you a wise apathy – so at least you told me once – but in the political sphere a diet of green herbs seems dangerous.

Letter written circa 12 Nov 1887, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 334.

⁷ Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, p. 58.

⁸ Richard D. French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science in Victorian Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 83.

⁹ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in 19th Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 243. Studies into antivivisectionist activist profiles continue to show a heavier representation among females than males. See Angus Taylor, *Magpies, Monkeys, and Morals: What Philosophers Say About Animal Liberation* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1999), p. 94.

¹⁰ See Kean, *Animal Rights*, pp. 117 and 184. The complicity of women in killing exotic birds for fashionable millinery was felt to be a particular concern for female campaigners who objected to the slaughter that took place in their name for this purpose. Henry Salt put the issue bluntly: '[...] The women of Europe and America have given an order for the ruthless extermination of birds'. Henry S. Salt, *Animals' Rights Considered in Relation to Social Progress* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1892), p. 86.

¹¹ Caine further credits Cobbe's importance as the Victorian feminist whose writings were best known among her contemporaries and who, furthermore, came closest to formulating a theory of patriarchy. See Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 104.

¹² Frances Power Cobbe, *Life of Frances Power Cobbe*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1894), II, p. 247 and p. 296. Many of these pamphlets, dating from 1863, were collected into a volume entitled the *Modern Rack: Papers on Vivisection* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1889). On the fly sheet of 'A Controversy in a Nutshell', Cobbe urged readers not only to circulate it among friends and neighbours but also to 'endeavour to leave copies in railway waiting-rooms, the cabins of steam-packets, or any public reading-rooms to which you have access'.

¹³ Landor, wrote Cobbe, appended to his signature on her antivivisection petition some words 'so fierce and contemptuous that I never dared to publish them!', *Life of Frances Power Cobbe*, II, p. 21.

¹⁴ Rupke suggests that members of the aristocracy, clergy and judiciary who opposed vivisection were often those that feared a loss of 'cultural influence' due to the rise of a new scientific and medical élite. See introduction to *Vivisection in Historical Practice*, ed. by Nicolaas A. Rupke (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 8. Queen Victoria's opposition to vivisection also added popular respectability to the cause. It has been suggested that her personal influence upon Disraeli was a significant factor in setting up the 1875 Royal Commission into animal cruelty. See Elston, 'Women and Anti-Vivisection', p. 270. 'The wailings of silly women' is a line of a poem entitled 'Somnia Medici', quoted at the beginning of Elston's essay (p. 259) from the *Zoophilist*, 5 (1 May 1885), p. 1

¹⁵ This was to be confirmed by the Constitutional Crisis, shortly after Cobbe's death. Other groups, for example, Our Dumb Friend's League, set up in 1897, and incorporated into the Blue Cross, and more importantly the later People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (with which it was closely associated), founded by Maria Dickin in 1917, represented a significant broadening of the class base of the organized animal welfare movement.

¹⁶ Cobbe, *Life*, II, p. 242.

¹⁷ Cobbe is adapting a remark by Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869).

¹⁸ Thomas gives several historical examples in *Man and the Natural World*, p. 43.

¹⁹ The Victoria Street Society later became the National Anti-Vivisection Society.

²⁰ Lord Shaftesbury, a prominent sponsor for the antivivisectionists in the House of Lords, had previously suggested to Cobbe that by conceding some experiments on utilitarian grounds the entire cause might be logically compromised. Nevertheless, on the occasion of the *Cruelty to Animals Bill*, Shaftesbury reassured Cobbe that, strategically, a bill, however imperfect, was still a substantial and useful achievement. Once on the statute, he argued, it would be far easier to add amendments than it would be to wait for another opportunity for a secretary of state to take up the question, given that any private members bill on the subject were highly unlikely ever to become law. However, the practical failure of the Act – even weaker in certain key points such as the mandatory use of anaesthetics than Shaftesbury had imagined – increased the militancy of the antivivisectionists. In 1878, a second bill by Holt was defeated in the House of Commons.

²¹ Cobbe, *Life*, II, p. 290. Cobbe quotes from her own book, *Bernard's Martyrs* (circa 1880).

²² Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, I, p. 321.

²³ Anna Kingsford, *Unscientific Science* (Edinburgh: 1883), p. 13. Cited in French, *Antivivisection in Victorian Society*, p. 316.

²⁴ Vivisection was just one of the many causes of animal suffering that Ouida denounced. She was a founder member of the Italian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Lee, *Ouida: A Memoir*, pp. 314-15) and a regular supporter of the Humanitarian League (although the Secretary, Henry Salt, sometimes felt the need to distance himself from her more idiosyncratic and anti-socialist views).

²⁵ 'Ouida' [Marie Louise de la Ramée], *The New Priesthood: A Protest Against Vivisection* (London: E. W. Allen, 1893), pp. 4-5.

²⁶ Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir: Petkeeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 7.

²⁷ Reprinted in *Victorian Women Poets*, ed. by Leighton and Reynolds, pp. 290-1. There is a thematic similarity with Robert Browning's poem, 'Tray' in which the eponymous dog, after heroically rescuing a child from drowning, returns to the water to save the child's doll. In so doing Tray arouses such curiosity about his instinct and motivations on the part of some of the onlookers that they decide that they must catch him to vivisect his brain. 'Tray' written in 1879 as one of the first series of the 'Dramatic Idyls', *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning, Complete from 1833 to 1868 and the Shorter Poems Thereafter* [1905], reset with additions 1940 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 596-97.

²⁸ Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (Paris: Baillière et fils, 1865), p. 48. Cited in Lansbury, *Old Brown Dog*, pp. 162-63.

²⁹ Elston, 'Women and Anti-Vivisection in Victorian England', p. 279.

³⁰ Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast*, p. 54.

³¹ See Henry Bett, *Dora Greenwell* (London: Epworth Press, 1950), p. 25.

³² See Nash, *The Rights of Nature*.

³³ Coral Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers, and Vivisection in Edwardian England* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 83.

³⁴ Sarah Grand, *The Beth Book* [1898], (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994).

³⁵ McFall is thought to have been involved in a Lock Hospital. See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 146.

³⁶ Grand, *Beth Book*, pp. 440-41. Grand coined the phrase 'new woman' and Bland records that she was a cyclist and member of the Rational Dress Society.

³⁷ Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog*, p. 94.

³⁸ See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 66 and 69.

³⁹ There is only one recent book-length introduction to Michael Field in print: Emma Donoghue, *We Are Michael Field* (Bath: Absolute Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ Mrs. R. B. Nicholletts, Honorary Secretary of the South Somerset Branch of the R.S.P.C.A., 'Our Allies and Auxiliaries: The Bristol and West of England Anti-Vivisection Society', *The Animals'*

Friend, 4 (November 1897), 24-28. Manuscript reference: Bristol Reference Library: Ref.Lib.Pr.2.Pb.Societies.IB. B3112.

⁴¹ See Donoghue, *We Are Michael Field*, p. 33. Donoghue notes 'feminism and animals rights often went hand in hand in those days'.

⁴² This society was later named the Bristol and West Society for the Total Abolition of Vivisection, which was affiliated to Cobbe's breakaway BUAV. Indeed, Bristol was long to remain a centre for antivivisectionist organization. Cobbe attended meetings for antivivisectionism and women's suffrage in Clifton as early as 1877 (*Life*, I, p. 287). Maitland records that Kingsford and he included Bristol and Clifton on their 'chiefly anti-vivisection' lecture tour of 1885. He recalled: 'At Bristol our labours were largely increased by a newspaper controversy in which we bore a plentiful part', *Anna Kingsford*, II, p. 246. The BUAV was founded at Bristol by Cobbe, its first President, at a public meeting on 14 June 1898 and was first based at 20 The Triangle, Bristol. The Bristol and West of England Anti-Vivisection Society formed the Central Section of the Union which incorporated societies from York, Macclesfield, Liverpool, together with the Electoral Anti-Vivisection League. See Emma Hopley, *Campaigning Against Cruelty: The Hundred Year History of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection* (London: B.U.A.V., 1998).

⁴³ However, many suffragettes were staunchly antivivisectionist. President of the Women's Freedom League Charlotte Despard, for example, was one of the many vice-presidents of the Animal Defence and Anti-Vivisection Society and spoke at the largest gathering of the first wave of the antivivisection movement, the International Anti-Vivisection and Animal Protection Congress in 1909. See *The Animals' Cause. International Anti-Vivisection Congress, held at the Caxton Hall, Westminster, London, July 6th-10th, 1909*, ed. by Louise Lind-Af-Hageby (London: Animal Defence and Anti-Vivisection Society, [1909]).

⁴⁴ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, p. 162.

⁴⁵ Elston, 'Women and Anti-Vivisection in Victorian England', p. 282.



CONCLUSION: ECOLOGICAL SELFISHNESS AND THE ACCOMMODATION OF THE OTHER

I remember [...] coming to the distinct conclusion that there were only two things really worth living for – the glory and beauty of Nature, and the glory and beauty of human love and friendship.

(Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*)¹

*The same spirit of sympathy and fraternity that broke the black man's manacles and is to-day melting the white woman's chains will to-morrow emancipate the working man and the ox; and, as the ages bloom and the great wheels of the centuries grind on, the same spirit shall banish Selfishness from the earth, and convert the planet finally into one unbroken and unparalleled spectacle of *PEACE, AFFECTION, and ALLELUIA*.*

(J. Howard Moore, *Universal Kinship*)²

It is now necessary to draw together some of the ways in which I feel that the representations of the natural world in the texts discussed in this study are pertinent to fundamental issues about individual and social well-being. I have suggested that we should be especially attentive to the problems, contradictions and diversity of representation that appear when factors such as gender and class complicate the celebration of the natural world. The foregoing argument has taken an anthropocentric, though hopefully not narrowly utilitarian, approach by exploring a variety of claims for the beneficial value of nature for human well-being (although it is acknowledged that non-human biota may have intrinsic value). William Wordsworth's account of 'love of nature leading to love of man' appears as a central claim in *The Prelude*. Using Wordsworth's proposition, I have taken licence to ask a slightly reformulated question: 'in what ways might a positive engagement with the natural world have beneficial consequences for human well-being?'³

There are, of course, many aspects to such an open question and it has been necessary to consider these within categories of individual and social well-being. There were claims (explored in Chapters 3 and 4) for the efficacy of natural history made by Romantic writers such as Charlotte Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Hazlitt, who all contemplated the love of nature and argued that nature study had precise social benefits. In 'Nature Writing and Human Flourishing' I suggested that Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Kellert's explicitly ecological 'biological basis for human values of nature' now offer more thoroughgoing conceptual frameworks for considering the contribution of engagement with the natural world to human well-being. I have adapted the multiple gradations in the models of Maslow and Kellert into three broad categories for understanding the empowering aspects

of human interaction with the natural world: the physical, the social and psychological and the spiritual and ontological.

It is necessary to recall that Maslow cautioned that the pyramidal structure of his model was merely a conceptual aid to discriminating between categories of human motivation and ought not to be interpreted as implying that physical needs were subordinate to intellectual or spiritual ones.⁴ He favoured, rather, an integrative response to the evaluation of human needs. Advances in neurophysiology suggest, for example, that the feelings of well-being experienced during moments of stimulating exercise in the natural world have their physical expression in a healthy release of endorphins, and that complex emotional responses are made possible by the neurochemical conversion of sensory experience into signals acted upon by the amygdala in the cerebral lobes.⁵ For ecopsychologists, human well-being and social progress are not to be achieved by the suppression of physical experience and the domination and exploitation of the natural environment, but through the healthy integration of physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions. This approach is evident in the Romantic revaluation of the relationship with the natural world and the familiar environmentalist affirmation of qualities such as interconnectedness, sustainability and biodiversity. In this aversion to dominance and emphasis upon respect for difference, there are close similarities between aspirations to an enhanced relationship to non-human nature and those qualities of intimacy and egalitarianism encouraged in human partnerships in contemporary liberal culture. Despite the biological imperatives emphasized by Kellert, the exact expression of human needs and the drives that they create are socially determined and mediated.

Affection for, or indeed hostility toward, nature, is, therefore, complicated by the phenomenological problem that literary representations of 'nature' are not constant but determined by the particular, and shifting subject positions of the writers and readers concerned. In conjoining the noumenal world and the subjective, phenomenal world, nature writing is a mediated space in which reminiscence, projection and fantasy overwrite the landscape and its inhabitants; by doing so it becomes descriptive not only of the heart of the countryside but of the countryside of the heart. It follows that this is not a social history of the countryside between 1775 and 1900 but an account of the imagined (though nevertheless materially embedded and often meticulously observed) non-human realm, a literary history of the natural world as the springhead of imaginative existence. Subject position determines the context in which attitudes to 'nature' are problematicized and contested. Do the preservation and celebration, or rather the exploitation of a particular species or locality best enhance human quality of life? If so, who benefits, in what circumstances, and by what

means? Such questions continue to form the substance of environmental debates, whether they are concerned with animal experimentation, the exploitation of a new oilfield and its implications for global climate change or the construction of a road in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

In its most expansive historical sweep, the emergence of Romantic nature sympathy may be explained by the profound transformation of the human relationship to the natural world generated by the scientific and industrial revolutions, a process resulting in the phenomenon that Max Weber described as the 'disenchantment of the earth'.⁶ Part of the cultural response to such a transformation has been the unease, regret and resistance that characterizes the Romantic revaluation of the human self and its relationship to its non-human others. Such a revaluation challenges the idea of an archetypal split between self and 'opposed other' that is frequently gendered in Western dualist conventions.

Furthermore, Romantic nature sympathy seeks to match quantitative aspirations to progress with more qualitative visions. Blake's 'world in a grain of sand' is rendered sacred not by its quantity but for its unexpectedly powerful quality as an image of the correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm. As an eclectic body of thought, the many voices of Romantic environmentalism have most characteristically expressed themselves through the critique of a perceived alienation from 'nature' and against the process that, since Marx, has been conceived as the commodification of the living world.

Since at least the Early Modern Period there has been an ongoing cultural negotiation about the natural world, one informed by prevailing ideas about human identity, and often articulated through the representative tropes of the living world itself.⁷ The origins of secular autobiography in Rousseau, Chateaubriand and Wordsworth, the emergence of dialectical and phenomenological theory, the immense social upheaval of industrialization accompanied by the appropriating and commodifying powers of industrial capitalism, the limits to growth identified by Malthus, which in turn facilitated the Darwinian revolution: all these significantly structure Western thinking about the relationship to the physical world today. Since the valorization of contact with nature, most notably associated with Rousseau and Wordsworth, attitudes to the natural environment have been intimately linked to discussions and controversies concerning human progress and moral improvement. For example, the difference of emphasis between those sympathetic 'changing sensibilities', documented by Thomas, and the imperialist will to dominate, identified by Mackenzie, is one that continues to exemplify contested views of human nature through radically contrasting estimations of the value of the natural world.

The ecocritical groundwork undertaken by Bate and Kroeber offers a basis to examine a range of less canonical Romantic texts that confirm and complement, but also occasionally diverge from, and possibly contest, the Wordsworthian narrative of improvement. I have attempted to demonstrate that the Romantic valorization of nature expressed itself in a myriad different ways. As opposed to a single 'Romantic Ecology' predominantly based upon the Wordsworthian canon (like the traditional Romantic studies which critics have been occupied in challenging and revising during recent decades), I suggest that our assessment of the love of non-human 'nature' during this period should examine the way in which perceptions are contingent upon plural subject identities. Gender, in particular, is a critically important factor when re-examining Romantic and Victorian nature writing.

Bate and Kroeber have established Wordsworth as the exemplary Romantic nature writer and indeed, in some senses, it is a mantle that fits him perfectly. However, a perspective that looks beyond Wordsworth's major works to take in a variety of less canonical authors, and many genre forms requires some correctives to the Wordsworthian image of the nature lover as a solitary walker and contemplative. While these writings are not antipathetic to Wordsworth (indeed, most are deeply admiring of his work), there is a greater literary diversity in which many writers tell us more about the natural world itself than Wordsworth, who wrote of the 'love of nature' but never turned his hand to natural history writing.

Attention to the phenomenology of self in relation to nature reveals the difference that subject position makes to the apprehension and representation of the living world. I have specifically focused upon the importance of gender, both because (as I argue in Chapter 5), it affects access to the countryside and because literature concerned with the natural environment is crucially marked by representations of gender identity. The convention that labelled women as inherently more 'natural beings' was frequently invoked to confine them to the private, reproductive sphere. To stray from roles designated as natural was to invite hostility and the assertion of literary subjectivity entailed a breaking away from such 'natural' expectations. Conservative critics of rights discourse, such as Burke and Polwhele worried that calamity would accompany any forgetfulness of the determining influence of 'nature' upon human behaviour.

In classical mythology, the earth goddesses Persephone and Demeter represent the apotheosis of the idea of women as natural beings. Persephone is the female earth deity compelled to circle in perpetuity between the radiant beauties of the diurnal earth and the

immanent prison of the underworld. As such she is a ready trope for the deeply anomalous predicament of humanity in Western culture, caught in the tension between existence as fleshly beings and the propensity of prevailing Judaeo-Christian beliefs to identify ultimate happiness with the transcendence of the corporeal and material in a spiritualized, heavenly afterlife. From the Shelleys' preoccupation with Proserpine (the Roman version of the tale), to the poems of Swinburne and Tennyson and the opulent pre-Raphaelite representations of Persephone, this myth represents an image of transformation and mediation between realms of difference. The three aspects of womanhood embodied in the goddesses Persephone, Demeter and Hecate have formed an enduring and adaptable imaginary mythiopoiesis. A conventional feminist interpretation of the myth – that patriarchal interference provokes female defiance and a barren and frozen planet – can clearly also serve as an ecological parable.⁸ Historically, the loss of the young goddess was understood to represent the dying vegetation at the old year's close.

The identification of woman *with* nature, however, as a persistent allegory of female immanence, has long been one felt to have ambiguous implications in feminist circles. While some ecofeminists celebrate the association, socialist feminists, keen to avoid the problematic attribution of intuition and corporeality to women, are more sceptical. They invoke the embedding of the female in biologically essentialist definitions as the foundation of gender oppression. Social ecologist Janet Biehl, for example, has challenged the Mother Earth identification (see Chapter 1), and has been controversially critical of the kind of gendered hylozoism involved in presenting the Earth as a female organism.⁹ In our own time, several feminists, such as Donna Haraway and the political montage artist Barbara Krueger, have been particularly critical of the nature/female association.

However, the escape of women *to* the natural environment and away from patriarchal society is a different matter. 'Michael Field' (two writers fond of the Persephone myth) preferred the 'thrills of the country', complaining to Robert Browning that 'suburbs are dreary' in a letter of 1883, an early expression of a sentiment soon to carry the burden of cliché.¹⁰ In ongoing correspondence, Katherine Bradley further linked the countryside to women's freedom of speech:

And we have many things to say that the world will not tolerate from a woman's lips. We must be free as dramatists to work out in the open air of nature – exposed to her vicissitudes, witnessing her terrors: we cannot be stifled in drawing-room conventionalities. In Clifton we have made a desperate fight for the freedom of our own privacy.¹¹

Certainly the Persephone myth is open to several interpretations, offering an allegorical force that may be extended beyond straightforward depictions of female earth goddesses.¹² While the precise details of this continually reworked, archetypal story are fluid, Robert Graves, who considers the cross-cultural traditions in detail in *Greek Myths* (1955), suggests that the tale 'refers to male usurpation of the female agricultural mysteries in primitive times'.¹³ For my purposes the Persephone myth is an apt motif because she is an inspirational figure who celebrates earthly existence, yet nevertheless strives for the assertion of a self that is realized in revolt against her patriarchal condition. Unlike many Western myths which privilege otherworldly joys above earthly suffering, the tale of Persephone celebrates the grounded, earthly state as one that is desirable for its vibrancy and colour. When she is in the earthly realm she is an active agent, able to act upon nature and give definition to the seasons. She has affinity with natural life-forms but couples this sense of bonding with a liberatory impulse to break away from the fate of perpetual imprisonment in the underworld. However, Persephone's liberation consists not only in her identification with the creative forces of fertility and regeneration, but in the strength derived from the acceptance of death as a natural process; interruption and separation are consonant with a fuller sense of continuity and union. As an embodiment of the natural processes of death and fecundity, Persephone represents a mediation between the masculine (Pluto's wintry Hades) and feminine (Demeter's summery Earth) polarities of creative regeneration. In Romantic thought, there is a long-standing symmetry between such vegetative creativity, with its synergy of life and death, and the allegorical process of poetic creativity itself through which the human mind ever recycles the raw material of the world into new forms. Persephone embodies such creative tensions because she mediates between boundaries, thriving in the provisional threshold of change.

Tensions between the natural and cultural are particularly apparent in the tropes of the living world I have explored, whether solitary wandering, cultivation or apes. 'Natural' roles have traditionally been used to limit possibilities for social change. At the same time, for women, active participation and interest in the study of non-human nature provided opportunities to enrich circumstances and extend opportunities. Many of the Romantic and Victorian texts I have examined reflect women's involvement in the revaluation and celebration of the natural world, and in the ontological repositioning and revision of biology made necessary by the Darwinian understanding of human immanence in nature. This contribution has been contemporaneous with the social endeavour to elevate and re-value women themselves since the eighteenth century.

I have aimed to offer a contributionist account by tracing some of the ways in which nature writing and nature study have advanced women's social aspirations in terms of mobility, education and opportunities to participate in science and politics. This approach has invited a journey through hitherto neglected aspects of literature, including the presence of natural history in educational curricula (Chapter 6), mid-Victorian writings about seaweed (Chapter 8) and the concern for animal welfare demonstrated by writers usually read for other reasons, such as Ann Radcliffe and Michael Field (Chapters 10 and 12).

Cultural prescriptions often placed obstacles in the paths of women which limited free access to the countryside and in consequence restricted the study of nature that Wordsworth advocated. Some writers were circumspect about adopting a public voice as female authors. On some occasions wild nature was experienced as a dangerous terrain, yet on others as a place of refuge from domestic and political threats. More positively, women's participation in nature writing, rambling and natural history was important as a liberating force that contributed to progressive gains in gender parity. Furthermore, the different levels of response to the natural world, from the solitary encounter, to the participation of kin, friends and fellow enthusiasts, to collective strategies for the understanding and protection of nature, were also influenced by gender (as demonstrated in the counterbalancing Chapters 4 and 5). The solitary male, for example, was a trope of aspiration, while the solitary woman was an anomaly.

I have suggested that women often participated in natural history as a shared activity. Nature study was one area of collective activity, in which interpersonal contact – to exchange knowledge and specimens in the gregarious setting of the field trip – could be retained against the course of mass industrial society which, according to critics, such as Dickens, Ruskin and Marx, has, perhaps paradoxically, tended towards atomistic and conformist versions of 'individualism' and restricted intimacy in social relations. While there was some hostility to the influence of Linnaean botany as a way of introducing libertarian sex education by covert means, the encouragement of women's involvement with the study of plants nevertheless progressively facilitated a broader scientific education and became an incentive to explore the countryside. In practice, most botany was constrained by prevailing ideas about separate spheres (made clear in Chapters 6-8) which assumed an ideal marital partnership in which the male and female couple were fused into a union based upon complementary difference.¹⁴ Within these familiarly divided roles, female 'accomplishments' were frequently designated amateur achievements, subordinate to professional male taxonomy, yet in practice there was scope for nineteenth-century women to excel in scientific ambitions otherwise foreclosed to them.

The eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility frequently articulated an ethic of care for animals. However, writers of many different persuasions, had already distanced themselves from much literature of sensibility by the century's close. Some, such as Wollstonecraft, felt that for women to celebrate sentimentalism in the manner of the 'man of feeling', involved identifying with emotionalist roles that were highly restrictive, yet she commended a version of sensibility grounded in active sympathy. Others, such as Hannah More, feared that excessive sentimentalism towards animals could lead to an irresponsible neglect of duty towards humans. Yet the literature of sensibility (that features in Chapter 10), in its moral opposition to cruelty to humans and animals, laid much of the foundation for the more active and empowering social campaigns of the nineteenth century (Chapter 12). These opened up an important cultural space for women to participate in extraparlimentary political activity.¹⁵ In this context extraparlimentary organizations, whether the pressure group, the debating society or the educational institute, provided fora for women to become engaged in decision-making processes and contributed to the ideological shift necessary for the more tangible political advances of the twentieth century.

Both the literary practice of women's writing as the assertion of subjectivity and women's participation in natural history, ultimately contest and act as a corrective to prevailing reductionist forms of biological essentialism. From Wollstonecraft's time to the appearance of the organized women's movement at the nineteenth century's close, there was a gradual rejection of the separate-spheres model, although not one that culminated in its demise. In *The Second Sex* (1953), Simone De Beauvoir, an important standard-bearer for second wave feminism, analysed the contrast in Western culture between the traditional feminine role, with its immanent cycle of reproductive chores in the domestic sphere, and the transcendence of goal-oriented masculine roles, in the production-oriented public world.¹⁶ The aspiration to greater autonomy and personal agency is based upon a more fluid concept of gender identity. This was expressed, for instance, in the confluence of Victorian antivivisectionism and suffragism, in which women such as Cobbe and Charlotte Despard, excluded from parliamentary politics, became prominent public campaigners.

There are three areas in particular in which nature study, social progress and the improvement of conditions for women became entwined during the Romantic and Victorian periods.

i. Time spent on nature study was regarded as an activity that at once confounded ennui and habits of dissipation, and encouraged physical exercise and intellectual development, and

ultimately, though more controversially, self-reliance rather than ‘accomplishments’ in the context of dependent domestic situations.

ii. The extension of the idea of rights had implications for both women’s social status and human attitudes to other species.

iii. The value placed upon sympathy, a gendered notion and one that accounted for the mechanism by which humanity succeeded as a social species, called for progress to be achieved by imaginative identification with others and through more altruistic behaviour. For some, the phenomenon of sympathy substantiated the social and environmentalist rejection of dualistic modes of thought. An emphasis upon the kinship of life forms challenged the definition of self identity by antithesis which conventionally privileged qualities designated masculine and cultural, thus sustaining patriarchy and devaluing the non-human in a way that formed the context for the repression of the animal or corporeal ‘other’. During the twentieth century, an ontological transformation in notions of identity called for a conception of an interconnected, and ultimately ecological, self.

These themes are historically contingent and I have endeavoured to remain sensitive to the ways in which the context of these debates has continued to be (often radically) revised and contested between 1775, 1900 and the present. Together, such improving impulses offer strategies (increasingly humanistic rather than theological) for the transformation of self and society, and encourage an enlarged ontological vision of a person’s particular aspirations in the vastness of an inhuman physical world that might otherwise threaten to overwhelm the self in existential nullity.

Many writers, such as Charlotte Smith and William Cobbett, have suggested that creative activity was one way to defeat such lack of purpose and emptiness and to accommodate oneself to the world. Engagement with the living world could take the form of a range of activities whether sketching landscapes, nature rambling, outdoor sports, gardening, campaigning for open spaces or collecting natural objects in the manner of Mary Anning, the famous fossil-hunter. For the Edgeworths, women, especially, could benefit from studying living things rather than indulging in distractions more dangerous to personal reputation:

Women, who cultivate their reasoning powers, and who acquire tastes for science and literature, find sufficient variety in life, and do not require the *stimulus* of dissipation, or of romance. Their sympathy and sensibility are engrossed by proper objects, and connected with habits of useful exertion: they usually feel the

affection which others profess, and actually enjoy the happiness which others describe.¹⁷

Perhaps the surest correlation between human improvement and better treatment for the natural world that came to prominence during the Romantic period, is the extension of the notion of rights. Barker-Benfield even goes so far as to suggest that 'sentimental fiction's contribution towards revolutionising attitudes toward animals was a kind of surrogate feminism'.¹⁸ Developments in women's participation in natural history and animal protection took place alongside the democratic revolution in so far as women's demands for inclusion in education, science and extraparliamentary organizations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made way for the further gains in political egalitarianism during the twentieth century. These processes were not simply parallel but mutually defining in their developments and outcomes. Such demands were often contested within works that feature natural history, for example in Plumptre's mockery of female botany, or D'Israeli's caricature of scientific women. Ironically, patriarchal arguments for the maintenance of the separate spheres were frequently based on the convention of women's inherent closeness to nature and that it was therefore against nature for writers such as Wollstonecraft to agitate for the right of inclusion in the public cultural sphere. This places a theoretical obstacle against the support of some ecofeminists for a progressive identification with 'nature'.

It has frequently been suggested that the gradual extension of the liberal discourse of rights from the exclusively applied Rights of Man, established during the American and French Revolutions, to include other major human constituencies – the working classes, all ethnic and religious groupings and women – has its final concomitant in the widening of the circle to embrace non-human animals and even plants or mountains. Again the idea is an eighteenth century one. Taylor facetiously suggested that 'brutes' should have rights as a part of his satire upon the rights of women and that this 'sublime theory' be soon extended to 'vegetables, minerals, and even the most apparently contemptible clod of earth'.¹⁹ John Lawrence more seriously advocated the case for animal welfare in terms of rights in his *Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses* (1796), referring in one chapter, entitled 'The Rights of Beasts', to the nation's 'four-legged, and mute citizens'.²⁰ Lawrence's book particularly brings together the ideas of rights and sympathy, asserting the continuity of humans and 'beasts' and suggesting that if both possess a 'vital spark' (*Treatise*, I, p. 120), and justice is indivisible, then it follows that both should be protected from cruelty. Speaking of the '*argumentum Sympatheticum*', he proclaims 'the nearest road to perfect humanity, is strongly to impress its necessity, beauty, and excellence, upon the hearts and minds of the rising generation' (*Treatise*, I, pp. 137-38).²¹ Peacock combined feminist ideas

and assertive womanhood with a sympathetic if unlikely representation of an orang-utan in *Melincourt*. Henry Salt wrote *Animals' Rights*, an important assertion of the idea in the 1890s, while Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* was one of the most prominent works of the late twentieth-century movement for animals. Contributors to *The Great Ape Project* have since mounted a serious ontological challenge to the concept of personhood in their attempts to enshrine in law certain minimal standards for the well-being of the anthropoid apes. John Seed's essay collection, *Thinking Like a Mountain* (1988), presents a number of writers who have contemplated the implications of extending the idea still further.²² Mick Smith is a partial dissident from this view, fearing that in reality the idea of 'an expanding circle of moral considerability, a history of moral progress in our relations to nature' amounts to a modernist myth, obscuring 'the empirical evidence of environmental devastation and the increasing objectification and commodification of the life-world'.²³ However, Smith's work ultimately amounts to a complementary corrective to Mathews's concept of the ecological self, insisting that it is only viable as an approach if synthesized with an 'ecological habitus' (*Ethics of Place*, pp. 203-4) in which environmental theory is not abstracted but embedded in an ethical practice that engages with particular localities in which 'the other is not [...] *reduced to us* but is *revealed* as something that must be conserved in its difference to us (*Ethics of Place*, p. 188).'

The extension of the circle of respect for others over the past two centuries has led to current environmental theory about 'ecocentric' or 'biocentric' valuing of the non-human advocated by deep ecologists, building upon the theories of Arne Naess.²⁴ While deep ecological claims for valuations of other organisms and environments in their own right, and according to their own measure of realization, might sometimes be compelling ones, I have deliberately avoided such an approach given my focus upon the consequences of the ongoing negotiation with the natural world for human culture. This is founded upon the anthropocentric proposition that as experiencing subjects humans can only assess the non-human in terms of their own culturally conditioned perceptions of it. Even biocentric accounts, such as Paul Taylor's *Respect for Nature*, are, primarily, concerned with questions of human nature and identity.

The rejection of dualistic ways of thinking that designated women and other species as 'other' to culture was also apparent in early environmentalist ideas about sympathy as a means of breaking down such oppositions. These dualisms are conceptually gendered, resting as they do upon conventionally gendered binary distinctions such as nature and culture, emotion and reason. Salt, speaking of his hopes for 'that "Return to Nature" of which Rousseau was the prophet', wrote:

Let it not for a moment be supposed that an acceptance of the gospel of Nature implies an abandonment or depreciation of intellect – on the contrary, it is the assertion that reason itself can never be at its best, can never be truly rational, except when it is in perfect harmony with the deep-seated emotional instincts and sympathies that underlie all thought.²⁵

Salt's vision of individual and cultural 'fulfillment' predicated upon what he termed 'universal benevolence' (apparently alluding to Andrew Carnegie's social Darwinist notion of the 'Gospel of Wealth' of 1889), represents a particularly pure instance of Victorian anti-capitalist Romanticism in its underlying rejection of dualistic thinking.

In *Gothic Feminism* (1998), Diane Long Hoeveler describes capitalism as 'that greatest of dualism machines'.²⁶ If the cultural materialist principle that a shift in the material conditions of a society inevitably finds its cultural expression, is well-founded, and I believe it is, then it is to be expected that the industrializing and urbanizing trend in economic development would meet its dialectical response in some version of the Romantic valorization of nature. The environmental geographer Tuan suggests that 'at the back of the romantic appreciation of nature is the privilege and wealth of the city'.²⁷ I have made use of Sayre and Löwy's idea of anti-capitalism as a feature that unites otherwise disparate strains of Romanticism, a countervailing force that comes to the fore when the destructive consequences of capitalism become apparent in social inequity or environmental destruction. Paradoxically, therefore, Romantic environmentalism is produced and sustained by, and is on some occasions complicit with, the very forces of industrial capitalism which it opposes.²⁸

Most fearful in its consequences has been the ideology that makes dualistic opposition its *sine qua non*: fascism. Zygmunt Bauman (1989) contentiously attributes the Holocaust not to the sudden aberrant appearance of a collective psychopathic and sadistic mentality, but rather to the psychology of bureaucratic authoritarianism as an essential precondition for genocidal practice in a modern industrial state. The pseudo-science of National Socialism attempted to draw an absolute distinction between the heroically human and the subhuman *Untermensch*, one profoundly counter to a progressive realization of human culture and corrosive of, to use Bookchin's phrase, the spirit of a 'universal *humanitas*'. Such a psychology is based upon the idea and practice of specialization and the implementation of what Bauman terms the 'functional division of labour' producing 'social distance' so that each individual who participates in collectively harmful activities appears to be absolved of personal responsibility.²⁹ At their best, Romantic and environmental traditions of thought

scrutinize the diversity of component parts in the physical world in order to attain conceptual or moral clarity, aspiring to achieve a more holistic understanding by identifying larger patterns of interconnection in natural processes and structures, rather than imposing a totalizing framework upon the natural world. The most promising versions of these traditions, therefore, attend to local and bioregional obligations without imploding into xenophobia, remaining mindful of internationalist, planetary perspectives. For writers such as Bookchin, the recognition of interconnection should be accommodated without losing the rationalist gains of discrimination on which rests the subjectivity and agency that make civilization, in its positive sense, possible.

In addressing the Romantic idea that valuing the natural world contributes to human flourishing, it is necessary to consider the phenomenology of the relationship between self and other. This ontological problem unites theories about the interactional self in society described by Jagtenberg and McKie,³⁰ with ecopsychological ideas which promote the desirability of evolving an ecological self. As I have indicated, for some feminists too, the key emancipationist demand for women's fuller subjectivity in the public world, should be accompanied by an awareness of the limitations and delusions of 'individualism'. Theorists such as Nancy Chodorow (1978) have therefore advocated the extended or relational self of connection rather than the appropriating and competitive tendencies of the egotistical self.³¹ This is in keeping with the idea that self-realization, a key term for both social psychologists, such as Maslow, and phenomenological environmentalists, such as Naess, is to be achieved by the synergic resolution of self with other, matter and spirit, reason and feeling, advocated by many Romantic and Victorian writers. Carpenter, for example, described the idea of 'inner realization and union', arguing:

Our union with Nature and humanity is a *fact*, which – whether we recognize it or not – is at the base of our lives; slumbering yet ready to wake in our consciousness when the due time arrives.³²

By addressing the narrow introspection of conventional, egotistical 'selfishness', the ecological self is consonant with deconstructionist understandings of the self and other as mutually contingent and affirming rather than founded upon the more traditional proposition that it is defined by antithesis through the opposition or suppression of its others. Mathews's account of the ecological self, informed by the insights of the new physics, challenges and transforms the notion of the discrete self that relies upon sustaining dualisms. The enlargement of what Hardy termed 'altruistic morals', as the logical corollary to Darwin's hypothesis, likewise militated against the fallacy that Richard Dawkins later characterized as the discontinuous species self (discussed in Chapter Eleven). Few linked and pursued such

ideas of altruism, self-improvement and the 'world's redemption' with more zeal than Anna Kingsford, who, writes Edward Maitland, pushed herself through a medical education because of her personal creed of 'purity of diet, compassion for the animals, the exaltation of womanhood, and mental and moral unfoldment through the purification of the organism'.³³ This inclusion of other species in moral consideration has significantly paralleled the political extension of empowerment to include broader human constituencies dating from the late eighteenth century, especially women, non-Europeans and the non-propertyed, a correlation recognized at the time. Indeed, the convention that sympathy for animals was a feminine quality gives the representation of the relationship with other species a significant gender inflection. During the 'humanitarian' age the idea emerged that we are rendered most human(e) when we express respect, sympathy or compassion for the non-human, thus redeeming our species' self-esteem.

The idea has thus developed that when we so act we ground respect for the welfare of other humans on the surest footing and contribute towards the realization of our selves as moral agents. It has long been argued that the attribute of sympathetic awareness – and responsibility this entails – makes humanity unique as a morally concerned species. The capacity for sympathy was central to Macaulay's ideas for social improvement:

A cat worries its prey, without considering whether she is doing evil, or the contrary; but man has sympathy in his nature, and his knowledge of the relation of things causes him to put himself in the place of the sufferer, and thus to acquire ideas of equity, and the utility of benevolence, which, as far as it is improved, will carry us in an opposite line from cruelty, or unnecessary slaughter.³⁴

At the point at which the human subject, through literary or artistic representation, imaginatively recognizes something of his or her *own* suffering in that of another, the foundation of concern shifts from that of sympathy for another being's situation to one of empathy, based upon the most human capacity to embrace a vision beyond individual consciousness, thus developing the possibility of an expanded self. Enlightened self-interest, therefore, is best served by living in a more just society. Albert Schweitzer pursued and refined this idea when he advocated his famous ethic of 'reverence for life' in the early twentieth century.

Such a quality is dependent upon our species' capacity for reflexive self-consciousness while continuing to be embedded and immanent within organic nature; an ambivalent status conceptualized as the condition of 'second nature' by social ecologists such as Bookchin and Biehl, and accounting for the phenomenon of biophilia identified by E. O. Wilson.

Lovelock, in his speculative epilogue to *Gaia*, wondered whether humanity might constitute the self-consciousness of his proposed planetary organism.³⁵ Like Wilson, he suspected that the human susceptibility to the aesthetic beauty of nature might be due to an evolutionary sense of pleasure in a balanced, healthy and diverse environment.³⁶ For Bookchin, an advanced consciousness in social evolution, in which cultural forms are created which are in harmony with the non-human world, would be a state of 'free nature'. The capacity to develop an expanded environmental consciousness at the level of individual ontogeny therefore has profound consequences for the evolving social phylogeny of humanity as a species.

After the home and the social realm, the natural world is the domain that most reassuringly sustains the idea that the individual self is best realized through an accommodation with its social and environmental surroundings. Bachelard wrote: 'the real beginnings of images, if we study them phenomenologically, will give concrete evidence of the values of inhabited space, of the not-I that protects the I'.³⁷ Our immediate natural surroundings frequently amount to what Bachelard's terms a 'eulogized space'; indeed, it follows that our very exposure in open country complements and confirms the enclosure of a secure home. To develop a sense of awareness of the continuity of self and the rest of living world grounds one in that world and goes some way to healing a sense of alienation experienced in modern industrial society. A sense of dwelling and bonding beyond the confines of the home environment contributes to a fuller orientation and grounding by contextualizing one's way of being in the universe. An understanding of such interconnections makes one mindful, gives a richer meaning to individual actions; having a coherent world-view is in itself essential to mental health and creative existence. Opposition to environmental destruction, pollution and animal cruelty, therefore generates a personal sense of purpose and fulfillment, and provides a logical framework for the infinite number of choices and decisions of everyday life.³⁸

The cultural struggle against the appropriation and exploitation of beings which are designated 'other' has implications for both social relations and the treatment of the natural environment. Ideas of improvement are historically contingent and have become progressively secularized during the past two centuries. Post-theological groundings for the value of non-human life often hold that consideration for natural surroundings orients us in the world and aestheticizes the experience of living with beauty and mystery – the foundation of human artistic culture.³⁹ Global and local destruction of the natural environment logically entails, therefore, a profoundly deleterious effect upon subjective consciousness. Culture has always defined itself, at least in part, in relation to the non-

human, so it logically follows that destructive redefinition of the natural environment on a wide scale might entail negative consequences for human society. Environmentalist perspectives – and for Sayre and Löwy the green movement is an ongoing strain of Romanticism – therefore identify human quality of life, self interest and even ontological coherence with the continued presence of a natural environment that possesses substantial agency and autonomy. It may be that only by shifting perceptions to a more enlightened sense of self interest is it possible to address the paradox that, over the past two centuries, and during the past four decades in particular, growth of environmental awareness has been simultaneous with unprecedented degradation of the living world.

The idea that individual health is dependent upon the quality of bonds with others, within the context of optimum environmental conditions, suggests that, in order to flourish and realize our potential, human interest ultimately lies in identifying with the vitality and well-being of what is other to, and outside, the bounded self. When self-realization is attained, autonomy and reciprocity are held in creative tension because, (as Naess suggests), all organisms exist in a wider relational milieu. If such polarities were to be positively addressed, the fecundity of human creative thought and environmental integrity might be more effectively realized. The Romantic exploration of the uncertain cusp between nature and culture remains critically important. It is true that all margins *are* dangerous. But liberation consists of the accommodation of such tensions. Thus is Persephone unbound.

¹ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 302.

² J. Howard Moore, *The Universal Kinship* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1906), p. 329.

³ While I have offered a sympathetic analysis of the proposition that there *are* a number of forceful and progressive individual and social benefits to be derived from a respectful and caring attitude to the natural environment, this territory is by its very nature speculative as the kind of social interrogation and experimentation necessary to quantify such qualitative factors as quality of life, aesthetic and spiritual benefits would be almost by definition impossible to design and evaluate. My concern here therefore is with an examination of some of the literature that debates and complicates this proposition.

⁴ Bookchin notes the imposition of *social characteristics* when the functions of higher and lower in the brain are presented in the form of hierarchical stratification. This, he suggests, is to introduce a misconstrued and unwarranted class bias that reflects an ideological presumption of social hierarchy in the realm of the neurological. See *Ecology of Freedom*, p. 113.

⁵ Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (London: Allen Lane; Penguin 1997), pp. 371-72.

⁶ A borrowing from Friedrich Schiller, used by Weber in his essay 'Science as a Vocation', *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* [1948], new edn trans. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 155.

⁷ Human society, for instance, has been represented as a beehive (Bernard Mandeville), a body (Thomas Hobbes), a plant or tree (Edmund Burke) and an organism (Herbert Spencer); a rhetorical practice perhaps as old as political society itself.

⁸ The myth of Persephone and Demeter, like the debate about the female identification with the Earth, has received keenly contested interpretations, given that, as Virgina Hyde writes, the tale lends itself to 'both patriarchal and matriarchal implications'. "'Lost Girls': D. H. Lawrence's Version of Persephone", in *Images of Persephone: Feminist Readings in Western Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth T. Hayes (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 100.

⁹ See *Finding Our Way* (p. 78), in which Biehl attacks hylozoism as a form of reductionism comparable to mechanism, fearing that the complexity of the earth is depreciated if it is diminished in a single image.

¹⁰ 'Michael Field' Correspondence Vol. VII (letter 118) presented by Mrs. M. Sturge-Moore, Brit.Mus.Additional MS 46, 866. Stoke Green, Stoke Bishop, Bristol, K. H. to R. B., Dec 31st 1883.

¹¹ 'Michael Field' Correspondence Vol. VII (letter 17) presented by Mrs. M. Sturge-Moore, Brit.Mus.Additional MS 46, 866. Stoke Green, Stoke Bishop, Bristol, K. H. to R. B., Sunday Even. Nov 23rd 1884.

¹² Indeed, in the Homeric version of the myth, the white narcissus that initially lures Persephone away from her female friends, Athena and Artemis, thus leaving her vulnerable to capture by Hades, is grown and placed for this very purpose by Gaia, the Earth Mother, who is therefore in direct collaboration with him. See *Images of Persephone*, ed. by Hayes, pp. 195-97.

¹³ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: I* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p. 93.

¹⁴ Indeed, in the opinion of Sir William Blackstone, author of *Commentaries on the Laws of England* [1769], it was a legal truth that 'In marriage husband and wife are one person, and that person is the husband'. Cited in Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 24.

...ertain women could participate as householders in politics at the local government level, at least women remained excluded from the franchise throughout the period under study.

...to stand for election at the local level after 1907.

...voir, *The Second Sex* [1949], trans. and ed. by H. M. Parshley in 1953 (Penguin, 1972).

...geworth, *Practical Education*, II, p. 298.

...ulture of Sensibility, p. 236.

...of the Rights of Brutes, p. 103.

...Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses, and on the Moral Duties of the Creation, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1796), p. 123.

...ympatheticum' bears out Keynon-Jones's critical distinction between 'those who animals in order to emphasise their own difference from the beasts [such as those who wanted to treat beasts well because of animals' similarity to humans] as clearly one of the latter. See *Kindred Brutes*, p. 205.

...s history of the narrative of the expansion of rights (written mostly from an anthropological perspective) in *The Rights of Nature*. The phrase 'thinking like a mountain' was coined by

²⁴ The distinction is explained by Max Oelschlaeger thus: 'ecocentrism' pertains to primary value being vested in the integrity of a particular ecosystem or the natural environment as a whole; the emphasis of 'biocentrism' is one that assigns intrinsic value to individual organisms. See *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 292-93.

²⁵ Salt, *Animals' Rights*, p. 114.

²⁶ Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. 18.

²⁷ Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 103.

²⁸ To take a relevant example, for the nature poet or artist to communicate effectively is it necessary to produce for a market and to encourage a love for the countryside that might, in a painful irony, inspire the kind of touristic curiosity that leads to its erosion. The popularity of the verse of the Lake Poets, or the photography of Ansell Adams unquestionably helped to secure the future of the landscapes that they represented, but inevitably put physical pressure upon those qualities of freedom in the pastoral and wilderness respectively, which they celebrated.

²⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989).

³⁰ See Jagtenberg and McKie's discussion of G. H. Mead, *Eco-Impacts*, pp. 134-36.

³¹ Nancy Chodorow draws a distinction between the social cultivation of masculine (with an emphasis upon separation) and feminine (defined as more continuous with others and with more permeable ego boundaries) relational experiences, to suit the productive and reproductive expectations and requirements respectively. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), p. 169.

³² Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 303.

³³ Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, I, p. 20.

³⁴ Macaulay, *Letters on Education*, pp. 196-97.

³⁵ The idea that humanity constitutes 'nature rendered self-conscious' is one that Bookchin attributes to the German Romantic philosopher, Johann Fichte. See *Ecology of Freedom*, p. 315.

³⁶ See Lovelock, *Gaia*, p. 142.

³⁷ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 5.

³⁸ Kate Soper suggests that the development of an 'alternative hedonism' – gratifying personal needs in a low-impact and sustainable way – might be the most readily acceptable, libertarian, transition to a more environmentally benign society in the West, *What is Nature?*, p. 168.

³⁹ Although retaining strong religious faith, psychotherapist and Auschwitz survivor Viktor E. Frankl cites the love of nature, together with human love and artistic endeavour and appreciation, as indispensable factors in the struggle to forge and retain the beneficial 'meaning orientation' (p. 107) necessary for the human subject to sustain a coherent worldview and healthy mental life when confronted by the suffering and transitory nature of existence. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* [1946], rev. edn, trans. by Ilse Lasch (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), pp. 36-42.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My primary acknowledgements must go to my parents and my supervisors. Graham and Maureen Hunt are owed much love and thanks for their encouragement, generosity and patience, not only during six years it has taken to complete the present thesis but also during previous my work as an undergraduate at Bath Spa University College and as a Masters student at the University of York.

Equally, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the assistance and diligence of my supervisors for their invaluable support over the last six years: Mr Richard Kerridge (Bath Spa University College), Dr William Hughes (Bath Spa University College) and Dr Robin Jarvis (University of the West of England), Professor Jeremy Hooker (University of Aberystwyth), Dr. Jeff Rodman (formerly Bath Spa University College). I have also received invaluable support from the staff of the Graduate School at Bath Spa University College: Dr Paul Davies, Dr Gaynor Kavanagh, Mrs Alison Dagger and Mrs Jean Gardiner.

Additionally, I received essential assistance and unfailing support from the library staff and archivists at the following institutions: Bath Spa University College, Mr Nigel Paine of Bath Spa Slide Library, the British Library, The Bodleian Library, Bath Public Library, the University of the West of England, the University of Bath and the University of Bristol, University of Exeter.

As ever, love and mutual aid was received from Howard Lee and Fay Stevens, Joe Duncan (together with computer therapy), Stephen Churchill, Ruth Pooley, Martine Allen, Simon Skeritt, Diane Mason, Stephen Zweifel and Olga Gomez – together with countless cups of fair-trade tea and sympathy. Equally, Ceri Burton must be thanked for the lively discussion that initially inspired the project. It is also necessary to acknowledge the encouragement and inspiration of my comrades in the Green Discussion group with love and respect – Christopher Tyndale, Mary Van Reimsdyk, Dr John Wills and Dr Karen Jones, Graham Burgess, Tony Waterhouse, Gavin Withers, Katherine Wall and Nick Campion – as well as members of Bath Eco-Futures, the Bath Literary and Scientific Institute and the Bath Animal Rights/Earth First! group. Merlin contributed inter-species insight and created essential screen breaks by vocalizing his needs so expressively.

Much generosity was also forthcoming from members of the Association for Studies in Literature and the Environment (ASLE) and the wider academic network. The prompt and courteous assistance received from the following were particularly appreciated: Dr Juliet Brodie (Department of Applied Sciences, BSUC) who advised on phycological accuracy in Chapter Eight, Linda Beattie (RSPCA Enquiries Co-ordinator), Ann Dinsdale (Brontë Society Librarian), Emma Donaghue (novelist and playwright), Prof. David Goodman (Open University), Linda Irvine (curator at the Botany Department of the Natural History Museum, Kensington), Sarah Mason (BUAV), Dr James Ogden (University College of Wales at Aberystwyth), Chris Reed (RSPCA Information Officer), Linda Rhodes (Community Librarian, Barking Central Library), Prof. John Tallmadge (The Union Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio) and Prof. Donald Worster (University of Kansas).