VICTORIAN MICROCOSMS: ENVIRONMENTAL FORMALISM IN THE NOVEL

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This dissertation reveals how formal structures within the Victorian novel serve as techniques of enclosing – and thus rendering representable – large-scale climatic systems. These structures make legible an increasingly capacious vision of the environment in Victorian culture, a crucial context for tracing the history of anthropogenic climate change. By examining forms of scaling down, this project aims to address the conceptual problem of representing vast, seemingly intangible, entities: the terms "climate," "atmosphere," and "weather," which often prove murky, and even interchangeable, in contemporary discourse. The chapters evaluate these meteorological terms through close readings of novels that immerse us, perhaps unexpectedly, in the environmental: Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and *Between the Acts*. Ultimately, *Victorian Microcosms* argues that the enclosing structures within nineteenth-century British novels (as well as their modernist successors) entangle the human and more-than-human worlds, circumscribing literary ecologies that challenge assumptions of human dominance.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Elisabeth Strayer was raised in Amherst, Massachusetts. She received her A.B. from Bowdoin College in 2015, where she studied English and art history. As a member of Cornell's Department of Literatures in English, she has researched the intersection between Victorian studies and the environmental humanities, earning her M.A. in 2018 and her Ph.D. in 2021.

For my parents

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I. Scaling Down for the Anthropocene

It is nearly impossible to discuss the Anthropocene, our current geological epoch in which humans have become agents of climatic change, without considering the scalar shifts it occasions in reconfiguring understandings of space, temporality, and human-ecological entanglement. Speaking to the human-oriented nature of the term, the "anthropo-" itself, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, "To call human beings geological agents is to scale up our imagination of the human."[1] In accordance with Chakrabarty, Jesse Oak Taylor depicts the Anthropocene as occasioning a radical shift in scale "that demands that we similarly scale up our thinking in response."[2] These summons to scale up our thought and our imagination have resonated across ecocritical scholarship, proving a fashionable tool for comprehending the great swathes of both space (global, universal, planetary) and time (multigenerational, geological, futuristic) that coincide when we tackle the human scale alongside the geological.

While scale itself is a crucial term for thinking environmentally, I will argue that too much emphasis has been placed on scaling *up*. Other scales – smaller scales – offer an intimacy and a sense of immersion that large-scale Anthropocene thought too often glosses over. Analyzing narratives has gained traction as a mode of thinking through and across scales, yet we must employ the very act of analysis more forcefully to counter the erasure to which large-scale thought leads. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing persuasively contends,

[1] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 206.
[2] Jesse Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 217.

> To learn anything we must revitalize arts of noticing… But we have a problem with scale. A rush of stories cannot be neatly summed up. Its scales do not nest neatly; they draw attention to interrupting geographies and tempos. These interruptions elicit more stories. This is the rush of stories' power as a science. Yet it is just these interruptions that step out of the bounds of most modern science, which demands the possibility for infinite expansion without changing the research framework. Arts of noticing are considered archaic because they are unable to "scale up" in this way. The ability to make one's research framework apply to greater scales, without changing the research questions, has become a hallmark of modern knowledge.[3]

My dissertation takes up Tsing's turn toward the arts of noticing, specifically through the potential of *literary* noticing, while resisting the idea that practicing these arts mandates scaling up. Rather, I draw on formal analysis and close reading, essential practices of attention in literary scholarship, to reveal stories not as chaotic and disruptive, but as spaces where narrative techniques fully immerse us in the nuanced ecosystem that joins human with environment. In its moments of description, moments where language surges to the forefront and circumscribes a literary ecology, the novel contains structures that privilege the natural world and force us to challenge assumptions of human dominance. Thus, rather than scaling *up* my research questions, I will consider how scaling *down* can productively counteract the ever-present impulse to think at scales beyond our own comprehension.

Scaling down serves as an especially suggestive point of resistance to the spatial, temporal, and conceptual framework of the Anthropocene. The geologic term itself has been subject to a slew of critiques, many of which challenge its anthropocentrism, often by offering up

[3] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 37-38.

new names (e.g., Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene) that more overtly address the singularly exploitative roots of our epoch.[4] For its critical prevalence, I stick with the term "Anthropocene" here, while remaining cognizant of its inherent problematics. On a smaller-scale level explicitly relevant to this project, Eileen Crist critiques "the shadowy repercussion of naming an epoch after ourselves," a name that serves as both "reflection and reinforcement of the anthropocentric worldview that generated 'the Anthropocene' – with all its looming emergencies – in the first place."[5] While the discourse surrounding the Anthropocene points to "the unavoidable merger of the human-natural," Crist writes, "lifting the banner of human integrity invites the *priority* of our pulling back and scaling down, of welcoming limitations."[6] Similarly, I have chosen to build on the extant scholarly work on scale while prioritizing the underexamined utility of scaling down, of delineating boundaries, of close reading, of *noticing*.

Tracking boundaries and limitations, however, is no simple task. As an agent of climate change, the Anthropocene has cultivated a representational crisis. Taking on climate, weather, and atmosphere – three interrelated and famously nebulous keywords – this project seeks to uncover literary tools that can render the meteorological both visible and legible. How do such large-scale ideas manifest within the pages of the novel, and how can theorizing these diffuse and amorphous concepts inform how we comprehend our own future? Voicing concern for literature's representational ability in the face of anthropogenic climate change, Amitav Ghosh contends, "I feel completely convinced that we have to change our fictional practices in order to

[4] For comprehensive discussions of these and other alternative terms, see: Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us* (London: Verso, 2016); Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Jason Moore, "The Rise of Cheap Nature," *Sociology Faculty Scholarship*, January 2016; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing et al., eds., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
[5] Eileen Crist, "On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature," *Environmental Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2013): 129–30.
[6] Ibid, 144.

deal with the world that we're in."[7] From the novelist's perspective, Ghosh envisions a shift in contemporary literary practices. In literary criticism, as I propose, there must emerge an accompanying shift in contemporary *analytical* practices. Proposing one such analytical practice, my dissertation argues that we can read formal structures within the Victorian novel as techniques of enclosing – and thus rendering representable – large-scale climatic systems. These structures make legible an increasingly capacious vision of the environment in Victorian culture, a crucial context for tracing the history of anthropogenic climate change.

Victorian Microcosms: Environmental Formalism in the Novel offers a rejoinder to rationales for humanists' contribution to the Anthropocene that demand we scale upwards, pivoting from the local to the global to account for the limits of human agency and to approach temporality through a geological framework. Progressively, however, scaling up has compelled critics to question whether the novel can negotiate such capacious networks. In *The Great Derangement* (2016), his groundbreaking nonfiction study of the novel's ability to encompass climate change, Ghosh argues that the Anthropocene "consists of phenomena that were long ago expelled from the territory of the novel – forces of unthinkable magnitude that create unbearably intimate connections over vast gaps in time and space."[8] Similarly, for Aaron Rosenberg, fiction that shifts between the human perspective and "scales of 'systems not serving the human'" generates "a kind of narrative excess, a surplus that threatens to disrupt the novel as a system of human relations, to derange the conventions that give it form."[9] Such analysis positions the

[7] Quoted in Alisha Haridasani Gupta, "When Climate Change Is Stranger Than Fiction," *The New York Times*, September 7, 2019, sec. Books.
[8] Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 63.
[9] Aaron Rosenberg, "'Infinitesimal Lives': Thomas Hardy's Scale Effects," in *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire*, ed. Philip Steer and Nathan K. Hensley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 183.

scaled-up Anthropocene as an epoch at violent odds with the novel in its paradigmatic nineteenth-century forms.

At what scale, then, should we comprehend manifestations of environmental thought in the Victorian novel, a form that signals an awareness of the potentially catastrophic anthropogenic effects on climate prior to a widespread cultural awareness of climate change? The answer, I claim in this dissertation, requires we analyze how novels ask us to *scale down.* Rather than manifesting as an unbearable or deranged symptom of scalar disjunction, the novel introduces formal structures that forward a solution for this crisis of representation. Against the emergence of global systems, the nineteenth-century British novel offers a technology of containment with surprisingly radical, and subversive, implications. In the novel's structures of enclosure, "background" descriptions surge to the foreground and nonhuman subjects partake in agential networks. Relying on a range of formal techniques, Victorian novelists problematize representational boundaries in their attempts to depict large-scale, abstract concepts such as climate.

Central to my account is the Victorian novel's use of the microcosm as an ecological framing device through which to formally delineate scaled-down climatic and atmospheric systems. After thriving as an aesthetic framework in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the microcosm first emerged as an ecological concept in an 1887 journal article by American ecologist Stephen Forbes. Titled "The Lake as a Microcosm," Forbes' study acknowledges the "remarkably isolated" nature of animals in a lake that, he writes, "forms a little world within itself – a microcosm within which all the elemental forces are at work and the play of life goes on in full, but on so small a scale as to bring it easily within the mental grasp."[10] Forbes' microcosm is a pivotal figure for Heidi Scott's *Chaos and*

[10] Stephen A. Forbes, "The Lake as a Microcosm," *Bulletin of the State of Illinois Department of Registration and Education, Division of the Natural History Survey* XV ([1887] 1925): 537.

Cosmos, where she joins artistic with scientific perspectives in arguing that "the seed of imagination that would enable a scientist to study a lake as a microcosm at the formal, empirical level was sown by poets of the nineteenth century who consciously drew a sphere around small-scale nature in order to make sense of spots of time and place amid the increasingly chaotic, global, industrial modern world."[11] Turning away from lakes but keeping with aqueous microcosms, Amy King discusses the mid-Victorian fascination with "the tide pool ecosystem" as a way of circumscribing a community undergoing constant change; she reads the tide pool as an analogy for the mid-Victorian struggle "to thrive in and adapt to the ever-changing and complex ecosystem that was their world."[12] Between the lake and the tide pool, microcosmic environments as a cultural tool reveal a shared function: scaling down the complex into something understandable, something fathomable. On a similar vein, Dewey Hall address *place* as a term that "signifies the interassimilation of humanity and open space – such as a biome or, more specifically, an ecosystem…– suggesting that humanity imposes a scheme as a means by which to make sense of the space."[13] Just as Scott argues that a scientist or a poet would enclose nature within a sphere "to make sense of" the modern world, so does Hall read human-imposed schemes as attempts "to make sense of" space. The microcosm, as a site of enclosure, finds significance in its own meaning-making capacity.

I want to build from this careful consideration of the micro-scale, especially in spatial terms, to complicate how we understand representational strategies beyond the grand scale – strategies such as language and description that entangle human agents with the more-than-human. Unlike the visible, tangible boundaries of a lake or a tide pool, air and the meteorological realm present particular

[11] Heidi C. M. Scott, *Chaos and Cosmos: Literary Roots of Modern Ecology in the British Nineteenth Century* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 4.
[12] Amy M. King, "Tide Pools," *Victorian Review* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 45.
[13] Dewey W. Hall, ed., *Victorian Ecocriticism: The Politics of Place and Early Environmental Justice* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 6.

challenges to representation. They resist boundaries – including quite literal ones. In narrative, then, we turn to literary forms as ways of creating these boundaries. The book seems an excellent place to delve into microclimatic forms; Susan Stewart writes, "The metaphors of the book are the metaphors of containment, of exteriority and interiority, of surface and depth, of covering and exposure."[14] As figures of containment, books are inherently suited to navigating between scales, and to encompassing small-scale thought. Stewart reminds us, "There are no miniatures in nature; the miniature is a cultural product, the product of an eye performing certain operations, manipulating, and attending in certain ways to, the physical world."[15] Perhaps paradoxically, the cultural connotations of the miniature render somewhat artificial an ecocritical reading of literature that hinges on small-scale forms and analysis. Yet in this impulse to create forms for "natural" elements, to circumscribe boundaries around seemingly arbitrary ecospheres, there dwells a tension between the natural and the artificial that saturates the Victorian era and comes to light in its scholarship. In this productive tension, new relationalities and alternative theories of human-ecological entanglements emerge.

II. Victorian Ecologies/Victorian Ecocriticism

Thinking ecocriticism and Victorian studies together, once an anomalous act,[16] has proved increasingly popular among contemporary scholars, particularly as we draw tight connections between the start of the Anthropocene and the long nineteenth century. In a summary of numerous scholars' research, Tina Young Choi and Barbara Leckie conclude that climate change originates during the period following the Industrial Revolution and into the

[14] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 37.
[15] Ibid, 55.
[16] Jesse Oak Taylor, "Where Is Victorian Ecocriticism?," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43, no. 4 (2015): 877–894.

Victorian era, "when human actions in the form of industrial capitalism, imperial expansion, and technological advances began to have perceptible, measurable effects upon the earth's history."[17] Benjamin Morgan lends further historical context to such scalar increases, noting, "the nineteenth-century nexus of new ideas about deep time and global weather systems, of expanding fossil fuel-based energy systems, and of the emergence of global capitalism remains widely regarded as the most significant intersection of historical processes in relation to the climate crisis."[18] "Put succinctly," Morgan concludes, "climate change is now commonly understood as a Victorian problem."[19]

It is, of course, anachronistic to claim that the Victorians understood anthropogenic climate change with the depth and breadth of knowledge that we now have. Nevertheless, we can trace the roots of many of our own concerns back to Victorian ecological knowledge. First, as Wendy Parkins and Peter Adkins observe, applying an environmental lens to our studies of Victorian literature and culture "enables us to return the concept of 'ecology' to its original set of contexts, definitions, and preoccupations."[20] These contexts include the genesis of "ecology" itself, a concept coined by German naturalist Ernst Haeckel in 1866 to describe "the study of 'the relationship of the organism to the surrounding exterior world, to which relations we can count in the broader sense all the conditions of existence.'"[21] Haeckel's definition, which sought to capture a series of environmental and global relations, did not exist in a vacuum; rather, it accords with other nineteenth-century concepts of natural science: the stratigraphic, scaled up,

[17] Tina Young Choi and Barbara Leckie, "Slow Causality: The Function of Narrative in an Age of Climate Change," *Victorian Studies* 60, no. 4 (2018): 566.
[18] Benjamin Morgan, "*Fin Du Globe*: On Decadent Planets," *Victorian Studies* 58, no. 4 (2016): 609–610.
[19] Ibid, 610.
[20] Wendy Parkins and Peter Adkins, "Introduction: Victorian Ecology and the Anthropocene," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, no. 26 (July 2018), 1.
[21] Ibid.

and more-than-human records of Earth in Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-33)[22]; William Thomson's articulation of an interconnected energy system in "On a Universal Tendency in Nature to the Dissipation of Mechanical Energy" (1852)[23]; the "tangled bank" of interdependent plants, birds, and insects in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859).[24] Together, these and other prominent scientific works opened up space for thinkers and readers to understand the enmeshed complexity of their own environments, on scales both miniscule and expansive.

Swiftly, these new dominant modes of ecological thought took hold in Victorian literature. Disciplinary divisions between the arts and sciences often appear quite solid today – how often, for instance, does a Classicist turn to dense scholarship on astrophysics, or a chemist read up on psychoanalytic film theory? Yet in the nineteenth century, as Gillian Beer contends, "scientists still shared a common language with other educated readers and writers of their time," allowing scientific texts to be interpreted through a literary sensibility.[25] This "shared discourse," as she calls it, allowed for the free movement of "not only *ideas* but metaphors, myths, and narrative patterns…between scientists and non-scientists."[26] While these ideas did not always transcend disciplines with total accuracy, they certainly created space for multidisciplinary discourse.[27] Novelists habitually acquainted themselves with the latest developments in biological, evolutionary, and geological thought, and they brought these concepts into their literary works, which often enjoyed a wide readership. Such novels addressed the crisis of

[22] Ibid, 3.
[23] Allen MacDuffie, *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 114.
[24] Parkins and Adkins, "Victorian Ecology," 2.
[25] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.
[26] Ibid, 5.
[27] Ibid.

representing scale by creating new ways to conceptualize a growing awareness of humanity's place amidst vast geological spans of time and space.

Fittingly, we have seen a surge in ecocriticism of the long nineteenth century that attends to the natural world through a concrete, tangible lens: literary studies of topics including geology[28], botany[29], and space and landscape.[30] But not every crisis of representation can be visualized through the tangible – through, say, the immovable, quantifiable solidity of rock strata or the mappable boundaries of a particular region. Further issues with ecological implications accompanied the rapid growth of Victorian culture and thought, and not all lent themselves to easy representation. I am talking, here, of that which is often intangible, invisible, malleable: climate, weather, and atmosphere. In other words: the meteorological.

My attention to the meteorological arises from a drive to discover what literary forms Victorian novelists drew upon – and what forms they developed – to convey the sheer *formlessness* of climate, weather, and atmosphere. A growing body of critical work finds scholars of the long nineteenth century using meteorological language to grapple with scalar shifts in the Anthropocene.[31] Perhaps the most influential monograph for my project has been Jesse Oak Taylor's *The Sky of Our Manufacture*, which traces the figure of London smog, as a

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[28] Adelene Buckland, *Novel Science: Fiction and the Invention of Nineteenth-Century Geology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[29] Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Novel Cultivations: Plants in British Literature of the Global Nineteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019); Jane Desmarais, *Monsters under Glass: A Cultural History of Hothouse Flowers from 1850 to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018); Amy M. King, *Bloom: The Botanical Vernacular in the English Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[30] Hall, *Victorian Ecocriticism*; Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Eithne Henson, *Landscape and Gender in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy: The Body of Nature* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011); Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[31] See, for instance: Jonathan Bate, "Living with the Weather," *Studies in Romanticism* 35, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 431–47; Mary A. Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Alexandra Harris, *Weatherland: Writers & Artists under English Skies* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015); Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, *Air's Appearance: Literary Atmosphere in British Fiction, 1660-1794* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

conceptualization of anthropogenic climate change, through nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British realist novels. In many ways, this dissertation shares Taylor's goal of seeking literary forms for climate, weather, and atmosphere; but with the exception of Chapter Three, the scope of my research largely moves beyond London, and beyond urban spaces in general, to see how novelists employ structures of containment to make sense of the vast meteorologies of England itself. From Emily Brontë's moors and Thomas Hardy's Little Hintock to the conservatories of Oscar Wilde and the country estates of Virginia Woolf, the literary spaces that I examine in the ensuing chapters employ formal techniques that catalogue and delineate immersive microclimates.

Continuing on the topic of form, this project likewise owes a debt to the rise of formalist studies over the past decade, many of which find their origins in the Victorian novel: Caroline Levine's *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*[32]; Anna Kornbluh's *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*[33]; and the essays within Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer's *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire*.[34] In particular, I adopt Levine's broad understanding of form as encompassing "all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference," and as a site where the aesthetic and the political meet (in this case, a political that subtends the social context of human-environmental convergences).[35] And my interest in scaling down, in reexamining familiar literary texts through micro-forms, stems, in part, from Hensley and Steer's eloquent proposal that "The challenge is not about content but about form, not about accumulating more

[32] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).
[33] Anna Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).
[34] Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer, eds., *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).
[35] Levine, *Forms*, 3.

information but about reframing the methods by which we understand it."[36] In their theory of ecological formalism, they prescribe "an approach that reconsiders Victorian literary structure in light of emergent and ongoing environmental catastrophe; coordinates these 'natural' questions with social ones, and underscores the category of form…as a means for producing environmental and therefore political knowledge."[37] Drawing inspiration from these keen analyses of form as an interlocuter in sociopolitical conversations, as well as a crucial component of literary thought, I propose that narrative fiction – and the novel in particular – serves as a powerful immersive tool for representing the meteorological phenomena that saturate this project.

My project also reflects an ecocritical move away from content and toward form. In *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton valorizes the act of critical reflection, addresses prevalent critiques that have been leveled against ecological criticism, and articulates a series of revised terms that the discipline might engage (e.g., ecocritique, ambient poetics). A particularly productive moment finds Morton envisioning a departure from ecocriticism's stereotypical "special, isolated place in the academy" by broadening the discourse and shifting away from some of its "ideological baggage."[38] "Even if a Shakespeare sonnet does not appear explicitly to be 'about' gender, nowadays we still want to ask what it might have to do with gender," Morton explains. "The time should come when we ask of any text, 'What does this say about the environment?'"[39] As someone pursuing an ecocritical project, I need no persuasion; it is exhilarating to imagine an ecological framework ascending to such universal salience. However, the strongest component of Morton's case for ecocriticism occurs in a discussion of form. The

[36] Nathan Hensley and Philip Steer, eds., "Introduction: Ecological Formalism; or, Love among the Ruins," in *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 4.
[37] Ibid, 5.
[38] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 5.
[39] Ibid.

book's argument, Morton writes, "moves beyond the simple mention of 'environmental' content, and toward the idea of environmental form."[40] Many of the book's examples concern non-literary mediums: Morton notes, for instance, the "surprising connections between the imminent ecological catastrophe and the emergence of virtual reality," connections that "concern not content but form,"[41] and soon after comments, "Instead of talking about content – software and wetware – I explore the realm of *form*."[42] In these two moments, Morton cogently details the immersive aesthetics of both ecological panic and virtual reality. With my dissertation, I build on this engagement with form over content, while moving away from new media and seeking immersion in both literature and, of course, the forms within our texts.

III. Key Terms: Weather, Climate, and Atmosphere

By examining formalist techniques for scaling down, this project also aims to address the conceptual problem of representing vast, seemingly intangible, entities: the terms "climate," "atmosphere," and "weather," which often prove murky, and even interchangeable, in contemporary discourse. In the literary realm in particular, these terms ask us to think both environmentally and affectively. The boundaries of these entities – and between these words themselves – are challenging to delineate. What formal strategies did novelists develop to account for such representational challenges? My dissertation argues that the Victorian novel creates enclosing structures that invite us to read for moments of description, rather than attending primarily to plot.

[40] Ibid, 2.
[41] Ibid, 26.
[42] Ibid, 28.

In turning to the novel's strategic enclosures, this project suggests literary strategies for containing the nebulous concepts of climate, weather, and atmosphere – terms with a history of conflation that dates back centuries, and certainly, at least, to the Victorian era. In "Weather," an unattributed essay published in the November 1860 issue of *Cornhill Magazine*, the author aims to explain early climate science to a public audience – in part, by distinguishing "weather" from "climate" in a meteorological context.[43] "Notwithstanding the daily discussion and inquiries," the author states, "we believe that the most indistinct and confused ideas are still commonly enough entertained about the weather. It is often mistaken for climate, and climate is confounded with it."[44] Incorporating our third key term, the author later continues, "The state of the weather at any time depends so much on the state of the atmosphere, that whatever influences that gaseous envelope of the earth necessarily produces a result which is universal or local according to the nature of the influence."[45] As the essay makes clear, the three terms are doubly intertwined; their distinct meanings overlap to the point of confusion, while their literal meteorological functions demonstrate an interdependence. These nineteenth-century observations remain relevant today; we have more sophisticated tools at our disposal, but scientists still recognize the global entanglements of weather, climate, and atmosphere. And circling back to their definitions, we still tend to conflate climate and weather, as well as climate and atmosphere. Hence, I find it useful to think of "climate" as occupying the center of a Venn diagram where "weather" and "atmosphere" intersect. In a figurative sense, the "Weather" essay finds additional affinity with this particular project in its almost-formalist description of its subject: "A very sudden alteration of form, or shifting of the place of clouds, or a sudden

[43] Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, "Climate Change and Victorian Studies: Introduction," *Victorian Studies* 60, no. 4 (Summer 2018): 539.
[44] "Weather," *Cornhill Magazine* 2, no. 11 (November 1860): 565.
[45] Ibid, 576.

obscuration of the sky without clouds in motion, is an indication of a state of the air generally belonging to changeable weather."[46]

Of my three primary terms, "weather" is perhaps the easiest to identify, and certainly the most concrete in its occasional tangibility; we can feel rain soaking into our clothing or hair, whereas touching the atmosphere proves a task of whimsy. However, even weather often resists boundedness; as Alexandra Harris points out, "Weather leaves its physical trace, but there are many aspects of weather which are insubstantial… We can see where a cloud is and where it is not, but we cannot run a finger around its edges."[47] Weather's very lack of edges complicates its ability to be represented. Its physical boundaries dissolve into a haze, and with its rapid shifts – its sudden alterations of form – weather operates at a radically different temporal scale than either climate or atmosphere, each of which operates in a more long-term sense. Weather can (and often does) change in a matter of hours, minutes, or even seconds. Acknowledging "the very ordinary seriality of weather," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes a new translated title for Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*: not *In Search of Lost Time*, but *In Search of Lost Weather*.[48] While playful, her attempt to replace time with weather also conflates the two, an intersection that will prove integral to my analysis of stasis and artificiality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Atmosphere, in contrast, leans away from a specific link to time and engages more with the spatial. In her theorization, Dora Zhang attends to the term's multivalent meaning: "the word refers to the envelope of gas surrounding the earth or any other celestial body. Used figuratively, it has a much wider reach, indicating the characteristic tone or pervading mood of a surrounding

[46] Ibid, 568.
[47] Harris, *Weatherland*, 9.
[48] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 8.

environment or object."[49] Taylor likewise observes a critical tendency to separate out two different connotations of the term, noting, "Accepting the absence of a correlation between literary atmosphere and literal atmosphere in the meteorological sense has long been considered a given of literary language."[50] In subsequently disproving the need to delineate between literal and figurative, Taylor accords in some ways with Zhang's understanding of the term; she also gestures to an innate nebulous quality: "Feeling the atmosphere is thus always an embodied perception that is more visceral than reflective, an awareness of being in a space and of how other bodies, both human and nonhuman, are also present there. It is a matter of finding one's body not only affected by its surroundings but also not easily demarcated from them."[51] In this acknowledgement of atmosphere as a concept that may intertwine human and nonhuman, I find justification for my argument that literary structures of containment allow for the flourishing of descriptions that celebrate the entangled human and more-than-human worlds. Zhang's notion of atmosphere undergirds how my selected novels render foreground and background interchangeable, creating an atmospheric palette that elides (primarily ecological) boundaries of all types.

If weather defies clear-cut boundaries and atmosphere creates space for hazy entanglements to occur, what are the properties of climate? Sitting at the intersection between weather and atmosphere, climate ought to have similarly diaphanous borders. Taylor offers a different model, suggesting an intimacy between the concept of climate and the practice of framing; he writes, "Climate is a discourse of limits. It demarcates the conditions of

[49] Dora Zhang, "Notes on Atmosphere," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 27, no. 1 (August 2018): 121.
[50] Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 8.
[51] Zhang, 125-126.

possibility."[52] He posits the following differentiation between climate and atmosphere: "Atmosphere is a concept manifest in works of literature, the air we breathe, and the skies overhead. Climate is a concept manifest in ideas, politics, cultural forms, bioregions, and weather patterns."[53] While I agree that climate invites framing, I am not persuaded that strict boundaries are an inherent property of climate itself. His attempt to distinguish climate from atmosphere seems more clear-cut than it truly is; their metaphorical significance varies, yes, but in a literal sense, atmosphere, climate, bioregions, air, and weather patterns are so deeply wound together that drawing a sharp line between all these entities seems unnecessary, even impossible. Simply put, for earth scientists and meteorologists, weather refers to short-term atmospheric conditions while climate refers to longer-term changes in atmosphere.[54] Even in distinct, empirical definitions, climate, weather, and atmosphere prove inextricable from one another. In the following chapters, I explain how certain terms apply to individual Victorian novels, and then discuss how they ultimately become conflated as we move into the twentieth century.

IV. The Meteorological Novel and Questions of Genre

Each of the first three chapters takes up a key meteorological term alongside a Victorian novel. Chapter One opens by discussing the weather in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), addressing the provincialism of the novel's title and the claustrophobia of its landscape. I build on its rich legacy as a gothic text, reading it anew through an *eco*gothic lens that accords with material ecocriticism's nonhuman turn. Brontë's environmental vision, I argue, relies on the simultaneous dissolution of spatial, agential, and generic boundaries to bind character with setting. In

[52] Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 9.
[53] Ibid, 8.
[54] National Geographic Society, "Weather or Climate ... What's the Difference?," National Geographic Society, 2019.

particular, I draw on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the "flesh" to propose a mode of environmental relationality that I term "ecogothic tactility," wherein the first generation of characters (Catherine and Heathcliff) interface corporeally – and quite violently – with the tempestuous weather on the moors. Ultimately, I read the second Catherine's cultivation of her family garden as a contrast, proposing that it exemplifies a generative future predicated on environmental stewardship.

Pivoting away from weather but lingering on the regional and the rural, Chapter Two reads atmosphere as a vital term for Hardy in *The Woodlanders* (1887). Building from theories of material ecocriticism and Eduardo Kohn's anthropological concept of "an ecology of selves," I argue for Little Hintock as a microcosm with a distinct environmental and social atmosphere. By enclosing his woodland community, Hardy creates a small-scale ecosphere that situates humans within more-than-human concepts of experience, selfhood, and embodiment. This chapter emphasizes description, in contradistinction with plot, as a formal technique for revealing the vibrancy inherent in a scaled-down ecological world. In the novel's enclosed system, setting and background swell to the foreground, immersing us in a space populated by personified trees, who assume the role of more-than-human characters. Through the microcosmic enclosed atmosphere of Little Hintock, Hardy demarcates a community of ecological depth, with intimately entangled human and environmental agents.

In Chapter Three, my discussion of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) turns to climate, proposing that the novel's many microclimates articulate a Decadent ecology that counters the critical tendency to view Decadence and nature as opposing forces. While the previous two chapters center on isolated rural environments, my reading of Wilde draws on Taylor's work to consider how urban space (that which seems manufactured, artificial) frames the ecological. I

identify two strategies through which Wilde underscores the novel's interest in naturalcultural intersections. First, I suggest that London's constructed microclimates – its gardens and conservatories – comprise an assemblage of spaces where the natural world can thrive amidst the literally and figuratively polluted backdrop of the novel. Here, the chapter contextualizes Wilde's networked ecologies by lingering on the historical value of glasshouses as sites of miniaturization (and symbols of social reform) in Victorian society. Second, returning to the literary realm, I argue that Wilde harnesses Decadent language to enclose Dorian's world – and to render inextricable its natural and artificial elements. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the *fin-de-siècle* novel's anxiety about the *fin du globe*, and how its framing of time and space might help us think through our own moment of climate crisis.

Finally, Chapter Four moves beyond the Victorian to consider how meteorological forms carry over into modernist literature, and particularly how they become entangled and conflated in what increasingly seems to be less of a scaling down and more of a scalar inversion. Through analyses of two Woolf novels, *Orlando* (1928) and *Between the Acts* (1941), I examine the breakdown of partitions between climate and weather. The novels emerge as sites where meteorology and chronology appear inverted: while *Orlando* moves a single character through hundreds of years, identifying large-scale fluctuations between centuries as small-scale weather events, *Between the Acts* describes an historical pageant that spans the Elizabethan through the interwar period, yet its performance over the course of a single afternoon scales up its dramatic weather events to the level of climatic shifts. Though these analyses take us into the twentieth century, Woolf's framing builds on a Victorian legacy; she finds common ground with the project's other novelists in challenging boundaries of selfhood, destabilizing divisions between

foreground and background, and considering the fruitful possibilities that emerge when we think of nature and artifice, the human and the more-than-human, alongside one another.

This project aims to reenergize ecocritical approaches to the novel by straying from the realist tradition and, instead, considering alternate genres as avenues for environmental-meteorological thought. Hence, it intentionally omits several names that Victorian ecocriticism tends to privilege: Joseph Conrad, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Gaskell, among others. By highlighting the more dramatic, fantastical modes (and forms) of the novels in the following chapters, we will encounter singular strategies for narrating beyond the human. Further, *Wuthering Heights* serves as a fitting start to the project, as all of the novels here are joined, to some extent, by violence – and by the gothic nature of their often-vivid meteorological occurrences.

The ecogothic, a burgeoning concept in literary studies, has only recently begun to receive concerted attention. In introducing their 2013 edited collection on the subject, Andrew Smith and William Hughes contend that they are the first to approach the gothic through an ecocritical lens.[55] Indeed, even in the years since, relatively few works devoted solely to the ecogothic have emerged. Smith and Hughes demonstrate, however, that environmental and gothic modes of thought deeply inform one another and ought to be taken seriously as associated objects of study. The ecogothic dialogues with contemporary environmental concerns even as it provides a framework for reading literature from the Romantic era, which they cite as an origin point for "an ecologically aware Gothic."[56] Most significantly, thinking with the ecogothic provides a crucial lens for a key tenet of material ecocriticism: understanding the agential

[55] Andrew Smith and William Hughes, "Introduction: Defining the Ecogothic," in *Ecogothic*, ed. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 1.
[56] Ibid.

capacity of beings beyond the human. As Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils suggest, "the ecogothic is an integral part of what has been called the 'nonhuman turn.'"[57] In rethinking Brontë's novel through the ecogothic, we can draw from this interest in the nonhuman to access deeper understandings of how literature can question and subvert customary understandings of the spatial, the temporal, and the agential.

Coupling imaginative forms with violence, the other novels, too, create space for the more-than-human to surge to the forefront. Hardy's forest thrums with conflict among the trees that, as I will argue, emerges as a plot parallel to the human narrative. Taking up corruption, murder, and decay, Wilde's novel promotes an ecological Decadence with overtly gothic overtones. And even Woolf's dramatic weather has something of the gothic – not to mention the aura of war that subtends various sections of *Orlando* as well as, more nebulously, the entirety of *Between the Acts*. Together, these novels diverge from the conventions of realism to circumscribe dense, immersive microclimates where all is not as it seems. Within these literary microcosms, traditional temporal cycles and spatial boundaries have fallen away, rendering nature twisted and strange.

[57] Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils, "Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic," in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed. Matthew Wynn Sivils and Dawn Keetley (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 11.

Chapter I

The Ecogothic Naturecultures of *Wuthering Heights*

I. The Work of "Wuthering"

In its title alone, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) points to the intimacy between plot and the environment in which the novel is situated. A number of the novel's themes crystallize in the singular word "wuthering," through which Emily Brontë gestures toward the novel's environmental imagination and ushers the reader into the world of an isolated rural community. Shortly after narrating his unwelcoming entry into Wuthering Heights, Lockwood glosses the adjective for the reader: "Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr Heathcliff's dwelling, 'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather."[58] This definition links three notable concepts that form the crux of the novel's environmental vision: provincialism, atmosphere, and weather. The first of these components, the provincial connotation of "wuthering," establishes that we are dealing with the local, the regional, the small scale. Wuthering Heights – the place – thus appears to be as insular and unfamiliar as the adjective itself. With few neighbors and even fewer inhabitants, it stands as a microcosmic community. Lockwood further circumscribes Wuthering Heights in microclimatic terms when he attends to the atmosphere and weather that characterize this house and the immediately surrounding land. Subject to unique weather events, the property bespeaks atmospheric containment that complements the containment intrinsic to its provincial position. As our entry point into the narrative, Wuthering Heights thus establishes the importance of attending to the interpenetration between the novel's harsh climate and its setting, which is at once claustrophobic and desolate.

[58] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin Books, [1847] 1995), 4.

With Lockwood's initial foray into the semantics of a provincial atmosphere, Brontë scales down and shuts us within the novel's world. She conceptualizes the space of this novel as a regional microcosm in which other, even smaller, microcosms materialize: Wuthering Heights, Thrushcross Grange, rooms within these houses, and even structures of enclosure within these rooms. Brontë draws our attention to – and imposes tight constrictions around – these small-scale spaces, these outposts of regional life. Yet in concentrating on these very places, she allows for the emergence of an intense world where nature and culture collapse into one another in modes that often prove quite fantastical. The various containers of Wuthering Heights and *Wuthering Heights* present deeply claustrophobic worlds, and, I argue, the novel marks this spatial containment as enabling the merging of binaries that critics have so often observed in the novel. By trapping the reader within inescapable settings and introducing only a handful of human characters, Brontë makes imaginative space to examine the rich compendium of human and nonhuman life that inhabits her narrative world.

Adelene Buckland deems *Wuthering Heights* "perhaps the most regional of all Victorian regional novels"[59] and, by opening the novel with Lockwood's attempt to define "wuthering," Brontë establishes his status as an outsider to this isolated community. Even after Lockwood ascertains the meaning of "wuthering," Brontë continually references his ignorance of the local environment through his inability to recognize what its weather patterns signify. For instance, as he watches snow blanket the land around Wuthering Heights, Lockwood grossly misreads the impending storm when he tells Heathcliff, "I fear I shall be weather-bound for half an hour, if you can afford me shelter during that space" (12). We quickly find that Lockwood has underestimated the severity of this climate: the half hour stretches into many hours more,

[59] Adelene Buckland, *Novel Science: Fiction and the Invention of Nineteenth-Century Geology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 151.

culminating in Lockwood's overnight stay. Despite the meteorological acumen he demonstrates in the first chapter, observes Graeme Tytler, "Lockwood is soon made to feel a kind of greenhorn as regards northern weather and seasons" in his mistaken assumption that he will be able to leave Wuthering Heights during the snowstorm.[60] On both a literal and a linguistic level, then, the concept of "wuthering" frames the novel's environment as one of extreme containment. Not only does the term indicate linguistic isolation by virtue of its use solely within the region, but it also points to the confining (and confined) nature of the weather itself in this isolated setting. Despite the traditional resistance of harsh weather events to containment, the novel – through regional language, through its stifling sense of space – encloses the elements alongside its characters.

Often, the novel enforces its sense of microcosmic entanglement by introducing nondiscriminating, interpenetrating weather into domestic spaces. The moors themselves see their fair share of dramatic weather, but even indoors, weather leaves its trace. Air permeates the boundaries of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange: it seeps in through windows, across thresholds, from the hearth. And within Brontë's claustrophobic environment, weather also takes on a more active, agential role that exceeds its customary relegation to the background of a novel's setting. Rain, snow, and mud mingle with human bodies, forming intensely tactile connections between characters and the more-than-human realm. While occurring within a bounded community, then, human-environmental interchange in the novel is characterized by the disintegration of ontological boundaries.

Tactility, a relatively undertheorized aspect of nineteenth-century studies,[61] proves central to Brontë's vision of human-environmental entanglement. Moreover, the peculiar tactility

[60] Graeme Tytler, "Weather in *Wuthering Heights*," *Brontë Studies* 41, no. 1 (January 2016): 40.
[61] Heather Tilley, "Introduction: The Victorian Tactile Imagination," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, no. 19 (2014), 1-2.

of enclosure that saturates the novel generates its most obviously gothic narrative modes. The nested narration, and its parallels with the novel's representation of space, accords with traditional definitions of the gothic as centering "a claustrophobic sense of *enclosure in space*."[62] Citing Elizabeth MacAndrew's influential work on the gothic, N.M. Jacobs writes, "the gothic frame-tale creates a 'closed-off region within an outer world… The mind is turned in on itself.'"[63] This emphasis on enclosure, claustrophobia, and closed-off spaces recalls the many boundaries on the moor, underscoring the novel's status as a gothic text in both content and form. Beyond its formal nod to the gothic, the most explicitly gothic components of the novel manifest in a number of well-documented thematic ways. Diane Long Hoeveler, for example, catalogues a range of the gothic traces in *Wuthering Heights*: "prescient dreams, a disputed inheritance, violence against women and animals, coffins with loose hinges, haunting ghosts and perhaps vampires, and repetitious narratives of fantasy and trauma."[64] Figuratively, the pervasive atmosphere of *Wuthering Heights* is imbued with gothic foreboding; more literally, the weather and atmosphere that touch every entity within the novel's microclimate prove characteristic of the gothic: bitter cold, obliterating snowstorms, theatrical thunderstorms. With Brontë's strategic deployment of weather events, in addition to tactile human-natural entanglements, *Wuthering Heights* serves as a prime example not only of the gothic genre, but also of the *eco*gothic.

Though the novel's interplay with the gothic is well-trodden ground, extant criticism has not yet interpreted *Wuthering Heights* as a specifically ecogothic text. As signaled by the novel's tempestuous weather, however, the gothic in *Wuthering Heights* has a strong ecological tenor.

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[62] Chris Baldick, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xix.
[63] N. M. Jacobs, "Gender and Layered Narrative in 'Wuthering Heights' and 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 16, no. 3 (1986): 206.
[64] Diane Long Hoeveler, "The Brontës and the Gothic Tradition," in *A Companion to the Brontës* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2016), 35.

Many of its most environmentally invested moments are also deeply haunted: by the past, by the dead, by the supernatural. In the seminal gothic novels of the eighteenth century, explains Lisa Kröger, although "much is made about the Gothic edifices, such as the ancient estate or the crumbling castle, the environment, most often seen in the Gothic forest, plays just as integral a role."[65] These outdoor spaces propagate what Kröger, vis-à-vis Jonathan Bate, terms "a Gothic ecology,…which demonstrates a convergence of the human world and the natural world."[66] As much as it is known for constructing boundaries and enclosing characters within built spaces, the gothic also provides fruitful erasures of barriers – a practice that allows for new imagined possibilities. Rife with the interpenetration of nature and culture, Brontë's microcosmic setting allows for a gothic ecology to emerge. While the text itself shuts us further into an already closed world, the ecogothic mode unsettles systems of enclosure *within* the novel. The binary between nature and culture falls apart through the ecogothic, as the frequent transgressions in Brontë's novel explode boundaries of space, of animacy, and of narrative form. Rather than demonstrating a binary between gothic buildings and the surrounding environment, Brontë shatters this divide by lingering on pervasive weather elements and other tactile naturalcultural engagements.

In addition to scaling down the world of the novel, Brontë's choice to open with the pivotal concept of "wuthering" creates space for an ecogothic sensibility. This chapter argues that Brontë strategically deploys enclosures to create an interconnected natureculture that transcends ontological boundaries. In presenting a scaled-down world filled with distinct climatic and affective atmospheres, she demarcates claustrophobic bounds around that which is traditionally considered uncontainable. Yet the dissolution of these boundaries is central to an

[65] Lisa Kröger, "Panic, Paranoia and Pathos: Ecocriticism in the Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel," in *Ecogothic*, ed. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 16.
[66] Ibid.

environmental reading of the text. Constitutive binaries fall away as the narrative proceeds: nature and culture, interior and exterior, human and nonhuman. Through moments that valorize tactile naturalcultural intersections, which often take the form of penetrative weather and other types of atmospheric touch, Brontë promotes a specifically environmental – and often ecogothic – vision that enlivens and empowers the more-than-human world.

II. Unsettling Boundaries

Before turning more concertedly to the ecogothic, some central questions remain as to how the novel complicates ecological constraints. Which elements of the novel signify nature, and which signify culture? Where and how does the novel dissolve the nature/culture binary? To what extent does the environment of *Wuthering Heights* align with the "natural," broadly construed? Boundaries in the novel often manifest ecologically, through a tension between cultivated and uncultivated landscapes. Drawing on the work of Margaret Homans[67] as well as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar,[68] Amy R. Possidente reiterates a critical consensus that the novel's two main houses, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, epitomize the divide between nature (associated with the former) and culture (associated with the latter).[69] In creating this division, argues Anna Krugovoy Silver, Brontë "sets up a conflict between cultivated and uncultivated nature that she never resolves."[70] But this conflict hardly even needs a resolution; in fact, it may hardly be a conflict at all. The power of Brontë's environmental vision in *Wuthering*

[67] Margaret Homans, "Repression and Sublimation of Nature in *Wuthering Heights*," in *The Brontës*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 91–107.
[68] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2000).
[69] Amy R. Possidente, "Women and Landscape in *Wuthering Heights*," *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 134, no. 1 (November 2018): 268.
[70] Anna Krugovoy Silver, "Domesticating Bronte's Moors: Motherhood in The Secret Garden," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 21, no. 2 (December 1997): 196.

Heights rests on her ability to dissolve spatial, agential, and generic boundaries all at once – and to revel in the productive work for which this dissolution allows.

Many critics have dwelled, in particular, on "natural" space in the novel, determining through close readings of environmental scenes that Brontë's depiction of nature is, to put it quite bluntly, complicated. As Buckland contends, "'nature' is very rarely described directly in the novel… We never see Catherine and Heathcliff together on the moors, the place with which they are most insistently associated, and the action of the novel takes place almost wholly indoors."[71] Buckland likely draws inspiration from Homans' nearly identical observation in a chapter that has proved foundational to ensuing scholarship.[72] Subverting our assumptions as to the nature of Brontëan nature, Homans concludes, "Nature is absent from literal presentation, but it is present in figurative language."[73] While figurative language does draw upon nature throughout the text, I disagree with the claim that literal nature is entirely absent from the novel, which is punctuated by numerous descriptions of weather events, animal life, arboreal ecologies,[74] and flower species.[75] More accurately, I suggest, Brontë's narrative spaces bear markers of the Anthropocene, often blending so-called "nature" with so-called "culture." Nature in the novel frequently appears in liminal spaces, spaces evocative of Donna Haraway's "natureculture," a term that speaks to her realization that critics tend to think "nature" and "culture" in similar ways.[76]

[71] Buckland, *Novel Science*, 141.
[72] Homans, "Repression and Sublimation," 91.
[73] Ibid, 95.
[74] Alicia Carroll, "Small Is Beautiful: Rethinking Localism from Wordsworth to Eliot," in *Romantic Ecocriticism: Origin and Legacies*, ed. Dewey W. Hall (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 219.
[75] Shawna Ross, "The Last Bluebell: Anthropocenic Mourning in the Brontës' Flower Imagery," *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 134, no. 1 (November 2018): 218–233.
[76] Donna Jeanne Haraway, *How like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Goodeve* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 105.

In addition to blending the natural and the cultural, the novel's boundaries often function to trouble that which lies between the domestic world and the environment beyond. Critics have catalogued the text's numerous references to spatial boundaries that delineate interiors from exteriors.[77] Alexandra Harris refers to shelter in general as an obstacle on numerous registers: "Since Catherine and Heathcliff must, for their basic human needs, submit to the containment of houses, windows are constantly being rattled or peered through, opened and closed. Houses are suffocating, especially when walls divide them not only from the wind but from each other."[78] Harris is not alone in calling attention to windows, which Elizabeth Napier[79] and Dorothy Van Ghent[80] likewise mark as salient figures in the text. Functioning like a wall or a door, the windowpane nevertheless adds a heightened sense of drama. Writes Van Ghent, "The windowpane is the medium, treacherously transparent, separating the 'inside' from the 'outside,' the 'human' from the alien and terrible 'other.'"[81] Before staying the night, Lockwood looks through a window at Wuthering Heights to see "dark night coming down prematurely, and sky and hills mingled in one bitter whirl of wind and suffocating snow" (14). Though he wishes to get home, he has no guide and thus cannot bridge the gap between indoor and outdoor, between the microclimate of Wuthering Heights and the microclimate of the snowy moors. "I cannot escort you," Mrs. Heathcliff (also known as Cathy, or the second Catherine) tells him. "They wouldn't let me go to the end of the garden-wall" (16). Once he enters the unwelcoming domestic space, Cathy's confinement seems to rub off on him, and Lockwood gets subsumed into the tumultuous atmosphere of the house itself, experiencing a series of interconnected

[77] Jamie S. Crouse, "'This Shattered Prison': Confinement, Control and Gender in Wuthering Heights," *Brontë Studies* 33, no. 3 (November 2008): 179.
[78] Alexandra Harris, *Weatherland: Writers & Artists under English Skies* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 284.
[79] Elizabeth Napier, "The Problem of Boundaries in 'Wuthering Heights,'" *Philological Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1984): 99.
[80] Dorothy Bendon Van Ghent, *The English Novel, Form and Function* (New York: Rinehart, 1953), 161.
[81] Ibid.

downward scalings: his world becomes progressively smaller, moving from house to room to paneled bed.

The physical boundaries that the house imposes are an obvious technique of confinement; it is no surprise that doors, windows, gates, and walls serve as barriers of various kinds. But Brontë underscores confinement in the novel by thematizing human force as an additional element in circumscribing boundaries. As in Cathy's explanation above, the novel is rife with characters who restrict and enforce others' ability to enter both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, as well as the spaces that lie beyond these houses. Following on the present-day admission that Cathy cannot set foot beyond the garden of Thrushcross Grange, itself an enclosed, gated plot, we become privy to the history of her isolated existence as the novel proceeds. Nelly recalls Catherine's childhood, noting,

> Till she reached the age of thirteen, she had not once been beyond the range of the park by herself. Mr Linton would take her with him, a mile or so outside, on rare occasions; but he trusted her to no one else. Gimmerton was an unsubstantial name in her ears; the chapel, the only building she had approached, or entered, except her own home; Wuthering Heights and Mr Heathcliff did not exist for her; she was a perfect recluse; and, apparently, perfectly contented. (190)

Designed by her father and enforced by Nelly, Cathy's childhood restriction operates on several levels. First, she interacts with a severely limited social circle, which even Heathcliff and her cousin Linton, practically neighbors, cannot infiltrate. Further, on the rare occasions that she does leave the property, she must submit to constant accompaniment by a chaperone (either her father or Nelly). Lastly, she remains entirely ignorant of anything beyond a mile away. Cathy has been fully subsumed within the microcosm that her father has imposed; the whole world exists

for her in this scaled-down community. And much as with Lockwood, who finds himself in increasingly stifling spaces once he enters Wuthering Heights, arising situations threaten to scale down Cathy's world even further. When her father falls ill and can hardly move from his deathbed, for example, "the library, where her father stopped a short time daily – the brief period he could bear to sit up – and his chamber, had become her whole world" (265). At this point in the novel, she is permitted to ride outside during the day, but driven by concern for her father, she instead chooses to remain enclosed within not only Thrushcross Grange, but within just two rooms of that house, thus shrinking her world even further.

Even as Cathy eventually leaves Thrushcross Grange in her late childhood, she finds herself subject to constant confinement, ricocheting from one enclosed space to the next. When Nelly accompanies her on a ramble among the moors, Cathy climbs atop a wall; as she reaches for some flowers, her hat tumbles down into a walled garden and "as the door was locked, she proposed scrambling down to recover it" (232). But she soon finds herself trapped once more: upon realizing that "the stones were smooth and neatly cemented, and the rosebushes and blackberry stragglers could yield no assistance in re-ascending," Cathy yells, "Ellen! you'll have to fetch the key, or else I must run round to the porter's lodge. I can't scale the ramparts on this side!" (232). Though she has ventured outdoors in the open air, Cathy becomes ensnared within a realm of walls and thorny plants; she attempts to interface with her surroundings, noting the stones' smooth texture, but the nature of her imprisonment has left her with no viable escape route. Her restriction later reaches its pinnacle when, on one of her furthest ventures, Cathy travels to Wuthering Heights only to fall prey to Heathcliff's rage; she becomes a prisoner within the house, separated cruelly from Linton and Nelly as they endure their own respective confinements. At this point in the narrative, Cathy is so constrained that she cannot relate her tale

of imprisonment; the task falls solely to Nelly, who can speak only of her own captivity: "And there I remained enclosed, the whole day, and the whole of the next night; and another, and another. Five nights and four days I remained, altogether, seeing nobody but Hareton, once every morning" (277). Regardless of where – or even whether – Cathy travels, she continually returns to a state of confinement: indoors or outdoors, home or away, past or present. Only at the end of the novel, through her more successful tactile connection with the land, does she finally gain some agency and mobility.

As Cathy's difficulty in navigating the novel's landscape makes clear, even the most open, airy, and unbounded spaces are sites of claustrophobic boundedness. Napier argues that the novel's "common pattern of escape and confinement functions as an additional reminder of the instability of the boundary, and of the ineffectuality of systems of constraint."[82] Failed constraint certainly becomes a pattern in the text, from Lockwood's forced entry into Wuthering Heights to Heathcliff and Catherine's attempt to reach Thrushcross Grange by fording multiple ecological barriers. Throughout the novel, in fact, the first Catherine and Heathcliff most famously and overtly symbolize a naturalcultural juncture, appearing as agents of the environmental in human form. Heathcliff displays both a literal and figurative affiliation with the stormy weather; his sour temper is capable of altering the affective atmosphere of Wuthering Heights. Traditionally, as Fred Botting reiterates, Heathcliff "is associated with natural wildness, and his temperament mirrors the hostile and stormy environment he occupies."[83] But less critical attention focuses on those moments where Brontë turns to the physical intersection between the wild moors and the human-built environment – the convergence of the gothic spaces that Kröger outlines. If we trace the paths that Heathcliff and both Catherines weave throughout the novel, an intimate (if

[82] Napier, "The Problem of Boundaries," 99.
[83] Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 123.

tortured) relationship to the environment emerges. Brontë here sets up this violence as a problematic that she will later destabilize in favor of a gentler, more nurturing connection between the second Catherine and her ancestral land.

Even as children, Heathcliff and the first Catherine exist in conjunction with the natural world to a remarkable degree. Brontë valorizes their environmental intimacies by setting them against Edgar Linton, the type of person who "sat at home all day for a shower of rain" (57). While Edgar confines himself to domestic interiors, Heathcliff and Catherine willfully welcome inclement weather. After Heathcliff runs off and a fittingly dramatic thunderstorm descends, Catherine paces in agitation between the gate and the door, awaiting his return. As Nelly recalls, Catherine "took up a permanent situation on one side of the wall, near the road; where, heedless of my expostulations, and the growling thunder, and the great drops that began to plash around her, she remained, calling at intervals, and then listening, and then crying outright" (85). By turning to the stormy outdoors during a period of strife, Catherine draws on her intimate knowledge of Heathcliff, similarly associated with the environment, and seeks out his favored habitat in an attempt to lure him back. Harris views Catherine's actions here as moving beyond affective mourning; she is "ritually surrendering herself to him as she allows the night to drench her, and she is claiming the weather as an expression of her grief."[84] As she seeks solace in the rain, she dissolves into her surroundings; the line between her tears and the raindrops becomes blurred.

This dissolution underscores the sheer potential for embodied relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. Naturally, the drenched Catherine welcomes the rain into her body through her skin. As William A. Cohen writes, "Both tactile membrane and

[84] Harris, *Weatherland*, 284.

enclosure, the skin is a permeable boundary that permits congress between inside and outside"; skin "thus forms the border not only between bodily interior and exterior but also between psychical and physical conceptions of the self."[85] The concept of a "permeable boundary" is useful for thinking through naturecultures and gothic tactility, for it suitably muddles the divide between interior and exterior: it simultaneously welcomes in and pushes out. For thinking through human-environmental relations, Maurice Merleau-Ponty famously theorizes the flesh as that which comes between subject and object: "the thickness of the flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication."[86] Cohen glosses this concept, attending to the convoluted reciprocity between skin and the environment with which it comes into contact: "While this model of relations between subject and object holds that they are reciprocal, it does not collapse them into each other."[87] Rather than *becoming* the rain, then, Catherine seeks communion *with* it, and, in so doing, achieves interagential communication. Her skin or flesh allows her to remain a singular entity through retaining her own bodily boundaries at the same time as its permeability brings the rain ever closer to her own being.

Practicing embodied relationships with the surrounding environment, the novel's human characters come into contact with the atmosphere in frequently tactile ways that open up boundaries between body and environment, as well as between domestic and natural spaces. In fact, much of the novel takes place on a plane caught between such opposing environmental and spatial visions. Deirdre d'Albertis offers an influential framework for thinking about how Brontë

[85] William A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 65.
[86] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 135.
[87] Cohen, *Embodied*, 18.

harnesses these differences. "Such a system of antinomies – nature/culture, wilderness/cultivation – would be familiar and indeed 'natural' to Lockwood and to Emily Brontë's Victorian readers," she writes. "Yet the novel makes obscurely thinkable a third or alternative space along what Garrard defines as 'the boundaries of cultivation.'"[88] This liminal quality of the narrative already becomes clear when we consider the interplay between confinement and escape – that identifiable "pattern." But in her treatment of weather and atmosphere, Brontë also circumscribes a microclimate around her fictional world. Wuthering Heights, Thrushcross Grange, and the moors exist within a closed weather system that flattens the line between the human and the more-than-human. In muddling the boundaries between the manor houses and the environment in which they stand, Brontë imaginatively, if not spatially, expands her microcosmic vision of the rural landscape, drawing on literal, material intersections to imbricate the human with the more-than-human.

As a whole, *Wuthering Heights* comprises an assemblage of microcosms, distinguished from one another by narrative boundaries as well as the innumerable gates and walls of literal spaces. Yet the whole literary world also exists as a sort of microcosm: the most all-encompassing microcosmic level Brontë calls upon is her creation of a local ecology from the seemingly boundless expanse of the moors. Her characters inhabit a world so scaled down as to exclude nearly everything beyond. In addition to highlighting Cathy's obliviousness to anything beyond Thrushcross Grange, including neighboring Gimmerton, Brontë frames the world in such a way as to deny exterior knowledge to the reader. Much of its inscrutability stems from the pure nebulousness of the landscape's geographical markers. For one, *Wuthering Heights* resists

[88] Deirdre d'Albertis, "Dark Nature: A Critical Return to Brontë Country," in *Victorian Writers and the Environment: Ecocritical Perspectives*, ed. Lawrence W. Mazzeno and Ronald D. Morrison (New York: Routledge, 2017), 136.

mapping its fictional world onto real spaces. As Josh Poklad notes, "Considering that the landscape of *Wuthering Heights* is predicated on the author's native West Yorkshire, it is significant that the only solid reference made to a world outside the Heights is to Liverpool as the place in which the young Heathcliff is found."[89] With the exception of Liverpool, argues Poklad, Brontë is able "to sustain the physical isolation of her fictional time-space unit by excluding modern environments from its immediacy."[90] Otherwise, the novel's geography "is purposefully abstracted and insulated, 'completely removed' from any kind of macro-geographic context."[91] By keeping recognizable referents purposefully ambiguous, Brontë draws a circle around her own literary world that does not often invite us to think beyond the microcosm in which her characters exist.

Even in the uncertain geography of *Wuthering Heights*, further barriers prevent us from clearly envisioning the place. Brontë layers abstraction onto abstraction. The weather, exemplified by the opening snowstorm in particular, serves as one defamiliarizing factor. Barely acquainted with the landscape, Lockwood watches the impending snowstorm and notes with concern, "The roads will be buried already; and, if they were bare, I could scarcely distinguish a foot in advance" (14). The microcosm into which he has entered takes on a sort of snow globe aesthetic here – but one that threatens rather than adorns. Even were he to venture outside, Lockwood would find his ability to navigate the landscape to be vastly constricted; with his vision only revealing a foot of snowy ground at a time, the moors have been reduced from traversable and expansive to illegible and microcosmic. This "whited-out landscape," Louise Lee notes, "like the blankness of the world without landmarks, becomes un-navigable, containing and

[89] Josh Poklad, "Time-Space Compression in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*," *Brontë Studies* 42, no. 2 (April 2017): 101.
[90] Ibid, 102.
[91] Ibid.

imprisoning Lockwood within its walls."[92] Here, the weather itself constructs a bubble that easily separates Lockwood from the world beyond the moors, and that even separates him from the moors themselves. In depicting the moors as almost entirely inaccessible, Brontë draws on the harsh local climate as a way to enclose the entire landscape within a microcosmic sphere, a place of restricted scope. On a generic level, the narrative's spatial restrictions work to destabilize human agency, valorizing more natural spaces – spaces other than the two houses at the novel's center. Or, in other words, nature itself becomes a haunted house.

Tactility, as thematized through an interchange between the human body and the environment, enables the novel's naturalcultural framing at the broadest level of circumscription. Simultaneously bounding and (seemingly) boundless, the wild spaces that surround Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange invite total immersion. The land itself becomes one vast sea, at some times of mud and at others of snow, that poses an impediment to the human presence. The unnavigable snowy landscape to which Lee alludes above comprises one giant moat between Wuthering Heights and anything that lies beyond. Lockwood stumbles across this metaphorical "billowy, white ocean" where the stones marked as guideposts have been submerged in snow (31). Lockwood recalls, "The distance from the gate to the Grange is two miles: I believe I managed to make it four; what with losing myself among the trees, and sinking up to the neck in snow" (31). Practically drowning, Lockwood finds himself fully immersed in the snowy moors. Their immensity makes it seem as though the entire world is contained within Wuthering Heights, a house utterly surrounded and enclosed by this frigid sea.

Even without actively hostile weather, the environment surrounding Wuthering Heights often proves unnavigable. Directly before the snowstorm, mud serves as a similar hindrance to

[92] Louise Lee, "Wuthering Heights," in *A Companion to the Brontës* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2016), 85.

Lockwood. Recollecting his second venture to Heathcliff's home, he describes "wading through heath and mud" and, upon reaching the locked gate to the house, he "jumped over, and, running up the flagged causeway bordered with straggling gooseberry bushes, knocked vainly for admittance" (9). Lockwood must force himself through a double layer of environmental resistance: after first defeating the mud, he is further subjected to fencelike bushes. As with the ocean-like expanse of snow that will soon blanket the landscape, the act of "wading" through the mud alludes to a body of water that resists easy traversal. While Heathcliff enters the narrative as an outsider to this region, even characters more familiar with the moors struggle to navigate the landscape. We might think, here, of Heathcliff and Catherine's illicit journey to Thrushcross Grange. Upon returning alone, Heathcliff tells Nelly, "We ran from the top of the Heights to the park, without stopping – Catherine completely beaten in the race because she was barefoot. You'll have to seek for her shoes in the bog to-morrow. We crept through a broken hedge, groped our way up the path, and planted ourselves on a flower-pot under the drawing-room window" (48). As with Lockwood's twin obstacles, Heathcliff and Catherine have to contend with both the bog and the hedge – land and plants together hindering, though not altogether preventing, their entrance to the property on which Thrushcross Grange sits. Moors, bogs, and an alternatingly muddy and snowy "ocean" surrounding these country houses offer a variety of visuals and metaphors that render the landscape nearly as hard to envision as it is to cross.

Yet the image of Catherine and Heathcliff planting themselves in a flowerpot also complicates their relationship with the natural world. Once they overcome the series of environmental obstacles, they seek out protection in the form of plants – here, however, of the domesticated, potted variety. Though humans, they are "planted" in the soil. In a disparate context, the figure of the flowerpot returns at another point in the novel to reinforce the

complicated navigation of natural and cultural spaces. Heathcliff rages over Catherine's presence at the Grange and her marriage to Linton, which he considers deeply unsuitable. Complaining to Nelly about Linton, Heathcliff exclaims, "He might as well plant an oak in a flower-pot, and expect it to thrive, as imagine he can restore her to vigour in the soil of his shallow cares!" (152). While it is not difficult to envision youthful, carefree Catherine hiding in a flowerpot at Thrushcross Grange, Heathcliff draws upon the same base image only to twist it. As Silver notes, this image is laden with absurdity: an oak tree is ill-suited to a vessel as small as a flowerpot. Catherine "stands, therefore, in opposition to the domestic values connoted by the garden and the potted plant, both of which contain and control the natural world in the same way that, according to Brontë, the home contains the woman."[93] Innately, Catherine does not fit into the domestic space; she cannot be contained in such a way. The initial image of Catherine in a flowerpot dissolves the boundaries between human and environment by visualizing her tactile relationship with the earth, while Heathcliff's vision of her as an oak tree too majestic to be bound to a mere pot elides the division between interior and exterior spaces. An oak tree, of course, belongs outside and cannot thrive when subjected to such constricting boundaries. Heathcliff's preposterous suggestion thus imposes limits on human-environmental relationships; some are meant to remain merely figurative.

Saturated with images of human bodies planted in soil or sunk into snow, the novel centers tactility as a primary way for human and nonhuman entities to interface. With his immersion within the landscape, Lockwood participates directly in an embodied relationship to the environment. For Victorian writers, suggests Cohen, embodied experience became a critical way of positing "a substantial interior being coming into contact with the world."[94] As with the

[93] Silver, "Domesticating Bronte's Moors," 197.
[94] Cohen, *Embodied*, 18.

bounding/boundless quality of the novel's surrounding environment itself, the skin, "Both tactile membrane and enclosure," functions as "a permeable boundary."[95] Without contradiction, it is thus possible to read Lockwood as being both one with and separate from the moors, whether mounded with snow or churned into mud; his skin touches snow or mud – his body is surrounded by snow or mud – but he does not *become* snow or mud. Rather, this section of the narrative opens up the possibility of tactility as that which makes strange the ability of the human to relate to the environment. Lockwood's entanglement with the setting reflects the nineteenth century's burgeoning acceptance of "the permeability of borders between the self and the external world."[96] Boundless yet enclosing, the moors enact one of the novel's many juxtapositions. Their simultaneous reinforcement of and resistance to the notion of the microcosm makes space for the way that boundaries, often so numerous and so rigid, start to break down over the course of the narrative. Brontë sets up numerous barriers in the text only to dissolve them, both figuratively and literally, here through physical touch.

III. Wuthering Heights *and the Ecogothic*

Bridging tactile connection, ecological awareness, and gothic violence, Catherine's reaction to Heathcliff's departure culminates in an ecogothic moment characterized by the tempestuous weather – the titular "wuthering." Her engagement with the environment occurs most strikingly before her death, during the long period of illness. Bound to her bed in Thrushcross Grange, she longs for what lies beyond, as Nelly narrates: "Tossing about, she increased her feverish bewilderment to madness, and tore the pillow with her teeth, then raising herself up all burning, desired that I would open the window. We were in the middle of winter,

[95] Ibid, 65.
[96] Tilley, "Introduction: The Victorian Tactile Imagination," 7.

the wind blew strong from the north-east, and I objected" (122). Suddenly distracted, "she seemed to find childish diversion in pulling the feathers from the rents she had just made, and ranging them on the sheet according to their different species," as she recalls her own associations with the local birds (122). In one sense, this moment suggests a parallel between Catherine's fate and that of the birds – she is, after all, on her deathbed in this scene. But it also evokes an intrinsic material connection that binds Catherine to her very environment through the act of touch.[97] Her longing for a physical, tactile connection with the feathers, these scraps of the natural world, manifests in her need to open the window and cool her flushed face with the winter wind.

This moment of feverish frenzy continues for several pages and finds Catherine both waxing nostalgic about her past and seeking a connectivity with nature that only Wuthering Heights can offer. She opines to Nelly, "Oh, if I were but in my own bed in the old house!… And that wind sounding in the firs by the lattice. Do let me feel it – it comes straight down the moor – do let me have one breath!" (124). Nelly appeases her and opens the window to allow a rush of cold air, which proves "suddenly reviving" to Catherine, who embarks on a monologue (124). After raving at length, Catherine concludes, "I wish I were out of doors – I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy and free… I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills… Open the window again wide, fasten it open! Quick, why don't you move?" (125-126). In a moment of intense desperation, before Nelly can intervene, Catherine "crossed the room, walking very uncertainly, threw it back, and bent out, careless of the frosty air that cut about her shoulders as keen as a knife" (126). Within a single scene taking place over

[97] Ivonne Defant reads this scene from "an earth-centred viewpoint" to argue for Catherine's reaction "as that of a woman who misses a tactile and receptive relationship with nature." Ivonne Defant, "Inhabiting Nature in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*," *Brontë Studies* 42, no. 1 (January 2017): 42.

the course of no more than a few minutes, this instance marks the third time that Catherine demands her window be opened. Between her engagement with the feathers from the pillow, her nostalgic connection to the wind and the firs at Wuthering Heights, and her repeated exposure to the cold air, the barriers between human and nature become increasingly porous. The powerful, frigid wind may seem a particularly extreme element to welcome into the house, but for Catherine, ushering it into the claustrophobic chamber generates a diluted version of the communion she is accustomed to having with the environment.

With wind and feathers infiltrating the domestic room, this scene exemplifies the sort of naturalcultural ethos that lies at the heart of Brontë's microcosmic imaginary. Frequently, the novel scales the natural in such a way as to allow for a fluid interchange between human and more-than-human entities. Brontë achieves this fluidity through singular, even surprising, methods. For instance, in contrast with Thomas Hardy's intensely detailed descriptions of the natural world, which I will explore in the next chapter, Brontë is often less inclined to paint her local ecology in vivid colors. As Enid Duthie argues, description in *Wuthering Heights* tends to accompany action and, subsequently, does not always contain great detail.[98] Rather than serving us protracted descriptions of the landscape, Duthie suggests, Brontë focuses "never on nature in itself but always on its significance for the actors in the drama," which often becomes apparent not through the frame narrative but through dialogue, as in Catherine's stated desire to be among the heather, out of doors.[99] While moments describing the natural world certainly punctuate the text, many significant environmental elements remain keenly attuned to the built world and to human life. In this sense, Brontë saturates the novel's atmosphere with traces of the more-than-human world, never quite allowing her human characters to detach from their greater ecological

[98] Enid Lowry Duthie, *The Brontës and Nature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 235.
[99] Ibid, 236.

context and even critiquing those, like Edgar Linton, who try to shut it out by lingering indoors at the mere chance of rain.

Beyond signaling one of the novel's many naturalcultural entanglements, the scene of Catherine's feverish fit reveals an intrinsic convergence between ecological themes and the gothic genre. In this moment, Catherine is on the verge of death, descending into madness. Yet in this gothic state of mind and body, all she wants is to be with the air – to be with (and, perhaps, within) the environment. In her frenzy, she seeks the cold wind, willing it to permeate the boundaries of the house, because her yearning to be out of doors can only be satiated once she feels the breeze through the open window. Letting in the air, then, the window becomes something of a metonymic figure for the environment at large; it ushers the wuthering atmosphere indoors, narrowing the gap between domestic and wild space. In senses both spatial and ontological, *Wuthering Heights* frequently explodes, overturns, and dissolves conventional boundaries with its tactile naturalcutural episodes. As in Cathy's violent demonstration of distress, the novel's dissolutions often assume a gothic tenor to interrogate particularly sinister barriers: those that separate the natural and supernatural,[100] and even those that separate life and death.[101]

Ecological concerns mirror gothic ones with surprising frequency. Even outside the realm of the explicitly ecogothic, nature holds a prominent role in establishing the affective scenery of many gothic narratives – or perhaps it is precisely this quality that evinces a need for the ecogothic classification. Botting explains how the gothic mode allows the domesticated and wild components of nature to play out: "Mountains are craggy, inaccessible and intimidating; forests

[100] Napier, "The Problem of Boundaries," 98.
[101] Steve Vine, "Crypts of Identity: The Refusal of Mourning in *Wuthering Heights*," *English: Journal of the English Association* 48, no. 192 (October 1999): 175.

shadowy, impenetrable; moors windswept, bleak and cold. Nature appears hostile, untamed and threatening; again, darkness, obscurity and barely contained malevolent energy reinforce atmospheres of disorientation and fear."[102] The moors, as a prominent feature of the landscape in *Wuthering Heights*, do substantial work in painting the non-domestic environment as hostile, threatening, and disorienting. With the heavy snow at the novel's beginning, the landscape enters the narrative as a vast, illegible sea with no way in. In continually drawing connections between the gothic edifices and the threatening natural world beyond, Brontë foregrounds a gothic ecology that, with its traces of the anthropogenic, is truly defamiliarizing and quite characteristic of the period following the Industrial Revolution. The divide between indoor and outdoor becomes muddled, and the domestic often proves more threatening than the world beyond in this naturalcultural microcosm.

To some extent, thinking beyond human-built enclosures to the natural world complicates the type of claustrophobic framing so dominantly affiliated with the gothic. But if we interrogate how they come together *within* these tightly woven spaces, the ecological and the gothic make a persuasive pairing. Romantic and nineteenth-century texts, which have been central to ecocriticism and gothic studies alike, lend themselves naturally to ecogothic analysis at their nexus. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils argue that from its inception, the American gothic has been environmental; spatial enclosure that characterizes the gothic "is not only the built environment – the ruined castle, the abbey, or the dungeon – but the larger natural ecosystem in which humans are enmeshed."[103] Straying from the American context and looking toward the British, however, their argument still rings true, at least in the case of *Wuthering*

[102] Botting, *Gothic*, 4.
[103] Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils, "Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic," in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed. Matthew Wynn Sivils and Dawn Keetley (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 6.

Heights. Brontë's microcosmic approach to space certainly dovetails with gothic and ecological notions alike, constantly blending the built environment with the surrounding ecosystem. The power of her narrative lies in the breaking of boundaries between the "natural" and the "cultural," between the novel's manor houses and the moors beyond.

Both generically and affectively, the ecogothic is unsettling. For one, it invites new theories and frameworks into age-old discussions of the gothic. In introducing an issue of *Gothic Studies* dedicated to the ecogothic in the long nineteenth century, David Del Principe provides an overview of the topic that dwells substantially on material ecocriticism. Even with the gothic's frequent emphasis on nature, a specifically *eco*gothic framework poses a challenge to the originary genre in "taking a nonanthropocentric position to reconsider the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear."[104] Toying with the solidity of boundaries that determine identity and humanness, writes Del Principe, the ecogothic "examines the construction of the Gothic body – unhuman, nonhuman, transhuman, posthuman, or hybrid – through a more inclusive lens, asking how it can be more meaningfully understood as a site of articulation for environmental and species identity."[105] The dissolution of barriers between human and environment serves as one mode of destabilizing human identity: when a body merges with the landscape, the human and the nonhuman worlds lose their singularity. Running barefoot through the moors, not only does Catherine lose her shoes – a marker of her status as a "civilized" human – but she also gains an intimacy with the land through a tactile connection: her very body becomes a little more of the moors in this moment, while the moors gain something of Cathy in absorbing her shoes. Through a

[104] David Del Principe, "Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century," *Gothic Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 1.
[105] Ibid.

specifically haptic relationship with the moors, Cathy finds her own humanity blending with this desolate gothic landscape.

An even more overt engagement with materiality as a facet of the ecogothic occurs in Keetley and Sivils' discussion of transcorporeality, which they develop from the work of Stacy Alaimo, Jane Bennett, and Simon Estok. This critical conversation, to which I will return in the following chapter on Hardy, underpins a human-environmental connection strengthened by an active, animated vision of the landscape. In the ecogothic, explain Keetley and Sivils, "Humans are not entangled with a passive and inert natural backdrop, then, but with a nonhuman that is, as Bennett has argued, 'vibrant' and 'vital.'"[106] The ecology of *Wuthering Heights* is significantly less agential and detailed than that which Hardy presents in *The Woodlanders*, but Brontë similarly conflates background with foreground by inviting weather events into the novel's domestic spaces and by subverting the human-nonhuman dynamic through writing the body as, itself, a space engaged in tactile conversation with the land. Brontë's vision echoes the notions of an ecogothic that "turns to the inevitability of humans intertwined with their natural environment – to humans surrounded, interpenetrated, and sometimes stalked by a nonhuman with an agentic force that challenges humans' own vaunted ability to shape their world."[107] Read through an environmental lens, the trajectory of *Wuthering Heights* is not clear cut, but one that oscillates between conflating human and nonhuman entities and valorizing different types of agency.

IV. Ecogothic Tactility and Haunted Naturecultures

Ecogothic moments in the novel tend to coincide with intense violence, against which human bodies "planted" in flowerpots or shoes lost in the bog bespeak comparatively gentle

[106] Keetley and Sivils, "Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic," 6.
[107] Ibid, 7.

naturecultures. Even Catherine's fevered rampage, punctuated by a longing to feel the wind, pales in comparison with the blood, wounds, and lifeless bodies that materialize in other ecologically attuned scenes. Imbued with deep violence, ecogothic scenes haunt the novel's naturecultural spaces. Bodies and fluids come to literally meld with the environment in ways that are viscerally unsettling and that further unsettle human-environmental relations. Mere tactility here gives way to a recognizably *ecogothic* tactility characterized by total – and vigorous – naturalcultural interpenetration.

Some of this violence occurs in the interplay between the natural and the supernatural, rendering vague the boundaries between, for instance, the animate and the inanimate. The novel's numerous "Gothic set pieces"[108] allow for the violence of transgressed boundaries to materialize. The first of these occurs just as Lockwood's narrative opens, in those layers of enclosure that amass as he lies in the oak bed, within Catherine's former room, within the inhospitable walls of Wuthering Heights itself. After narrating the many boundaries that confine him, Lockwood introduces one of the most dramatic and violent ecogothic scenes in the entire novel, which occurs as he is caught in a vivid nightmare:

> This time, I remembered I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause: but, it annoyed me so much, that I resolved to silence it, if possible; and, I thought, I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the staple, a circumstance observed by me, when awake, but forgotten.

[108] Hoeveler, "The Brontës and the Gothic Tradition," 37.

> "I must stop it, nevertheless!" I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch: instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! (24-25)

In introducing itself as Catherine Linton, though Lockwood has read the name "Catherine Earnshaw" in the bed's carved inscriptions, the figure instantly evokes further layering: of identity, of temporality, of generations. But this moment also suggestively highlights the layering of natural and supernatural. "Terror made me cruel," Lockwood notes, describing his response of grasping the wrist of "the creature" and rubbing it against the broken window "till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes" (25). In this uncharacteristic moment, Lockwood exercises the sort of impassioned violence that we will eventually come to expect from Heathcliff. Notably, it occurs in a liminal space: the broken window that intertwines exterior with interior. But despite the shared feature of open windows, this scene has a much more sinister tenor than that in which feverish Catherine tears feathers from the pillow. That Lockwood in his half-awake state confuses the tree branch for the arm of Catherine's human/ghost hybrid self greatly complicates the interchange between Wuthering Heights and the moors, painting them both in a violent light.

Blurring multiple boundaries at once, this scene illustrates a keenly ecogothic convergence between the human and nonhuman realms. The haunting and the violence, which accord with typical gothic tropes, here take on a distinct ecological trace. Hoeveler interprets the tree branch as a symbol of "primeval nature struggling continually to uproot and assault what we construct as civilization."[109] But the confusion between branch and arm also displays an agential uncertainty: Hoeveler questions whether Lockwood "grabs or is grabbed by ice-cold fingers."[110] By inserting this key moment into the beginning of the novel, Brontë creates space for

[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.

boundaries to disintegrate and to bleed, sometimes quite literally, into one another. Moreover, reading the hand as a branch also invites the consideration of anthropogenic environmental destruction. In conflating Catherine's ghostly arm with a branch, Brontë conflates violence against humans with violence against nature. The act of scraping the arm across the broken window thus becomes analogous to that of sawing into the limb of a tree: two acts of violence rooted in tactility. This scene, thus, also contains an inherent critique of human-environmental relations, cataloguing the injury wrought by human touch.

As with this instance of Lockwood's cruelty, Brontë's ecogothic mode demonstrates the more vicious forms that naturalcultural relationships may take. The actions of Heathcliff, in particular, highlight a deep and haptic intimacy with the environment that often turns violent – more concerningly so than in the world of Lockwood's dream, for this real violence tends to manifest in physical pain and even injury. Though Heathcliff's temper comes as no surprise by this late point in the novel, his tendency toward ecogothic violence becomes particularly evident when he at last visits Catherine during her illness. He begins innocently enough by passing through the door of Thrushcross Grange, which is usually locked but, on this occasion, has anomalously been flung wide open to welcome the warm weather (157). Once he reunites with Catherine in her chamber, he continues to dissolve the distance between them – both in that moment and in his promise to remain as near to her as possible even when forced to leave the house upon Mr. Linton's imminent return. When Nelly advises Heathcliff to hide in the trees outside, Heathcliff promises Catherine, "I won't stray five yards from your window" (163), while to Nelly he says, "I shall stay in the garden… I shall be under those larch trees mind! or I pay another visit, whether Linton be in or not" (165). After Catherine's death in childbirth the following day, Nelly discovers Heathcliff, true to his word, in the park outside, "leant against an

old ash tree, his hat off, and his hair soaked with the dew that had gathered on the budded branches, and fell pattering round him" (168). By occupying this space, he crosses two divides at once. First, if entering the house found him newly privy to a previously off-limits space, he maintains this momentum by lingering near her window. A border simultaneously solid and transparent, the figure of the window is the model liminal space where Heathcliff can keep watch over Catherine while he remains unenclosed by the house itself. The second and more profound border that fades here is that between his own body and the environment in which he is situated. Deprived of full access to the domestic sphere, Heathcliff makes his home among the garden and the trees, even as he continues to mourn Catherine.

Heathcliff's most aggressive material interface with the environment soon follows, occurring immediately after Nelly informs him of Catherine's death. According to her narration, "He dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast being goaded to death with knives and spears. I observed several splashes of blood about the bark of the tree, and his hand and forehead were both stained; probably the scene I witnessed was a repetition of others acted during the night" (169). Heathcliff's violence is nothing new, particularly at this point in the novel; in some respects, his vicious actions reflect a human/more-than-human interchange through the figure of the animal, or what Ivan Kreilkamp terms "Brontë's insistent *animalization* of Heathcliff."[111] Beyond the dehumanizing, animalizing effect of Heathcliff's behavior here, the act of bashing his head into the tree can also be read as a most extreme manifestation of his desire to meld with the larger, nonhuman world around him. As when Catherine loses her shoes in the bog and plants herself in the flowerpot, Heathcliff attempts quite literally to engage materially with the environment, and even marks the tree with

[111] Ivan Kreilkamp, *Minor Creatures: Persons, Animals, and the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 55.

traces of his own being: the splashes of blood. But again, the violence of his action positions it in an entirely different register from those more innocent, incidental moments of naturalcultural tactility. When Heathcliff forcefully dashes his head into the tree, the intermingling of bark and blood defy the easy classification of Heathcliff and the tree as signifiers, respectively, of culture and nature. As Heathcliff breaks his skin, he attempts to break through the subject-object divide of Merleau-Ponty's "flesh" – yet his otherwise whole body manages to remain separate from the tree, resisting a hybrid reclassification.

Heathcliff's impassioned grief here also functions as the fullest expression of his relationship with Catherine. I read this moment of sorrowful violence as an analogue to the earlier scene when Catherine insists on standing in the rain, longing for Heathcliff's return. The connection between the two is predicated on their shared investment in their environment, and operates through the ultimate dissolution of differences, "In willfully eradicating the boundaries of the self."[112] With their boundaries thus blurred, Heathcliff, Catherine, and the natural world merge into one physical, material, nebulous entity. Through dialogue, each expresses the nature of their union, as in Catherine's concise claim, "Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff!" (82). Years after Catherine's death, and shortly before his own, Heathcliff waxes at length on their imbrication:

> …what is not connected with her to me? and what does not recall her? I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped on the flags! In every cloud, in every tree – filling the air and night, and caught by glimpses in every object, by day I am surrounded with her image… The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her! (323-324)

[112] Napier, "The Problem of Boundaries," 103.

In this devastating monologue, Heathcliff reveals how his own vision of the world has come to be shaped entirely by Catherine's memory; he exists in a microcosm where every cloud, stone, and tree echoes her features. As Heathcliff develops throughout the novel, d'Albertis writes, he "becomes absorbed…by the environment itself and a violently receptive relation to the world around him."[113] In Catherine's identification as Heathcliff himself and in Heathcliff's image of his world as saturated with Catherines, the two engage, as Napier suggests, in "a procedure of identification and merging which encompasses and annihilates the individual self."[114] They practice this absorption, attempting to dissolve within their own environment as a way to identify and reach toward the other. Earlier in the novel, a more vivacious Catherine and Heathcliff espouse a distinctly tactile mode of communicating with the natural world; here, however, their ultimate destitution leads them down the last-resort path of dissolution. They try to find their way back to each other by employing the environment itself as a medium, but they can only succeed in merging through death alone.

Furthering their shared attempts to reach each other, Heathcliff even practices his bodily-environmental dissolution in a way that mimics Catherine's. Like Catherine in her illness, Heathcliff, in his physical decline, takes to leaving his window open regardless of the weather. Walking around the house after a night of heavy rain, Nelly notices "the master's window swinging open, and the rain driving straight in" (334). When she hurries inside to check on him, she is met with several boundaries: a locked door, to which she must fetch a key, followed by closed panels, which she pushes open to find Heathcliff in an eerie state of death, with eyes that will not close and a near smile on his face. Nelly observes that he has been drenched: "his face and throat were washed with rain; the bed-clothes dripped, and he was perfectly still. The lattice,

[113] D'Albertis, "Dark Nature," 137-138.
[114] Napier, "The Problem of Boundaries," 102.

flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill" (335). As a fitting bookend to a novel that introduces the generational drama through Lockwood's nightmare in the oak bed, here is another haunting image of a figure whose arm is caught in the window, suspended between home and nature, even between life and death. It is as if, in his final moments, he has performed the ultimate naturalcultural collapse, harnessing the weather and summoning it inside.

Perhaps the most extreme ecogothic moment in the novel, however, occurs shortly before Heathcliff's rain-soaked death. Venturing to Catherine's grave, Heathcliff discerns that "two yards of loose earth was the sole barrier between us" (289) and immediately resolves to shovel it away and join her. He tells Nelly that, while trying to pry the lid from Catherine's coffin,

> There was another sigh, close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind. I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by – but as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there, not under me, but on the earth. (290)

Multiple echoes of the scene between Lockwood and Catherine's ghost transpire here, from the forms of enclosure (oak bed, coffin) to the dissolution of a human-earth barrier (arm and/as tree, body and/as earth). Likewise, similar moments of sensory confusion highlight such dissolution: in both scenes emerge sounds indistinguishable as human or natural. Throughout the novel, Harris argues, Catherine and Heathcliff "understand themselves to be part of the land and the air, feeling with and through the weather rather than in response to it."[115] Heathcliff ultimately brings this connection to fruition when he joins Catherine in her final resting place – a place that, John

[115] Harris, *Weatherland*, 283-284.

T. Matthews suggests, "predictably secures their suspension across boundaries… Neither inside nor outside, the site of the wall's rupture, the obliteration of nature's and culture's demarcation."[116] Together, Heathcliff and Catherine face an eternity intertwined with the earth, where nearly every remaining boundary has collapsed.

With its concluding image, though, the novel suggests a mode of human-environmental relationality that repositions the ecogothic. Rather than appearing as the site of a gothic nightmare, the burial ground transforms into a site of pure dissolution. Lockwood, venturing through the churchyard, comes upon the headstones of Edgar Linton, Catherine, and Heathcliff, noting, "I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (337). Despite the tempestuous relationships that enliven the novel, Brontë here lingers on a residual trace of weather and permeability that characterizes the human/more-than-human connection as one of dissolution. Lockwood claims to be with the human "them," but he sees only the environment surrounding the graves: the sky, moths, heath, harebells, wind, and grass. The bodies have begun to decompose; soon, stripped of flesh, they will be bereft of their "permeable boundary." In death, the distinction between human and nonhuman will, in its most physical sense, dissolve.

V. Naturalcultural Revisions: The Second Catherine

It is in living, however, that humans cultivate their own relationships with the more-than-human world. The story of Catherine and Heathcliff, the first generation, both drips with violent ecogothic occurrences and culminates in trauma and tragedy. But by the novel's end, the vicious

[116] John T. Matthews, "Framing in 'Wuthering Heights,'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language; Austin* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 55.

human presence gives way to a new environmental connection that Cathy, the second Catherine, cultivates. I want to propose that we read Cathy as Brontë's exemplar of how to practice constructive environmental immersion, or how to carry out an ecological stewardship that lends itself to emulation by resisting those violent relationships between the human and the more-than-human world. Not every character, and not every setting, need be so tempestuous as we see with Heathcliff and the first Catherine, Brontë suggests through the figure of Cathy. Despite growing up amid countless enclosures and boundaries, Cathy ultimately strikes a productive balance between wild and domestic spaces, protecting local plants and cultivating a garden of her own. And in exploring Cathy's nurturing potential, Brontë turns away from the violent tactility that accompanies the ecogothic and, once again, toward communication between human and more-than-human entities.

In critical discussions, the two Catherines often appear juxtaposed for their seemingly opposing ways of inhabiting the natural world. Silver sets up a distinction, arguing, "whereas Catherine runs barefoot through the heath, her daughter passively watches…from her comfortable seat in a tree."[117] Much as in scholarship that pits nature against culture, there seems to be a pleasure in identifying the novel's display of juxtaposition through the figures of the Catherines. Yet these contrasts are hardly the binaries they initially seem to be. Cathy Linton, in particular, serves as a mediating force between nature and culture, interiors and exteriors, cultivated and uncultivated spaces. In many ways, she is uniquely poised as a figure of the Anthropocene, as her drive to engage with the outer world stems from her initial enclosure within domestic spaces. When she is at last allowed to have direct encounters with the environment, she practices a more tempered – perhaps a more identifiably human(e) – mode of

[117] Silver, "Domesticating Bronte's Moors," 197.

relation, observing and tending to it rather than violently assaulting it. In other words, compared with her mother, Cathy seems to be a more stereotypical "Victorian" woman.

Cathy does carry on the more moderate tactility with which I began this chapter: the type that Merleau-Ponty identifies as a mode of communication. She sustains, across generations, that essential intimacy between human skin and the weather itself. In a scene reminiscent of the contrast between Edgar Linton's aversion to the rain versus Catherine and Heathcliff's embrace of the elements, Brontë reiterates this divide in the next generation. Young Linton, in a crotchety rage, demands of Cathy, "Will you shut the door, if you please? you left it open – and those – those *detestable* creatures won't bring coals to the fire. It's so cold!" (237). Like her mother and Heathcliff, Cathy instinctively bridges the divide between domestic space and the natural world outside, transcending boundaries through opening doors and windows. She even follows on their heels in her indifference to inclement weather. Preparing for an afternoon walk, Nelly notices "boding abundant rain" and "requested my young lady to forego her ramble because I was certain of showers. She refused; and I unwillingly donned a cloak, and took my umbrella to accompany her on a stroll to the bottom of the park" (229). Rather than presenting a radically different model of engaging with the environment, then, Cathy's behavior still evokes that of the novel's most ecologically imbricated characters – only in a more practical and practicable sense. Her relation to nature, to be sure, veers away from the violence that Heathcliff displays and the intensity with which both Heathcliff and Catherine let in the winter air and driving rain from outside. Nevertheless, she opens naturalcultural boundaries within her bounded world, working to cultivate a space where the human and the more-than-human can coexist less violently.

With her more moderate attentiveness to the land around her, Cathy becomes something of a champion for human-environmental relations in the rapidly industrializing world. Though

the novel presents a microcosm that the world beyond hardly penetrates, Brontë's work nevertheless reads as a response to the environmental shifts and damage emerging as a result of the Industrial Revolution. As a central figure in the second generation's storyline, Cathy navigates some of these changes even as she remains wholly enclosed in a world that consists only of Thrushcross Grange, Wuthering Heights, and their immediate environs. Shawna Ross analyzes Nelly and Cathy's attention to a bluebell as representative of "how the Brontës, living temporally and spatially at the onset of the Anthropocene, processed their experiences of ecological change."[118] On the walk that Cathy refuses to pass up despite the threatening rain, Nelly tries to cheer her by pointing to the roots of a tree and exclaiming, "There's a little flower, up yonder, the last bud from the multitude of blue-bells that clouded those turf steps in July with a lilac mist. Will you clamber up, and pluck it to show to papa?" (230). After staring for some time at the lone flower, Cathy replies, "No, I'll not touch it – but it looks melancholy, does it not, Ellen?" (230). In this reluctance to uproot the bluebell, Ross notes, Cathy emerges as "a steward of nature whose own health is intimately tied to that of her environment."[119] By carefully observing the flower, projecting its very melancholy, and leaving it be, Cathy demonstrates a productive intimacy with the environment that lacks the previous generation's intensity and violence. Often, Cathy enacts a somewhat distanced, less tactile approach to the wilderness, leaving few traces of herself in comparison with her mother, who carelessly loses her shoes in the bog, or Heathcliff, whose blood mingles with the bark of the tree. In her very refusal even to touch the flower, Cathy seems rather womanly in a sentimental sense; her nurturing characteristics open up the possibility for an alternate mode of human-environmental

[118] Ross, "The Last Bluebell," 219.
[119] Ibid, 225.

relationality that depends not on achieving tactile intimacy with nature, but on communicating with it in a gentler, more protective way.

When Cathy does use touch, she puts it to a nurturing end, turning to the domestic space to intervene with nature through the small-scale act of cultivating a garden. She works together with Hareton to design a garden that, Possidente argues, "becomes a fitting symbol of her ability to unite nature and culture in a way that her mother never could."[120] Encountering Cathy and Hareton at work, Nelly observes, "I saw she had persuaded him to clear a large space of ground from currant and gooseberry bushes, and they were busy planning together an importation of plants from the grange" (317). Alongside Nelly's wonder comes her alarm at "the devastation which had been accomplished in a brief half hour; the black currant trees were the apple of Joseph's eye, and she had just fixed her choice of a flower bed in the midst of them!" (317). Even as the novel draws to a close, Cathy challenges rigid binaries and links the act of cultivated growth with the act of upheaval. In rupturing Joseph's trees from the earth, Cathy claims the land for her own, filling it with plants that she has chosen and trees that will outlive her. And in doing so, she unites the pair of ancestral houses, taking two microcosmic spaces and turning them into a larger sphere – a sphere including the surrounding landscape – that weds elements of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.

Cathy's form of natureculture suggests that turning away from the embodied, violent, and destructive engenders new, more generative human-environmental relationships. Working towards a similar end, Lockwood's increasing awareness of the moors, too, frames the novel. Whereas he begins his journey at Wuthering Heights by participating in an act of ecogothic violence, raking ghostly Catherine's branchlike wrist over the jagged windowpane, he concludes

[120] Possidente, "Women and Landscape in *Wuthering Heights*," 266.

his narrative as a peaceful observer in the churchyard, singling out individual species of flowers and insects. He achieves a fresh reverence, becoming a fittingly quiet participant among “that quiet earth.” Moving away from the ecogothic at the novel’s end, Brontë envisions a peaceful engagement with the local ecology, allowing plants, and those who tend to them, to flourish among the wuthering landscape.

Chapter II

Thomas Hardy's Ecosphere: More-than-Human Entanglement in *The Woodlanders*

I. "An Ecology of Selves" and Hardy's Vital Materialism

While Emily Brontë takes up questions of how nature inflects domesticity and civilization, Thomas Hardy imagines a nature that has already written itself into us, rendering no domestic space untouched by it. The thrust of his environmental vision lies not in his strategic deployment of genre, but – on a fittingly smaller scale – in his descriptions that privilege linguistic detail over plot. Like many of Hardy's novels, *The Woodlanders* (1887) imagines a world (here, a forest) teeming with the activity of animals, plants, and humans alike. From its opening chapters, every part of the novel's world is vibrantly, even violently, alive, as when Marty South emerges from her cottage after a sleepless night of spar-making: "A lingering wind brought to her ear the creaking sound of two over-crowded branches in the neighbouring wood, which were rubbing each other into wounds, and other vocalised sorrows of the trees, together with the screech of owls, and the fluttering tumble of some awkward woodpigeon ill-balanced on its roosting bough."[121] In Marty's brief journey between her home and her shed, she encounters a bizarre symphony of interwoven natural sounds: windblown branches, screeching owls, and a tumbling woodpigeon. Attuned to various components within the environment, this description grants each life form a moment in the foreground. First, Hardy personifies the trees; engaged in conflict, they vocally manifest their own agony. Then, in contrast with the unspecified number of owls, the woodpigeon emerges as a singular being, audible not for its song, as may be anticipated, but for its clumsy fall. And as soon as she steps outside, Marty, the sole human presence in this scene, becomes imbricated within this group of more-than-human entities. By

[121] Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, ed. Patricia Ingham (London: Penguin Books, [1887] 1998), 16.

breaking the environment down into an assemblage of specific beings, Hardy here imbues the woods with a vitality and animacy that decenters the human presence in the land.

My reading of *The Woodlanders* centers on description as a mode of accessing environmental depth in the novel. Attending to descriptive moments necessitates a scaling down that counters much Victorian ecocriticism, which often lauds Hardy's novels for their navigation of enormous temporal and spatial disjunctions at a grand scale suitable for the Anthropocene.[122] If, as Gillian Beer writes, Hardy's plots "pay homage to human scale by ceasing as the hero or heroine dies,"[123] this chapter concertedly turns away from both plot and the human scale. Instead, I attend to the ecological descriptions, or what Beer might simply term "writing" in contradistinction to a human-centered "plot." Entangling character with environment and vacillating between foreground and background, these moments position humans as interconnected components of the rural ecosphere. Nearly always, they animate the more-than-human realm by featuring multiple facets of the environment to create what anthropologist Eduardo Kohn terms "an ecology of selves."[124] Rather than aggrandizing or abolishing human agency, then, Hardy's microfocus allows him to place humans within the context of other modes of experience, other scales of being, and other methods of acting and feeling. His descriptive moments offer representations of and engagements with more-than-human agents, eliding the boundary between humans and environment that many critics are so keen to delineate.

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[122] See: Anna Henchman, *The Starry Sky Within: Astronomy and the Reach of the Mind in Victorian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Benjamin Morgan, "Scale as Form: Thomas Hardy's Rocks and Stars," in *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse O. Taylor, AnthropoScene: The SLSA Book Series (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 132–149; Aaron Rosenberg, "'Infinitesimal Lives': Thomas Hardy's Scale Effects," in *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire*, ed. Philip Steer and Nathan K. Hensley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 182–199.
[123] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 223.
[124] Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 78.

Encouraging a narrow focus, Hardy's novels constitute micro-localized communities, expanding the environmental imagination with their imbrication of human and more-than-human entities.

Throughout *The Woodlanders*, Hardy delineates Little Hintock as a microcosm with an environmental and social atmosphere distinct from that of the world beyond. Uniquely nebulous, atmosphere evades representation. Yet Hardy's attention to boundaries allows him to circumscribe an atmospheric space that, if not visible, can certainly be sensed. Dora Zhang usefully theorizes this hazy concept, explaining, "Feeling the atmosphere is thus always an embodied perception that is more visceral than reflective, an awareness of being in a space and of how other bodies, both human and nonhuman, are also present there. It is a matter of finding one's body not only affected by its surroundings but also not easily demarcated from them."[125] Zhang's attention to the interchange between human and nonhuman bodies is crucial to my reading of Hardy's efforts to frame the village community. Dependent on technologies of containment, Little Hintock plays host to a proliferation of moments that celebrate the entanglement between human and more-than-human lives. Within Hardy's microcosmic vision, an atmospheric palette emerges, predicated on the descriptive space afforded to all types of beings as well as on the conflation of foreground and background that occurs most compellingly in this smaller sphere of focus.

Close reading the novel's descriptions grants space for the background and for the nonhuman to emerge as central components of the narrative. For thinking about how Hardy reworks the status of setting and character, Kohn's work proves instructive. In *How Forests Think*, Kohn expands upon interdisciplinary attempts to develop a framework that bridges the human and the nonhuman; his scholarship offers a posthuman critique of human exceptionalism

[125] Dora Zhang, "Notes on Atmosphere," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 27, no. 1 (August 2018): 125-126.

that probes "what it might mean to say that forests think."[126] A thinking forest, for one, comprises "an ecology of selves." This crucial phrase necessitates expanding the boundaries of selfhood beyond "animals with brains" to plants and other nonhumans.[127] In Kohn's broadly construed definition, selfhood is not necessarily "coterminous with a physically bounded organism," but can encompass many bodies (e.g., a crowd) or appear within a body (e.g., a cell).[128] Informed by Kohn's work, I shift this attention to boundaries into the literary realm, reading Little Hintock and its forested surroundings as an ecology of selves.

Little Hintock's ecology of selves becomes apparent through those small-scale, descriptive moments in which Hardy explores the potential of the novel to circumscribe networks in which more-than-human semiotics and agencies coalesce. Hardy's novels offer a provocative mode of imagining how human and more-than-human entities are entangled. I approach from a different angle the critical interest in analyzing how Hardy's works "navigate problems of scalar multiplicity and incommensurability."[129] Depth is central to narrating entanglement, and in this case, depth takes the form of ecological embeddedness. Attending to dendrography in *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), Elizabeth Carolyn Miller pushes back against critiques of Hardy's bioregional rootedness to argue, "despite conceptual shortcomings of bioregionalism, which are particularly notable when considering environmental questions from a postcolonial, global, or anti-capitalist perspective," the novel's dendrography discloses the existence of "more than one vector along which we might measure a work's outward reach."[130] My own analysis similarly turns to another axis, considering neither time in the geological sense

[126] Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 6-7.
[127] Ibid, 75.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Morgan, "Scale as Form," 133.
[130] Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, "Dendrography and Ecological Realism," *Victorian Studies* 58, no. 4 (December 2016): 699.

nor space in the universal sense, but a depth of environmental relation that emerges in that microcosmic place – that ecology of selves – known as Little Hintock. We must attend not to the universe as a whole, but to a sliver of it. Rather than discerning a scale for the human, I argue, Hardy's attention to the microcosm permits him to articulate what it means for the human to exist as part of the world.

As with the wrestling trees and tumbling woodpigeon in the opening example, the microcosmic structure allows for great depth in its ability to convey nonhuman activity and, moreover, nonhuman agency. For a conception of agency beyond the human, I draw from new materialism. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann observe that although agency comes in many forms, all such forms are material and "the meanings they produce influence in various ways the existence of both human and non-human natures."[131] Agency transcends humans and human intentionality alike, emerging as "a pervasive and inbuilt property of matter."[132] As Elisha Cohn notes, Hardy, in particular, is productive for thinking how literature can challenge conventions of narrative agency; he paints human agency as "profoundly unstable" against the background of a novel marked by an unpredictable ecosystem, frequent perspectival shifts, and swarming, flocking animals that are multiple rather than individuated.[133] In making space for various forms of nonhuman agency to flourish, Hardy articulates a vital materialism that, per Jane Bennett's definition, resists anthropocentrism and relies upon "the agentic contributions of nonhuman forces…in an attempt to counter the narcissistic reflex of human language and

[131] Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, "Introduction: Stories Come to Matter," in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 3.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Elisha Cohn, "'No Insignificant Creature': Thomas Hardy's Ethical Turn," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 64, no. 4 (2010): 501.

thought."[134] Narrative attention to agency and nonhuman materiality, then, becomes a key method for analyzing Hardy's descriptions and how they valorize the more-than-human.

As a foundational component of his writing process, Hardy's notebooks evince his engagement with contemporary work that promoted alternative notions of animacy beyond the human. In his notes from the mid-1870s through 1888, he quotes Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of Biology*: "A glacier has almost the properties of an animate thing. It grows, decays, in a tolerably constant ratio."[135] And from Oswald Heer's *The Primaeval World of Switzerland*, Hardy cites a description of a landscape from the Carboniferous period: "There was none of the higher animals: no birds rested on the branches of the trees: no mammal in the forests. The air was sultry & full of vapour, the soil hot and steaming: & the stillness was profound, broken only by the plashing of the rain, or the whistling of the wind as it passed by the leaves of the trees."[136] These brief excerpts from a dense compendium of research find Hardy grappling with the possibilities that emerge when humans share, or even cede, the spotlight. Spencer's attention to the glacier invites consideration of what happens when inanimate objects are imbued with animate qualities, while the passage from Heer pushes the imagination further in illustrating a vibrant world devoid of humans and even other animals. Recalling the drama of the trees in the opening passage, the sultry air, steaming soil, and whistling wind easily find resonance in Hardy's own woodland.

Hardy's fiction puts his reading and research into practice. Framing Little Hintock as a self-contained atmospheric microcosm, Hardy works in a manner similar to Brontë's, imagining the ecological depth that can emerge through attending to a community on a small scale. But in

[134] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.
[135] Thomas Hardy, *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 90.
[136] Ibid, 89-90

his natural world, unlike that of *Wuthering Heights*, the ecosystem teems with nonhuman entities that seem, almost, to be characters in their own right – and that act with deep violence in their own contexts, even devoid of the human presence. In the world of *The Woodlanders*, Hardy steers clear of human-imposed confinement, envisioning the environment as itself a container of an ecosystem that synthesizes human with more-than-human, rather than thinking on the scale of the individual or even, more broadly, of humanity. The isolated village of Little Hintock thus emerges as a place characterized not only by the drama of its human characters, but also by a vital materialism that the novel's environmental vision generates. Through description, itself a kind of enclosure, Hardy delineates the novel's micronarratives and microspaces, blurring the long-established binaries between human and environment, between foreground and background.

II. Little Hintock: Framing, Description, and Entanglement

Before considering the networked qualities of Hardy's ecosphere, and the entanglement of the various human and more-than-human lives within it, it is essential to examine how Hardy circumscribes Little Hintock within a microcosmic structure. Moments of containment saturate the novel from its opening, which finds a minor character, the barber Mr. Percombe, struggling to locate Little Hintock. He journeys along "the forsaken coach-road," also described as "a deserted highway," which "expresses solitude to a degree that is not reached by mere dales or downs, and bespeaks a tomb-like stillness more emphatic than that of glades and pools" (5). Distilling the essence of this deserted, solitudinous place, the first paragraph concludes, simply, "The spot is lonely" (5). As he traverses the lonely landscape, Mr. Percombe welcomes the sight of a passing carriage with the lament, "I've been trying to find a short way to Little Hintock this last half hour… But though I've been to Great Hintock and Hintock House half a dozen times, I

am at fault about the small village" (6). More so than other locales within the Hintock family, Little Hintock fails to make itself apparent. Only with the guidance of a more astute traveler can Mr. Percombe navigate the landscape.

Having collected Mr. Percombe, the carriage eventually winds its way into the village via "a half-invisible little lane" (8). With its negligible size and inconspicuousness, the lane serves as a fitting introduction to Little Hintock, whose topography remains hardly discernible to an outsider. Now further obscured by the looming darkness, the village finally emerges as a vision of "gardens and orchards sunk in a concave, and, as it were, snipped out of the woodland. From this self-contained place rose in stealthy silence tall stems of smoke… It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world" (8). As Little Hintock slowly comes into sight, Hardy paints its isolation with an alliterative heavy hand: "sunk in a concave," "snipped out of the woodland," "self-contained," "sequestered." Little Hintock is nothing if not spatially distinct, almost estranged from the surrounding woods. Commencing the narrative with an outsider's entry into this clandestine village, Hardy creates the sense that Mr. Percombe – like Lockwood – has infiltrated an altogether different environment; innately microcosmic, Little Hintock maintains a rigid boundedness from the world beyond.

Hardy's bioregionalism illustrates a deliberately scaled-down ecosphere. Conceptualizing the nature of such a "circumscribed environment," Heidi Scott defines the ecosphere as "the regional environment that was the entire sphere of existence for most people before the Industrial Revolution."[137] The impulse to contain, suggests Scott, manifests also in the work of nineteenth-century poets "who consciously drew a sphere around small-scale nature in order to make sense

[137] Heidi C. M. Scott, *Chaos and Cosmos: Literary Roots of Modern Ecology in the British Nineteenth Century* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 25.

of spots of time and place amid the increasingly chaotic, global, industrial modern world."[138] The sequestered village of Little Hintock certainly has little room to usher in components of the outside world, even the immediate woodland surroundings. The size of this ecosphere thus seems to be less about resisting international pressures and more about creating a space to explore the imaginative potential of a fully agential ecological-narrative system.

Coeval with the rise in globalization that imperialism heralded, even those most bioregional of Victorian novels dialogue to some extent with the world beyond. In a passage from Book I of *The Woodlanders*, Giles Winterborne and Marty South, the novel's primary figures of ecological enmeshment, meet in the early morning and "walked together, the pattern of the air-holes in the top of the lantern being thrown upon the mist overhead, where they appeared of giant size, as if reaching the tent-shaped sky… Hardly anything could be more isolated or more self-contained than the lives of these two walking here in the lonely hour before day" (21-22). Recalling the description of Little Hintock's insularity in the first paragraphs of the novel, this moment draws "self-contained" Giles and Marty into direct comparison with the "self-contained" woodland. The notion of containment even stretches to the uppermost boundaries of their village, which become almost visible in the finite image of the "tent-shaped sky." Immediately following this moment, however, a qualification situates Giles and Marty within a larger context: "And yet, looked at in a certain way, their lonely courses formed no detached design at all, but were part of the pattern in the great web of human doings then weaving in both hemispheres, from the White Sea to Cape Horn" (22). It is possible to be almost wholly cut off from the outside world and still unwittingly participate in its grand scheme, Hardy suggests; this enclosure, of course, is only rendered perceptible in contrast to that which is absent.

[138] Ibid, 4.

Aside from this gesture toward a capacious global scale, however, Hardy's interests lie in constructing a knowable community. All beings are intrinsically networked in this world, but only by scaling down the globe into a miniature sphere will an enmeshed environmental network become evident. Thinking at the global scale also occludes much of the depth that local attachment affords: if Giles and Marty were to cross continents or hemispheres, for instance, they would have little knowledge of the native flora and fauna, or the customary climatic and seasonal patterns. Only by concentrating a narrative in a microcosm like that of Little Hintock can this depth of place be achieved and a network beyond the human become manifest. Envisioning Little Hintock as an intimately enclosed ecosphere certainly suggests the possibility of perceiving the village from outside, as a whole. Such a perspective accords with Jesse Oak Taylor's suggestion, "To inhabit an interior is to imagine an exterior, even if you do not have access to it. We are now in a glasshouse that we cannot escape, even as we are unable to forget the vantage point of one outside looking in."[139] By opening with the scene of Mr. Percombe's attempt to enter the village, the novel establishes importance of demarcating boundaries between interior and exterior – a type of narrative framing device that also scaffolds the spatial purview of Little Hintock. Taylor's figure of the glasshouse (a figure that the next chapter will discuss at length in regard to Wilde) offers a rational method through which to envision Little Hintock. Much like a temperature-controlled Victorian hothouse, Little Hintock seems to comprise its own microclimate. Evoking manufactured environments and the technology of curation, these metaphors of glassy encasement encompass scales as small as an instrument of domestic decor and as large as the Crystal Palace of 1851.

[139] Jesse Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 26-27.

Bell jars and glasshouses also find literal resonance in *The Woodlanders*, filtered through the scientific knowledge of Dr. Edred Fitzpiers, one of several disruptive newcomers to Little Hintock. While vehemently denying his love for Grace Melbury, Fitzpiers offers one of many (largely unfavorable) reflections on his residence in the village, saying to Winterborne, "people living insulated, as I do by the solitude of this place, get charged with emotive fluid like a Leyden jar with electric" (115). Signaling Hardy's "aspiration to integrate scientific thought with literary form,"[140] Fitzpiers here refers to an eighteenth-century Dutch invention in which a glass jar could be made temporarily to store electricity. By comparing his own existence within Little Hintock to the contained environment of a Leyden jar, Fitzpiers suggests the involuntary interpenetration of person and environment within a particular atmosphere. Taylor proffers a parallel in his chapter on George Eliot, arguing, "Eliot's novels often present atmospheres that both penetrate and are constituted by the characters that inhabit them. She turns to atmospheric language in describing characters' mental and emotional states, and the sense in which those ideas, feelings, or sensations can be transmitted 'in the air.'"[141] The Leyden jar image sets up a similarly contained notion of an atmosphere that both influences and is influenced by its inhabitants – whether they participate in this sphere willingly, like Giles Winterborne and Marty South, or inadvertently, like Fitzpiers.

That Little Hintock adheres to its own logic, and even to its own climate patterns, becomes a source of increasing frustration for Fitzpiers. The narrator describes the village's climatic quirks – a hybrid of "half-snowy, half-rainy" (126) weather, in one instance – as eccentric to most, but charming to those who possess local knowledge:

[140] Morgan, "Scale as Form," 141-142.
[141] Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 69.

> To the people at home there these changeful tricks had their interests; the strange mistakes that some of the more sanguine trees had made in budding before their month, to be incontinently glued up by frozen thawings now; the similar sanguine errors of impulsive birds in framing nests that were swamped by snow-water, and other such incidents, prevented any sense of wearisomeness in the minds of the natives. But these were features of a world not familiar to Fitzpiers, and the inner visions to which he had almost exclusively attended having suddenly failed in their power to absorb him, he felt unutterably dreary. (126)

Fitzpiers' total lack of joy stems in large part from his inability to "read" the landscape and its changing weather, echoing Lockwood's own confusion upon first coming to Wuthering Heights. Though Fitzpiers feels constricted by Little Hintock's jar-like intimacy, he is not an astute enough participant to become integrated into its ecosystem until the end of the novel, and even then, his entry is tied to Grace, a village native. Much of his failure stems from his frequent refusal to engage with the already-limited Little Hintock. Here, the mention of his "inner visions" gestures toward his tendency to delineate an individual world around himself in the face of these unfamiliar surroundings.

Hardy develops Fitzpiers' sense of insulation by continually positioning him in a state of self-imposed enclosure. Shortly before their marriage, for instance, Grace looks out across the landscape toward the house of her future husband: "The window-shutters were closed, the bedroom curtains closely drawn, and not the thinnest coil of smoke rose from the rugged chimneys" (167). By shutting himself in so fully, Fitzpiers creates a microcosm within the already microcosmic Little Hintock, establishing a rigid boundary with no promise of interchange: no light can penetrate the windows of the home, and no smoke can emerge from its

chimney into the surrounding atmosphere. Shortly thereafter, Fitzpiers' self-imposed isolation intensifies. Once they have married and moved into a wing of the Melburys' house, Fitzpiers tells Grace, "we must come to an understanding about our way of living here. If we continue in these rooms there must be no mixing in with your people below" (183). Compared with Lockwood, who likewise finds himself confined within room upon room, Fitzpiers closes *himself* off. Lockwood is involuntarily trapped by the forces around him, including the weather, while Fitzpiers chooses to inhabit restrictive interior spaces, and even *segments* of those interior spaces, that prevent him from participating in all that lies beyond: Little Hintock's community, its environment, and even its very atmosphere. Confined as such, he will neither mingle with Grace's family nor emit chimney smoke from his house. In contrast, too, with Giles and Marty's positioning within Little Hintock's ecosphere, Fitzpiers' inattention to his surroundings indicates a failure of communal and environmental engagement.

Rather than allowing human characters to dictate space, Hardy suggests, the environment itself should impose boundaries. Following on the demarcation conjured by the phrase "tent-shaped sky" as well as Fitzpiers' Leyden jar comparison, Hardy's rural community seems to exist quite literally in its own sphere. The bounds of this sphere consist most often of trees and branches, such as "the black boughs which formed a network upon the stars" (114). From within the tangle of trees, the world beyond appears in brief glimpses; conversely, outer forces can barely seep in. Such circumscription crops up repeatedly throughout the novel, recalling Little Hintock's physical enclosure. From the perspective of the villagers, accessing even the sky beyond proves difficult: shaded by dense leaves, the woodland becomes "a solid opaque body of infinitely larger shape and importance… Except at mid-day the sun was not seen complete by the Hintock people, but rather in the form of numerous little stars staring through the leaves" (144).

Similarly, Grace walks through these woods "screened and roofed in from the outer world of wind and cloud by a net-work of boughs" (233). And as Mr. Melbury searches the woods for Fitzpiers, "The breeze was oozing through the net-work of boughs as through a strainer" (257). With the frequently reiterated image of the bough network, Hardy affirms the opacity and impenetrability of this sphere, through which not even the sun can shine in its full brilliance. And echoing the image of Little Hintock's sky as tent-like, Grace becomes "screened and roofed in" from the world above.

The images of the oozing wind and "numerous little stars staring through the leaves" gesture towards a somewhat varied perspective that shifts outward to imagine forces from above and beyond as they fruitlessly attempt to enter Little Hintock. Light again proves a common infiltrator, but instead of Fitzpiers shutting the windows to close it out, the trees themselves serve as a natural boundary; in another instance, the summer leaves are "so opaque, that it was darker at some of the densest spots than in winter time, scarce a crevice existing by which a ray could get down to the ground" (299). And at yet a different point in the text, "The fog of the previous evening still lingered so heavily over the woods that the morning could not penetrate the trees till long after its time" (95). Taken together, these descriptions construct a world strangely bereft of natural light, regardless of season. The most secluded and densely bounded outposts of Little Hintock almost exist in a state of perpetual night – and of perpetual stillness. Beyond sunlight, other elements struggle to permeate the woodland. As Grace sits in her garden, "The mass of full-juiced leafage on the heights around her was just swayed into faint gestures by a nearly spent wind which, even in its enfeebled state, did not reach her shelter" (288). Devoid of unmediated light and even unaffected by wind, this microcosm of rural life comprises its own sort of atmosphere in being almost entirely severed from the world beyond.

The contained nature of Little Hintock, forming its own bounded ecosophere, recalls Brontë's "wuthering" setting in dictating a unique climate that typically demands local knowledge to understand. Much like the aforementioned climatic hybrid of snow and rain, seasons – and their changes, in particular – tend not to transition cleanly into the next, but to hover in a liminal state. One such description finds Grace, returned from school, reacquainting herself with the village's patterns:

> Although the time of bare boughs had now set in, there were sheltered hollows amid the Hintock plantations and copses in which a more tardy leave-taking than on windy summits was the rule with the foliage. This caused here and there an apparent mixture of the seasons; so that in some of the dells they passed by holly-berries in full red growing beside oak and hazel whose leaves were as yet not far removed from green, and brambles whose verdure was rich and deep as in the month of August. To Grace these well-known particularities were as an old painting restored. (51)

In this passage, the woods put forth a gradient of seasons. The most intensely sheltered parts of the woodland preserve seasons since past, allowing for the remarkable coexistence of lush summer brambles and autumnal holly berries alongside the naked branches of impending winter. A single point in time becomes occasion for a study in contrasts: winter meets summer, red meets green, and austerity meets abundance. Though these qualities seem unlikely to coincide in most realms, they join together here to distinguish Little Hintock from other ecosystems, suggesting that this village comprises a distinct microclimate.

The village's own location, too, describes a sharp line between different alcoves of the region. As Melbury and Grace travel home by carriage, "on the right they beheld a wide valley, differing both in feature and atmosphere from that of the Hintock precincts. It was the cider

country, which met the woodland district on the axis of this hill. Over the vale the air was blue as sapphire – such a blue as outside that apple-valley was never seen" (140). Divided from Little Hintock by a mere hill, cider country differs strikingly in atmosphere. Moving beyond the networks of branches, Hardy here draws on the sky's distinct shift to frame the limits of Little Hintock, visualizing atmosphere, that often unrepresentable entity, through color. In doing so, ultimately, he demarcates a microcosmic, atmospheric space wherein an array of beings can be brought into relation.

Framed by a network of boughs – that recurring image – the ecosphere of Little Hintock consists of its own corporeal, enmeshed networks that manifest in a multitude of ways. Within Hardy's ecology of selves, the primary entanglements take on a range of forms, from the figurative linking of the human with the more-than-human to the deep intimacy of certain characters' local knowledge. While Hardy elsewhere decenters the human altogether, these points in the narrative more consistently, and more directly, entangle the human with the more-than-human environment.

Rather than functioning as obvious plot points or extended descriptions, these entanglements largely emerge through brief details. As with Hardy's descriptions of the impenetrable woodland sphere, some of his techniques here gain traction through repetition. He draws constantly upon figurative language in the context of the human voice, for instance, to interweave humans and their environment. Early in the text, as Giles trails Grace and Mr. Melbury through the woods, he hears a voice "shouting intermittently in a sort of human bark" (53) and eventually emerges through the trees to find himself at an auction. He absentmindedly bids on timber "To justify his presence there" as "the auctioneer's voice seemed to become one of the natural sounds of the woodland" (54). The "bark" analogy conjures two distinct forms of

natural engagement: both the sound of a dog and the outer layer of the tree, that figure ever-present in the novel. In blending with the woodland itself, the auctioneer's voice demonstrates the capacity for the human to become fully immersed in an ecological system. A twin phrase from the novel's end finds a dying Giles attempting to communicate with Grace as she hides out in his humble cottage: "Through the darkness and wind a voice reached her, floating upon the weather as though a part of it" (310). The mention of the weather here suggests something of an anthropogenic influence, likening Giles to an agent that can effect change on the local ecosystem – which, being a master planter of trees, he truly can. Also during this period of the novel, when Grace remains unaware of Giles' dilapidated shelter nearby, she "fancied that she heard a faint noise amid the trees, resembling a cough; but as it never came any nearer she concluded that it was a squirrel or bird" (306). Giles' constant imbrication with the environment through his physicality and intimate local knowledge is crucial to his characterization, but it is worth noting that his voice blends with his natural surroundings elsewhere, too. Before his innocent cohabitation with Grace, the two almost-lovers illicitly walk arm-in-arm through the woods, and Giles murmurs to her in a voice "as husky as that of the leaves under foot" (293). As a collection, these easily overlooked moments from the novel employ the human voice to signal human-nonhuman intimacy through its confusion with the sounds of an animal, dry leaves, or even the woodland itself.

In a more extended passage of description that straddles the figurative and the literal, Grace and Mrs. Charmond become entangled with their environment after meeting by chance in the woods. Their uncomfortable reunion after Grace's marriage to Fitzpiers finds Mrs. Charmond holding a tentative hand out to Grace, who "stood like a wild animal on first confronting a mirror or other puzzling product of civilization" (235-236). Grace, whose status as a native of Little

Hintock has previously been interrogated, is placed yet again on a sliding scale of embeddedness with this simile – though she is less sensitive to her surroundings than someone like Giles or Marty, compared with a true outsider like Fitzpiers or Mrs. Charmond. Nevertheless, she loses the "civilized" status afforded by her education and becomes something feral. Together, however, the two women subsequently demonstrate an environmental imbrication both physical and unsolicited. After exchanging harsh words and wishes to never see one another again, they wander off in separate directions and find themselves utterly lost in the dense forest. An hour and a half later, they meet with great relief and decide to rest together before finding their way home:

> They found a clump of bushy hollies which afforded a shelter from the wind, and sat down under it, some tufts of dead fern, crisp and dry, that remained from the previous season forming a sort of nest for them. But it was cold, nevertheless, on this March night, particularly for Grace, who with the sanguine prematureness of youth in matters of dress, had considered it spring-time, and hence was not so warmly clad as Mrs. Charmond, who still wore her winter fur. But after sitting a while the latter lady shivered no less than Grace as the warmth imparted by her hasty walking began to go off, and they felt the cold air drawing through the holly leaves which scratched their backs and shoulders. Moreover, they could hear some drops of rain falling on the trees, though none reached the nook in which they had ensconced themselves. (240)

Hardy seems to have an affinity for positioning his protagonists in sylvan nests; this passage finds an analogue both later in the plot, when Giles burrows into a pile of brush, as well as in a prominent scene from *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.[142] It also dialogues with Hardy's environmental

[142] Tess frequently occupies a liminal space wherein she is a human subject who also seems to have dissolved into the landscape itself; when she is on the run with nowhere to truly call home, she finds sanctuary in the forest, crafting a "nest" of dead leaves in which to sleep. Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, ed. Tim Dolin (London: Penguin Books, [1891] 1998), 277.

imagination in several ways. In a physical sense, it demonstrates human intimacy with – and dependence upon – the environment, as Grace and Mrs. Charmond sit under the hollies and atop some dead ferns. Encircled as they are, their environment walks the line between offering comfort and bringing pain. In yet another moment of enclosure, the dense foliage protects them from rain, yet it also lets in some of the cold, and the tightly-packed branches scratch their bodies. Finding both help and harm, the women unquestionably engage physically with this space – a central moment for Mrs. Charmond, in particular, who has shown great disdain for the woods throughout the novel. The woodland's influence, Hardy seems to argue, is unavoidable. And from a more figurative standpoint, Grace is no longer the only one sharing an affinity with a wild animal. By virtue of seeking shelter in this wooded nest, Mrs. Charmond (fittingly wearing a fur coat) also earns a mark of wildness.

In a literal register, Hardy's imbricated ecosystem also makes room for links between human and animal life through acknowledging various modes of cohabitation. As with the primarily figurative examples, animal life earns prominence in its own right as it dovetails with people and their built environment. A sort of quiet communion between the various species is interwoven through the novel. As Mr. Melbury navigates the woods, for instance, the narrator remarks, "It seemed as if the squirrels and birds knew him. One of the former would occasionally run from the path to hide behind the arm of some tree, which the little animal carefully edged round *pari passu* with Melbury and his daughter's movement onward, assuming a mock manner, as though he were saying, 'Ho, ho; you are only a timber-merchant, and carry no gun!'" (52). Animating the squirrels as such, Hardy envisions a playful dynamic between woodland creatures of both human and animal varieties and implies a mutual understanding. Quite soon after, we yet again gain entrance into the animal imaginary: "A few flakes of snow descended, at the sight of

which a robin, alarmed at these signs of imminent winter, and seeing that no offence was meant by the human invasion, came and perched on the tip of the faggots that were being sold" (54). More concerned by the weather than by the human presence, the robin demonstrates a fearlessness that points to Little Hintock's code of environmental stewardship. And in an even more peaceful acknowledgement of coexistence, the first prolonged description of Hintock House includes a brief but telling detail: "A few sheep lay about, which as they ruminated looked quietly into the bedroom windows" (58). Scattered through the narrative, these and other similar moments demonstrate a decentering of human superiority; the animals do not fear close contact with humans, with the squirrels seeming even to spiritedly mock Mr. Melbury. From undeveloped forest to manufactured homestead, this entangled ecosystem creates space for animal life to thrive, eliding traditional divisions between human and more-than-human worlds.

Though Hardy strives to decenter humans, he nevertheless valorizes those humans who best understand their environment. In part, his attitude becomes apparent through his critical treatment of Grace, newly returned from school beyond the village. As Grace reacquaints herself with Little Hintock, Giles calls into question her ability to read the landscape, exclaiming, "Why, you are looking at John-apple-trees! You know bitter-sweets – you used to well enough?" (42). Even the narrator subsequently critiques, in suitably agricultural terms, how Grace's recent schooling has overtaken her local knowledge: "cultivation had so far advanced in the soil of Miss Melbury's mind as to lead her to talk of anything save of that she knew well, and had the greatest interest in developing – herself. She had fallen from the good old Hintock ways" (43-44). Here, Grace begins to find redemption in recognizing the unusual coincidence of seasons that would likely shock any observant outsider. For Grace, participating in Little Hintock's ecological

network takes a different form than Giles and Marty's innate embeddedness in its systems and cycles.

Giles and Marty are, of course, the text's most deeply networked characters. As Richard Kerridge notes, these two "have a practical knowledge of the woodlands of the type that Ray Dasmann attributes to the communities he calls 'ecosystem people,'" or those who are "deeply accustomed to that area and in stable, sustainable relation to the local ecosystem."[143] Using the same phrase, Rob Nixon writes, "This is not to suggest that ecosystem people possess some romantic, timeless, organic bond to the pulse of nature, but rather to acknowledge that their often precarious conditions of survival depend on different combinations of temporal awareness."[144] For Hardy, nearly everyone in Little Hintock – at least those of Hapsburgian relation – is entangled with the ecosystem to some extent. In the world of *The Woodlanders*, those characters most aligned with the phrase "ecosystem people" might also be known as "out-door people," as in the narrator's recounting of yet another seasonal shift: "In-door people said they had heard the nightingale, to which out-door people replied contemptuously that they had heard him a fortnight before" (135). While Giles and Marty, two of the novel's most humble characters, surely do not display contempt for "in-door people," Hardy establishes a hierarchy of environmental awareness among the inhabitants of this ecosphere.

Perhaps something of this attunement to nature is hereditary, too. Though his early death may explain his failure to be ranked as one of the novel's key "ecosystem people," Marty's father, John South, should be treated as such. His very existence is predicated on his union with an elm tree. Their saga unravels in the first volume of the novel when John South, a formerly

[143] Richard Kerridge, "Ecological Hardy," in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 126–137.
[144] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 61-62.

healthy man of middle age, suddenly falls ill, all the while expressing an immutable fear that the tall elm tree by his house will blow down and crush both him and his daughter. John South tells Giles, "I could bear up, I know I could, if it were not for the tree – yes, the tree, 'tis that's killing me. There he stands, threatening my life every minute that the wind do blow" (91). He follows by narrating a lifetime of entanglement with this particular elm: "'Ah, when it was quite a small tree,' he said, 'and I was a little boy, I thought one day of chopping it off with my hook to make a clothes-line with. But I put off doing it… And at last it got too big, and now 'tis my enemy, and will be the death o' me. Little did I think, when I let that sapling stay, that a time would come when it would torment me, and dash me into my grave" (91). Marty elaborates on her father's connection, saying, "The shape of it seems to haunt him like an evil spirit. He says that it is exactly his own age, that it has got human sense, and sprouted up when he was born on purpose to rule him and keep him as its slave. Others have been like it afore in Hintock" (101). John South's intimacy with the elm is a crucial moment in the novel's elision of the binary between the human and the more-than-human.

This scene offers an instance of what Miller reads as Hardy's dendrography, in that it twines human with nonhuman entities and scales to propose the mutual interdependence of the novel's human characters and trees. In *Under the Greenwood Tree*, writes Miller, humans and trees share a register, thus "integrating the characters and their environments and suggesting their coevolution" and envisioning "human life as thoroughly bundled with the ecosystem to which it belongs."[145] Something similar seems to be happening in *The Woodlanders*; this type of "bundling" could hardly be more overt, particularly in juxtaposition with the characters who undermine the human-nonhuman network. A latent criticism of Fitzpiers, in particular,

[145] Miller, "Dendrography," 708-709.

accompanies the explanation of how the tree comes to be felled, for he exclaims, "what's a tree beside a life! Cut it down" (101). His call to action ultimately leads to the death of both John South and the elm, serving as early evidence of Fitzpiers' failure to understand and cultivate life within this ecosystem. The narrative continually asks us to remember this cautionary tale wherein environmental mistreatment can influence human lives.

Trees become a frequent touchstone for environmental ethics within the text, and Giles' skills bring this about quite centrally. As one of the two primary characters whose environmentalism persists throughout the novel, he merits special attention for his gift of generating nonhuman life. We see him at work in a horticultural capacity toward the novel's start:

> He had a marvellous power of making trees grow. Although he would seem to shovel in the earth quite carelessly there was a sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak, or beech that he was operating on; so that the roots took hold of the soil in a few days. When, on the other hand, any of the journeymen planted, although they seemed to go through an identically similar process, one quarter of the trees would die away during the ensuing August. (63)

If John South has a fraternal relationship with the elm tree, Giles exerts a nurturing paternal influence over the saplings. Compared with the other planters, his corporeal engagement with new trees stabilizes them as no other person can. His fate even becomes written in the wood, which, following his demise, "seemed to be a house of death, pervaded by loss to its uttermost length and breadth" (326). In Giles' absence, "the copses seemed to show the want of him; those young trees, so many of which he had planted, and of which he had spoken so truly when he said that he should fall before they fell, were at that very moment sending out their roots in the

direction that he had given them with his subtle hand" (326). Giles has shaped the trees that will continue to enclose Little Hintock, and both his life and his death touch every sapling that he has cultivated. As with John South's elm, Giles' codependent trees assume the tenor of familial connections, embedding the human within the wood and the wood within the human.

In numerous other ways, Giles proves practically inseparable from his environs at various points in the narrative. His bodily relationship to his cider business, for one, paints him yet again in terms of intimate relations to the trees, here taking on the fraternal:

> He looked and smelt like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat-color, his eyes blue as corn-flowers, his boots and leggings dyed with fruit-stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips, and everywhere about him that atmosphere of cider which at its first return each season has such an indescribable fascination for those who have been born and bred among the orchards. (205-206)

Hardy engages the multisensory realm to demonstrate the sheer inextricability of Giles from his beloved forest – a recurring narrative move. For instance, as Grace reflects upon her former lover, Giles "rose upon her memory as the fruit-god and the wood-god in alternation; sometimes leafy, and smeared with green lichen, as she had seen him among the sappy boughs of the plantations; sometimes cider-stained, and with apple-pips in the hair of his arms" (278). These passages share striking visceral qualities as they interweave Giles with the woodland. Similar to Brontë's emphasis on the tactile, though without gothic overtones, Hardy's language practically oozes palpability: Giles appears "sunburnt," "dyed," "clammy," "smeared," "cider-stained" – marked corporeally by the more-than-human network of his daily life. Completely saturated by

natural forces, Giles' character promotes a sort of interchangeability between his own physicality and the environment itself – a characteristic that imagines the forest itself in sentient terms.

One of the novel's final revelations articulates the synchronicity with which Marty and Giles relate to the woods. Mourning Giles together with Marty, Grace arrives at the devastating conclusion "that she had never understood Giles as Marty had done. Marty South alone, of all the women in Hintock and the world, had approximated to Winterborne's level of intelligent intercourse with nature. In that respect she had formed the complement to him in the other sex, had lived as his counterpart, had subjoined her thought to his as a corollary" (330). Grace's thoughts continue to develop into a celebration of Giles and Marty's status as "ecosystem people" or "out-door people," as she recalls their innate local knowledge in a comprehensive overview:

> The casual glimpses which the ordinary population bestowed upon that wondrous world of sap and leaves called the Hintock woods had been with these two, Giles and Marty, a clear gaze. They had been possessed of its finer mysteries as of commonplace knowledge; had been able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing; to them the sights and sounds of night, winter, wind, storm, amid those dense boughs, which had to Grace a touch of the uncanny, and even the supernatural, were simple occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew. They had planted together, and together they had felled; together they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which, seen in few, were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet. From the light lashing of the twigs upon their faces, when brushing through them in the dark, they could pronounce upon the species of the tree whence they stretched; from the quality of the wind's murmur through a bough they could in like

> manner name its sort afar off. They knew by a glance at a trunk if its heart were sound, or tainted with incipient decay, and by the state of its upper twigs, the stratum that had been reached by its roots. The artifices of the seasons were seen by them from the conjuror's own point of view, and not from that of the spectator's. (330-331)

Though lengthy, this passage merits citing in full for its relational depth that transcends other textual moments of human enmeshment with the more-than-human. It positions Marty and Giles against the rest of the world as the only two capable of demystifying their environmental surroundings. For the standard villager, the woodlands of Little Hintock appear "wondrous," "uncanny," and "supernatural"; consisting of "mysteries," "hieroglyphs," and "remoter signs and symbols…of runic obscurity," they are not always legible. With their inherent "clear gaze," however, Giles and Marty dispel all of these uncertainties: ecological intrigue gives way to "commonplace knowledge," "simple occurrences," "laws they foreknew," a readable "alphabet." This attention to language and symbols recalls Kohn's discussion of the semiotics inherent in an ecosystem. In the forests around Ávila, he encounters "greater than human webs of semiosis" that suggest a communicative ability transcending human language.[146] A similar web is evident in the woodlands of Little Hintock, wherein Giles and Marty participate in a broader semiotic network. Unlike the others who prove mere spectators, they have become fully entangled in the woodland, effortlessly parsing its many agential selves.

For all its valorization of human-nonhuman relationships, however, this passage also proves a stumbling block for its use of extrinsic metaphors and othering language. Hardy here positions hieroglyphs as abnormal by juxtaposing them with "ordinary writing." And the reference to both hieroglyphs and runes suggests a problematic impulse to primitivize the

[146] Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 42.

nonhuman. These metaphors, which elide civilizational and geographical divisions, dialogue with Hardy's general interest in conceptualizing characters through their relative indigeneity to Little Hintock. At several points throughout *The Woodlanders*, he directly interrogates nativity and foreignness within the enclosed ecosystem. For instance, following a prolonged absence from her native village, Grace Melbury encounters newcomer Edred Fitzpiers and reflects upon the strangeness of returning to Little Hintock to "find in one of its nooks, like a tropical plant in a hedgerow, a nucleus of advanced ideas and practices which had nothing in common with the life around" (50). And as she weighs Fitzpiers against Giles Winterborne, "somewhere in the bottom of her heart there pulsed an old simple indigenous feeling favorable to Giles, though it had become overlaid with implanted tastes" (81). Drawn into relation with the world beyond Little Hintock, Giles comes to epitomize indigeneity in a botanical sense.

For Hardy's woodlanders, indigeneity implies a rootedness in the ecosystem as well as an ability to "read" the natural world. It connotes a litany of skills that, as in the above passage, proves striking in its wide-ranging approach to the senses. From Grace and Mrs. Charmond's nesting to Giles' sappy, lichen-smeared visage, many moments that I have probed figure human enmeshment in the environment as explicitly corporeal. Certainly, Giles and Marty engage physically through acts of planting, felling, and even brushing against twigs. But their non-tactile reading of the woods signifies a truly transcendent ability – a non-violent manner of communication that Heathcliff and Catherine could never achieve. As Grace reminisces to Marty after Giles' death, "you and he could speak in a tongue that nobody else knew…the tongue of the trees and fruits and flowers themselves" (331). Grace's reflection, like these many entanglements, remains grounded to a large extent in the assumption of human connectivity with the environment. Lingering on the fruitful modes through which language can indicate

entanglement, the final section considers how Hardy's literary structures work to center the novel's more-than-human entities.

III. Structures of Centering the More-than-Human

Fundamentally, *The Woodlanders* asks us to rethink the way that more-than-human agency manifests within an ecological sphere. Beyond the figurative and corporeal intermingling of human and more-than-human agents, Hardy's ecology of selves emerges through reworking the divide between background and foreground, and through employing personification – each a critical mode of decentering the human in this novel. Who, precisely, are the woodlanders of the novel's title? From the standpoint of material ecocriticism, they could encompass not only the human characters at their varying levels of environmental relationality but also the personified trees, birds, and flowers that take their turns in the foreground.

Material ecocriticism demands the defamiliarization of narrative structures. Iovino and Oppermann structure their anthology of material ecocritical thought around what they envision as a simple conceptual argument: that "the world's material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be 'read' and interpreted as forming narratives, stories."[147] With an abundance of linguistic and semiotic terminology, the aforementioned passage on Giles and Marty's innate relation to the woods already invites the suggestion of a narrative ecology *within* Hardy's novel. But aside from explicit references to the acts of reading and writing, we are also tasked with reading ecologically in the proliferation of descriptions that focus on the village's dynamic ecosphere. This practice draws from Taylor's notion of "reading for atmosphere."[148] As an ecocritical method, atmospheric reading requires "doing away with the notion that setting is

[147] Iovino and Oppermann, *Material Ecocriticism*, 1.
[148] Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 7.

by definition passive, a mere container in which events take place, while nominally human characters provide narrative action."[149] In lieu of a singular human emphasis, argues Taylor, "settings, atmospheres, and environments can become agents in their own right."[150] Harnessing Taylor's method, I approach the ecosphere of *The Woodlanders* by considering its depth of agential figures, which has entailed framing the textual environment as a sort of atmospheric microcosm. Reaching out from the human, the atmospherically interpreted novel chooses, as Taylor writes, "not to account for individual subjects but to materialize the climates of history."[151] In this materialization, the environment acquires a crucial subjectivity, and even a human-like consciousness.

Intrinsically ecological, the practice of reading climatically shifts our conventions for understanding foreground and background. As Kerridge points out, "An ecologist studies forms of life not in isolation but as parts of a system, an economy that sustains them and that they constitute."[152] Hardy employs narrative form to articulate interdependency, Kerridge contends, with "a distinctive way of introducing characters that shows how they ceaselessly make and remake each other's identity."[153] At several different scales, John South's relationship with the elm tree illustrates this sort of dependence. Most obvious is the affiliation of the human with a more-than-human agent. But the relationship between person and tree dictates other aspects of the ecospherical network: for one, John South's death marks a transference of property wherein Giles will lose his familial homestead. Deprived of a home, he relocates to a small cottage, which he relinquishes to Grace; in giving up his new dwelling, he lives exposed to the elements,

[149] Ibid, 36.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid, 15.
[152] Kerridge, "Ecological Hardy," 130.
[153] Ibid.

which brings about his death. And Giles' death, as we have seen, undermines the stability of the very trees he planted in the forest. Finally, on an even grander scale, Marty's comment that "Others have been like it afore in Hintock" (101) implies that John South is not the only villager to have this sort of life-altering relationship with the local woodland. With this single instance manifesting in a variety of ways, I am inclined to agree with Kerridge that "the special value of Hardy to ecocritics is precisely in the way he does not separate place and person."[154] In a similar register, Hardy's work adheres to Iovino's discussion of natural agency, in which she emphasizes that "landscape and nonhuman subjects have to be integrated in the narrative framework as essential components of the place's 'material imagination.'"[155] Imbricating place and person, as well as setting and other more-than-human subjects, Hardy's novel imagines an ecological system comprised of a vibrant network of agents and selves.

Joining network with narrative calls for an adjustment from a typical mode of human-centered readership. A particularly compelling component of Taylor's methodology depends upon the decentering of plot, by which, he writes, "Foreground becomes background and background becomes foreground."[156] Taylor's suggestion resonates throughout a small pool of ecocritical thought that advocates for a new understanding of what constitutes foreground and background. Stacy Alaimo concedes that a material ecocritical framework in which human and nonhuman alike possess agency "makes it difficult to pose nature as mere background, as Val Plumwood would put it, for the exploits of the human since 'nature' is always as close as one's own skin – perhaps even closer."[157] Explaining her concept of trans-corporeality, Alaimo argues

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[154] Ibid, 141
[155] Serenella Iovino, "Restoring the Imagination of Place: Narrative Reinhabitation and the Po Valley," in *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place*, ed. Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 107.
[156] Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 15.
[157] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

for the vital act of "thinking across bodies" to "catalyze the recognition that the environment, which is too often imagined as inert, empty space or as a resource for human use, is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions."[158] In our present ecological crisis, recognizing the environment's very corporeality may be one of the most critical tools for driving sustainability and mobilizing human action. By approaching narrative as a process of fluctuation, we might reconsider, and more deeply value, both nonhuman components of the environment and, indeed, the environment as a whole.

Even in scenes with a human emphasis, Hardy destabilizes the notion of foreground and background. For instance, when Giles invites the Melburys to his home, he also asks some additional villagers, "in dearth of other friends, that the room might not appear empty" (75). But Giles comes to regret this move: "In his mind's eye, before the event, they had been the mere background or padding of the scene; but somehow in the reality they were the most prominent personages there" (75). In a way, this sentence could sum up the whole novel. Though the scene presents an interlude from the pervasive woodland setting, Hardy demonstrates concern in balancing components of Little Hintock's ecosphere. In this enclosed system, all agents – human and more-than-human alike – play a distinct role and warrant attention. Even that which is meant to lie in the background may surge up, unexpectedly or otherwise, to occupy a prominent position.

In its more ecological moments, Hardy's writing is saturated with salient environmental details that so many novels treat as inconsequential. His particular attention to qualities of setting and environment, or that which might typically be understood as background, compels William Cohen to suggest a reading practice that resonates with Taylor's attention to atmosphere. Cohen

[158] Ibid.

cites a shift in priorities that emerges when we read Hardy; compared with other writers, he argues, Hardy nudges us "to read, that is, not for plot or character, but by dwelling on what I confess I once thought of as the 'boring parts': the descriptions of trees and other natural forms, and of the processes by which human characters work on, and are in turn worked on by, these trees."[159] My own interest in reading Hardy has long been sustained, in fact, by looking beyond character; it was precisely these so-called "boring parts" that led to my initial fascination with Hardy. Some of his most grotesque, evocative prose occurs in the liminal space between the human-attuned sections of his narratives.

These moments might be approached more generously through the phrase "dilatory description," which Amy King coins in her discussion of the realist novel.[160] Thwarting theories of realism that privilege the reader's desire to reach the end of a text, King notes, "We might alternatively consider the different kinds of readerly interest generated by lingering in narrative moments of protracted description: descriptive pause as opposed to plot."[161] Rather than hustling toward closure, dilatory description, as a narrative practice, invites the reader to labor over details – a practice upon which Hardy draws frequently. In *The Woodlanders*, Hardy often reserves dilatory description for images of trees and wildlife, which invites a reconfiguring of character itself. But thinking ecocritically and atmospherically can also allow for approaching the novel through an alternative methodology wherein the environment – and its agential vitality – takes center stage in its own right.

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[159] William A. Cohen, "Arborealities: The Tactile Ecology of Hardy's Woodlanders," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, no. 19 (October 2014): 6.
[160] Amy M. King, "Natural History and the Novel: Dilatoriness and Length and the Nineteenth-Century Novel of Everyday Life," *Novel* 42, no. 3 (2009): 461.
[161] Ibid.

My approach to Hardy is predicated on considering how his formal techniques invite us to read over and around the typical plot: by positing an ambiguous relationship between foreground and background, he crafts a networked literary ecosystem that decenters the human. Reading for nonhuman characters forms a key tenet of Elizabeth Hope Chang's provocative *Novel Cultivations: Plants in British Literature of the Global Nineteenth Century*. Chang prefaces her argument by critiquing how "Readers, trained in human prejudice, rely on human-aligned forms and figures in narrative as much as they do major and minor characters to direct their reading."[162] Looking past the human explodes the potential for a text to dialogue about meaning. Chang argues, "The moments in which a narrative pauses to regard a plant, whether potato, oak, or orchid, have often been seen as gaps or breaks from narrative work, but…I see them as especially making meaning about what agency, consciousness, sentience, and selfhood could be for the British subject in the imperial age."[163] So often relinquished to the background of both a plot and its analysis, these components of a narrative make meaning "not only by operating as resonant shards of figuration diverting the progress" but also "simply by making space for their own description in the wide field of the novel's setting."[164] Fictional plants decenter the human, Chang theorizes, in how they "shift narrative weight and significance away from a centrally human form,"[165] as well as in their capacity to become, "if not equivalent to a human character, at least character-adjacent."[166]

Some of Hardy's more-than-human agents are character-adjacent in more than one sense. John South's elm, for instance, is personified like a human character; but in a more literal sense,

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[162] Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Novel Cultivations: Plants in British Literature of the Global Nineteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 5.
[163] Ibid, *Novel Cultivations*, 9.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid, 33
[166] Ibid, 37

it is also adjacent to John South himself, as becomes apparent in their intertwined lives. If we usher plants like this into the narrative realm and grant them character status, proposes Chang, we ultimately "defy the standard parameters by which we understand narrative fiction to operate, since a plant with narrative agency radically alters notions about sentience, mobility, reproduction, and representation – not least by blurring distinctions between character and setting."[167] Hardy's very ecological system relies upon extended descriptions of setting; perhaps a reading of these spaces as filled with more-than-human characters, or selves as characters, can grant them a status more akin to foreground than to background.

As with the scene of Giles' dinner party, we might query, what constitutes background or foreground, and for whom? Hardy repeatedly calls attention to the simultaneity of various foregrounds according to where we position the subject, as in this scene at the opening of Volume III that seems at first glimpse to be a simple overview of setting, or what Cohen might have formerly termed one of the novel's "boring parts":

> The time was that dull interval in a woodlander's life which coincides with great activity in the life of the woodland itself – a period following the close of the winter tree-cutting, and preceding the barking season, when the saps are just beginning to heave with the force of hydraulic lifts inside all the trunks of the forest. (247)

Again evoking Heer's illustration of the Carboniferous period, this paragraph imagines a world populated and animated by nonhumans. Yet it transcends sheer description, advocating for the agency of subjects beyond the human. In it, the more-than-human woodland becomes a point of comparison for the human woodlander; the two seem, in fact, to swap places. The ecosphere of Little Hintock reverberates with activity regardless of season, and only the participants in said

[167] Ibid, 161.

activity now vary. Though the woodlander may be enduring a period of dullness where work with the trees is not viable, Hardy proposes that the woods still course with energy – if one only knows where to look. Rising above the human at this moment, the sap within the tree trunks represents Little Hintock's primary source of vitality during this period of minimal human labor.

Hardy's employment of personification here also seems significant for decentering the human. In a reading of James Thomson's *The Seasons*, Heather Keenleyside proffers an instructive model for analyzing personification. Keenleyside contends that Thomson's "careful juxtapositions of human and nonhuman creatures and of perceptible and imperceptible actions" intertwine personification with natural description.[168] Significantly, however, she shies away from a human-centered analysis, noting that although "Thomson does not *humanize* the sun or air or rivers," "he does *personify* both elements and animals by granting them the kind of agency and affect proper to persons."[169] I read several moments from Hardy in a similar register. Like Thomson, in the above passage Hardy attends simultaneously to humans and nonhumans, describing both the obvious human inaction and the less visible occurrences within the trees themselves. That the woodland itself participates in "great activity," including in its heaving saps, paints the trees and the whole forest as agents in the ecological system. They maintain an active state while the humans are largely at rest but, crucially, they do not replace the humans – rather, their agency positions them on equal footing.

Personification also gains traction through repetition. Hardy relies upon recurring language and imagery that imbues the forest with agency. These moments – the novel's most ecogothic – occur most commonly in extended descriptions of the woodland's violent, grotesque

[168] Heather Keenleyside, "Personification for the People: On James Thomson's *The Seasons*," *ELH* 76, no. 2 (2009): 457.
[169] Ibid, 463.

scenery. In *The Woodlanders*, as in Hardy's corpus more generally, the participating characters are typically trees; he animates them and their broader environment variously, and always in vivid terms. Though seemingly minor, these nonhuman actors perform important narrative work and make apparent the ecological depth of Little Hintock's microcosm. They invert the customary relationship of foreground and background, commanding us to participate in reading practices that decenter the human and acknowledge the vibrant materiality of the ecosphere's nonhuman members.

These analogous passages, which appear throughout the novel, represent some of the most striking sections of text. In the first, we return to the description with which I began this chapter, when Marty South steps outside early in the novel: "A lingering wind brought to her ear the creaking sound of two over-crowded branches in the neighbouring wood, which were rubbing each other into wounds, and other vocalised sorrows of the trees, together with the screech of owls, and the fluttering tumble of some awkward woodpigeon ill-balanced on its roosting bow" (16). Aside from interweaving human, plant, and animal life, as I noted earlier, a few additional components are worth considering for how they intersect with other moments from the novel. For one, the depiction of avian life builds upon my earlier suggestion that Little Hintock is so self-contained as to abide by natural laws of its own. This passage is but one of many in the text where animals enact strange, ungainly behavior. The woodpigeon's clumsy maneuvering stands out repeatedly: moving through its home with a "fluttering tumble," it reads as both "awkward" and "ill-balanced." Such surprising inelegance circles back into the text at other points in the form of animals who fail to behave according to custom, from "a squirrel, which did not run up its tree,…dropping the sweet chestnut which it carried" (328) to "the similar sanguine errors of impulsive birds in framing nests that were now swamped by snow-

water" (126). Together, these moments articulate a world devoid of legible patterns – a world in which human behavior's variable and unpredictable nature is no longer a singular quality, for blunders permeate the whole landscape.

But the most vivid image in this description is, of course, that of the branches "rubbing each other into wounds." Rachel Ablow calls attention to this description, querying, "What are we asked to make of the 'wounded' and 'sorrowing' trees in this passage…? They occupy very little space in the novel: as soon as Marty South's eyes adjust to the darkness, she continues with her work of carrying the spars she has just made out to the shed, and the trees' troubles seem forgotten."[170] Yet the "personifying pathos" of Hardy's descriptive language, suggests Ablow, may linger with the reader; she interprets the trees as subjects that "deserve our attention: 'wounds' and 'sorrows' are terms we tend not to associate with trees, nor do we ordinarily think of the sounds their branches make as pain cries in the way the passage suggests we should, or at least might."[171] I fully concur with Ablow's reading of trees as subjects; they consistently demand the reader's attention despite the brevity of this description. Though these particular trees "occupy very little space in the novel," however, the constant attention to trees in general takes up quite a bit of the narrative, from Giles' paternal status to John South's enmeshment with the tall elm outside his home.

Further underscoring the interpretation of Hardy's trees as subjects, a moment closer to the end of the novel reiterates the intrinsic violence of their interaction. During Grace's tenure in Giles' cottage, she wakes one morning and peers out the window in search of the woodsman, but:

[170] Rachel Ablow, *Victorian Pain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 118.
[171] Ibid.

> all she could see were more trees, jacketed with lichen and stockinged with moss… Next were more trees close together, wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings and blows. It was the struggle between these neighbors that she had heard in the night. Beneath them were the rotting stumps of those of the group that had been vanquished long ago, rising from their mossy setting like decayed teeth from green gums. (311)

As with the earlier passage, Hardy's attention to detail results not in romanticization but in revulsion. He employs notes of the ecogothic in contrasting the wounded, "disfigured" trees with the "rotting stumps" below, suggesting that the trees, too, will one day resemble nothing more than "decayed teeth." Most striking here, though, is the precise language that delimits the nature of the arboreal conflict. Dozens of chapters after the description to which Ablow points, a nearly identical description appears. Evoking the "over-crowded *branches* in the neighbouring wood, which were *rubbing* each other into *wounds*," this later passage's trees display "*branches* disfigured with *wounds* resulting from their mutual *rubbings* and blows" (emphases mine). With these kindred phrases, the repetition itself underscores the non-plot force of description. In both scenes, the battle between the woodland's trees delimits an ecological, more-than-human conflict, spaced out and unresolved over the course of the whole novel. That the trees are greatly overcrowded – which Ablow cites as further evidence of their subjectivity[172] – both perpetuates this violence and reminds us of the network of boughs circumscribing the very sphere that wind, light, and rain struggle to penetrate throughout. Coupled with a reading of the trees as subjects or even characters, this continuity demarcates a nonhuman community that furthers our understanding of Little Hintock as a microcosmic site of ecological depth.

[172] Ibid.

Further marking the text as a network that includes more-than-human stories, instances of shared language punctuate the additional scenes that offer extended attention to setting. The environmental drama bookended by the nearly twinned descriptions of sparring trees verges into foreground territory throughout the novel, reminding us of the many agents in this ecology of selves. The text's midpoint includes several particularly revolting images of the woodland. On his way to visit Mrs. Charmond, for example, Fitzpiers crosses through the park, "where slimy streams of green moisture, exuding from decayed holes caused by old amputations, ran down the bark of the oaks and elm… Wrinkled like an old crone's face, and antlered with dead branches that rose above the foliage of their summits, they were nevertheless still green – though yellow had invaded the leaves of other trees" (196-197). And in pursuit of Fitzpiers not long after, Grace Melbury and her father pause "beneath a half-dead oak, hollow, and disfigured with white tumors, its roots spreading out like accipitrine claws grasping the ground" (211). As in the other environmental descriptions, these personified trees have fallen to ruin in a war-like process. Reminiscent of the "wrestling" trees and the "vanquished" stumps, these have "decayed" to a "half-dead" state. They have been "invaded" and marked by "amputations" and "tumors," which renders them "disfigured" – a term also present in the scene where Grace looks through the window for Giles. The proliferation of the grotesque, emphasized through repetition, breaks from the human-centered narrative to demand our attention.

Personifying those other selves that comprise Little Hintock's ecosystem, these repeated moments, with their striking and unsavory language, invite us to destabilize our customary focus on human characters and human plots; instead, we can begin to conceive of an ecology of selves. I read this narrative technique, again turning to a tenet of material ecocriticism, as an

exemplification of what Iovino and Oppermann term "material narrativity,"[173] which veers away from human-centered literature. "Framed as material-discursive encounters," they contend, "literary stories emerge from the intra-action of human creativity and the narrative agency of matter. Playing together, this shared creativity of human and nonhuman agents generates new narratives and discourses that give voice to the complexity of our collective."[174] As with Kohn's notion of dissolved selfhood and collective agency, it is as if Hardy – like Giles, like Marty – simply draws out the agency latent in his microcosmic woodland to produce a narrative where materiality emerges from the background to take center stage.

For all its intimacy with the more-than-human world, of course, *The Woodlanders* is ultimately a novel mediated, like any other, through the human lens of its author. Returning to the Leyden jar metaphor, I am tempted to read Hardy as the conductor of a scientific experiment of sorts. After all, he has constructed an enclosed atmospheric space (Little Hintock, or the novel itself) in which his ecology of selves can play out. But unlike Fitzpiers, his own bearer of scientific knowledge who views the world in too-rigid terms, Hardy wields this microlocalized scale in a more humanistic sense. Just as Kohn notes that "Entertaining the viewpoints of other beings blurs the boundaries that separate kinds of selves,"[175] Hardy participates in the "capacious ethical practice"[176] of imagining various modes of entanglement between the human and the more-than-human. By reading for these scaled-down moments, we, too, can come to understand the novel as a fitting mode for thinking ecologically and continuing to reimagine networks – both narrative and environmental – in the Anthropocene.

[173] Iovino and Oppermann, "Stories Come to Matter," 8.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 132.
[176] Ibid, 134.

Chapter III

Artificial Climates and Decadent Ecologies in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

I. Fin-de-Siècle *Ecocriticism: A Case for Wilde*

From the rural embeddedness of Thomas Hardy, we move next to the urban Decadence of Oscar Wilde. Among his many Decadent influences, Wilde owes a debt to Joris-Karl Huysmans, whose 1884 novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*) purportedly found its way into *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) as the poisonous, though unnamed, yellow book that corrupts the title character. Dorian and Duc Jean des Esseintes, Huysmans's protagonist, share a taste for the finer things in life, including an "interest in perfumes, music, precious stones, embroideries, and ecclesiastical raiment."[177] In keeping with Des Esseintes' own sensory obsessions, Wilde includes a multitude of passages that catalogue, in extensive detail, Dorian's collections of such items. Of course, some crucial differences separate the two novels; Dorian, for example, participates actively in society while Des Esseintes lives in isolation. Furthermore, though Dorian famously undergoes great physical and moral transformation in Wilde's novel, Des Esseintes' preoccupation with spiritual matters, while prominent, proves less memorable.[178] Therefore, it is not in plot or morals, but rather in aesthetics and atmosphere, that Wilde's Decadent book draws on Huysmans's influence.

The Decadent world of Huysmans serves as crucial inspiration for *Dorian Gray*'s naturalcultural settings. Particularly evocative of Decadence is the eighth chapter of *À Rebours*, in which Des Esseintes, formerly resistant to all things natural, discovers a new infatuation with real flowers that only *seem* artificial, and subsequently finds himself haunted by visions of female bodies and flowers blending together in a horrific nightmare. Huysmans writes of Des

[177] G. A. Cevasco, *The Breviary of the Decadence: J.-K. Huysmans's* A Rebours *and English Literature* (New York: AMS Press, 2001), 86.
[178] Ibid, 79.

Esseintes, "In former days, in Paris, his inborn taste for the artificial had led him to neglect the real flower for its copy, faithfully and almost miraculously executed in indiarubber and wire, calico and taffeta, paper and velvet."[179] Eventually, "tired of artificial flowers aping real ones, he wanted some natural flowers that would look like fakes" (97). Thus, Des Esseintes orders a troop of gardeners to fetch real flowers, including "the one called Madame Mame, [which] seemed to be emulating zinc, parodying bits of punched metal coloured emperor green and spattered with drops of oil-paint, streaks of red lead and white" (98). Another, the *Alocasia Metallica*, is "Covered with a coat of greenish bronze shot with glints of silver…anyone would have taken it for a bit of stove-pipe cut into a pike-head pattern by the makers" (99). As Huysmans describes flower after flower, this garden grows increasingly grotesque, evoking Hardy's violent woods with "the Echinopsis, thrusting its ghastly pink blossoms out of the cotton-wool compresses, like the stumps of amputated limbs" and "the Nidularium, opening its sword-shaped petals to reveal gaping flesh-wounds" (99). But the grotesquery does nothing to put off Des Esseintes; ultimately, he revels in the striking physical properties that make the flowers look sickly and diseased, reflecting with satisfaction that "his object had been achieved: not one of them looked real; it was as if cloth, paper, porcelain, and metal had been lent by man to Nature to enable her to create these monstrosities" (101).

Beyond bringing nature and culture into proximity, Husymans's novel provides further relevance to this study of Wilde in its attention to the microclimate. For Wilde, a crucial naturalcultural integration appears quite often in descriptions of the conservatory and garden, and Huysmans, in fact, begins the flower chapter with a similar discussion of built environments that house various species of flora. In seeking flowers for his collection, Des Esseintes travels to "the

[179] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Penguin, [1884] 1987), 97.

hothouses of Châtillon and the valley of Aunay," from which he orders the monstrous procession of real blooms that merely *seem* artificial (97). The hothouses have a metaphorical import as well, for the opening description fixates on the sundry spaces in which certain species of flowers might grow. Placed according to a strict hierarchy, the flowers' social coding maps directly onto a class-based view of the nineteenth century; a horticulturist's shop, in the eyes of Des Esseintes, resembles:

> a microcosm in which every social category and class was represented – poor, vulgar slum-flowers, the gillyflower for instance, that are really at home only on the window-sill of a garret, with their roots squeezed into milk-cans or old earthenware pots; then pretentious, conventional, stupid flowers such as the rose, whose proper place is in pots concealed inside porcelain vases painted by nice young ladies; and lastly, flowers of charm and tremulous delicacy, exotic flowers exiled to Paris and kept warm in palaces of glass, princesses of the vegetable kingdom, living aloof and apart, having nothing whatever in common with the popular plants or the bourgeois blooms. (96)

Though he loathes the middle-class plants and expresses a sympathetic interest in the lower-class flowers "wilting in the slums under the foul breath of sewers and sinks," Des Esseintes truly admires only "the rare and aristocratic plants from distant lands, kept alive with cunning attention in artificial tropics created by carefully regulated stoves" (96-97). Such valorization of these rare blooms offers an apt rationale for Des Esseintes' own cloistered and self-indulgent habitude. But this passage also speaks to the extreme inequality, and particularly the class disparity, that characterized nineteenth-century urban life. His key distinction between so-called upper-class and lower-class flowers rides on their relative abilities to find shelter from polluted air. So, while the hothouse in Huysmans's extended simile parallels Des Esseintes' life of

privilege (and recalls *À Rebours*' tenth chapter on scent and oppressive perfume), it also references a practical need to avoid the industrial smog that pervaded cities.

Not merely a luxury, then, hothouses and conservatories were often a necessity when it came to sustaining plant life. For one, plants imported from milder or even tropical climates required extraordinary care; perhaps more crucially, London's infamous pollution proved hostile to plant growth in general. Writes Jesse Oak Taylor, "The artificial climate of the glasshouse offered a paradoxically *more* natural habitat than the soot-laden London. The city had become a space in which nature could be sustained only through artifice, sheltered from the toxic atmosphere outside the glass."[180] While Taylor's argument perhaps overstates the extent to which London's industrial climate thwarted plant life (parks, green squares, and plane trees dotted the city, after all), his nod to paradox instructively troubles the divide between nature and artifice. The natural world interfaces with – and even depends upon – the built environment, and it is this paradoxical relationship that Huysmans and Wilde highlight in their Decadent settings. As Huysmans demonstrates, the artificial climates of the glasshouses figured as status symbols for wealthy people who could afford the money, space, and care to cultivate non-native species. But while Huysmans's "palaces of glass" serve as a more lavish amenity, Wilde's cultivated microclimates offer outposts of the natural world where plant life can thrive (and drama can play out) amidst the backdrop of smog-choked, *fin-de-siècle* London.

Oscar Wilde has not entered easily into the ecocritical conversation. In *The Sky of Our Manufacture*, otherwise rife with naturalcultural intersections in literature, Taylor contends, "Even Oscar Wilde, who held that 'people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects,' took for granted that his

[180] Jesse Oak Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 25.

audience would recognize the 'extraordinary change in the climate of London that has taken place during the last ten years.'"[181] Though Taylor's analysis here centers around how deeply issues of climate had permeated Victorian life, his use of "Even" to preface Wilde's contributions suggests that, for ecocritics, Wilde occupies a peripheral place. And Taylor is certainly not alone; with few exceptions, scholars tend to recognize Wilde's Decadence and dandyism as values in opposition with the "natural" world. However, I argue, Wilde's nuanced depiction of nature renders him an exceptionally valuable interlocutor in the context of Victorian ecocriticism. In fact, his Decadence allows him to be read with such interdisciplinary attention; in *Dorian Gray*, rife with verdant interiors and engineered ecologies, Wilde entangles nature and culture *through* his Decadent microclimates.

The first prolonged ecocritical reading of Wilde appears in Neil Sammells' prescient essay "Wilde Nature" (1998). From the opening scene of *Dorian Gray*, Sammells explains, Wilde elides the nature-culture binary, "acknowledging it only to collapse it."[182] For Sammells, "Wilde's mannered anti-naturalism, his apparent contempt for nature, paradoxically opens up a radical political space or landscape which contemporary ecocriticism might occupy."[183] In addressing the confluence between nature and culture, and in positing Wilde's work as a paradoxical yet useful avenue for ecocritical thought – again, note the importance of paradox to this discussion – Sammells considers the implications of bringing ecological and environmental topics to bear in an unexpected context. Even in the decades since Sammells published his essay, ecocritical readings of Wilde remain relatively sparse; however, drawing on contemporary theories that wed ecocritical and Decadent discourse, Wilde's environmental slant is less

[181] Ibid, 2.
[182] Neil Sammells, "Wilde Nature," in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Neil Sammells and Richard Kerridge (London: Zed Books, 1998), 129.
[183] Ibid, 124.

"radical" than Sammells makes it out to be. The interplay between human and natural agencies appears to be on Wilde's mind with some frequency; in his play *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), for instance, Mrs. Erlynne famously declares, "London is too full of fogs and – and serious people, Lord Windermere. Whether the fogs produce the serious people or whether the serious people produce the fogs, I don't know."[184] Despite its satirical context, the line suggests a reciprocity between fog and humans, between nature and culture. This chapter considers how such reciprocity figures in *Dorian Gray*, forming the crux of what I will term Wilde's ecological Decadence.

Reputed for privileging aestheticism and artifice and described as "the most famous Decadent novel of the Nineties era,"[185] *The Picture of Dorian Gray* may seem an unlikely candidate for ecocritical study – certainly, the critical tendency to yoke Wilde's novel with *À Rebours* has done further work to vanquish the natural from discussions of Wilde. In light of Taylor's call for an expanded notion of Victorian ecocriticism and Ashton Nichols' conception of the world as an "urbanatural"[186] space, I will demonstrate how Wilde's London-based novel, which reveals a keen interest in the interplay between nature and culture, can be seen as a new channel for ecocritical thought. In fact, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* reveals a deep communion with nature. Of particular interest are, of course, the aforementioned microclimates: built environments, like the conservatory and the garden, that house curated and cultivated nature as an antidote to urban squalor and pollution. Though they are man-made and highly controlled, these spaces are the only true sites where the natural can thrive within London. Further, Wilde's

[184] Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: HarperCollins, [1892] 2003), 457.
[185] Murray Pittock, *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 122.
[186] Ashton Nichols, *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward Urbanatural Roosting* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

figurative language extends the intersection of nature and culture by creating a larger imaginative world wherein natural entities appear to be the products of human manufacture, while decorative objects crafted by humans seem to hail from the natural world. Rather than posing a distinct opposition to nature, then, Wilde's work greatly values the exchange between human culture and the restorative natural world. Between literally enclosing plants in a conservatory and figuratively wedding natural with artificial language, Wilde's fiction crafts a Decadent ecology that positions nature as part of a modern, industrial context. Crucial to destabilizing the novel's reputation as a work "against nature" is our own destabilization of Decadence as a force that opposes the environmental.

II. Decadent Ecologies

The Decadent environment of *Dorian Gray* unfolds from the novel's opening sentence, with its lavish description of the garden in Basil's studio. Indeed, the first two paragraphs serve as a prime example of Wilde's attempt to create descriptive spaces that put London at a distance, even when the characters live in the city itself. The novel begins:

> The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.
>
> From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long

> tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion. The sullen murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown grass, or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt horns of the straggling woodbine, seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. The dim roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ.[187]

With this last line, we come to understand Basil's studio and garden as working in opposition to the urban environment beyond; the murmuring of the bees seems more salient than the "dim" and "distant" drone of the city. This description, which twines studio with garden, is not so much an escape from nature, as we see with Huysmans, but rather an attempt to harness the beautiful qualities of nature in order to escape from London's oppressive climate.

As Sammells indicates, this scene works toward the impression that "the two realms are melding: the garden (Nature) is infiltrating the studio (Culture)."[188] In particular, the word choice underscores this "transgressive movement" wherein "'odour becomes scent' which becomes perfume'. The natural world, in other words, appears as cultivated (the garden) and smells like a 'fragrance'" while "the world of *couture*, on the other hand, is offered as simply an intensification of 'natural' odours." The "aestheticization of the natural, and the naturalization of the cultural" here accords with the connection between Dorian and his portrait that "precisely enacts that collapsing of the distinction between Nature and Culture, or life and art." Concludes Sammells, "Wilde evokes the natural world…not simply as a way of setting the scene, but in

[187] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: HarperCollins, [1891] 2003), 18.
[188] Sammells, "Wilde Nature," 129.

order to signal the transgressive and subversive strategies which will structure the novel itself." Sammells' suggestion that this scene evinces Wilde's "optimistic belief in the possibility of human agency and change" resonates with contemporary ecocritical interest in the Anthropocene. But rather than serving as evidence of "Wilde's anti-naturalistic aesthetic and practice," as Sammells contends, this introductory scene actually divulges a deep interest in natural elements, regardless of their cultivated nature.[189]

Particularly given the threatening valence of subsequent scenes set among the London streets, the sensory decorative elements in the studio mark a resistance to the urban space that contains Basil's home. Until the final sentence of the second paragraph, nothing at all indicates the studio's true location – we might assume that Basil resides in the peaceful countryside. Desiring a private garden within the city, however, Basil Hallward has created one beside his own studio in typical Victorian fashion. William Robinson's notion of the wild garden, deliberately designed to appear "naturalistic,"[190] comes to mind with Basil's "long unmown grass" and "straggling woodbine." Though Basil's garden appears here in direct conversation with the aestheticized studio, it still offers a comparatively natural appearance in both its untamed qualities and its juxtaposition with London itself. After all, a garden, by nature, stems from human cultivation.

From its opening scene, *Dorian Gray* troubles the boundary between nature and culture, art and life. Rather than resisting an ecological reading, however, the novel's Decadence frames our attention to the natural world. A number of prominent Victorian literary scholars take up the environmental implications of Decadence, theorizing the artistic movement alongside – and even through – the organic environment. Despite a growing interest in modernist ecocriticism, Dennis

[189] Ibid, 129-30.
[190] William Robinson, *The Wild Garden: or, Our Groves & Shrubberies Made Beautiful* (London: J. Murray, 1870).

Denisoff contends, "Decadence has remained a sort of marker of extreme artifice."[191] Decadence may still be revered for its ties to "the aesthetic and symbolic potency of urbanism and artifice," but artists and writers of the movement "also relied heavily on nature and nature worship for conceptualizing and articulating their non-normative tastes and social values."[192] Similarly, Benjamin Morgan acknowledges, "Although decadence is often associated with a rejection of nature in favor of artifice, it is better understood as a mode of ecological thought that undermines the distinction between the natural and the made."[193] Morgan furthers Denisoff's argument with a presentist suggestion that "Decadence is worth attending to in the context of literary histories of climate change and planetary thought…because it discerns a close relationship between ecological and political spheres, adapting scientific narratives about the degeneration of species or dissipation of energy to anxieties about imperial decline and expressions of reactionary nostalgia."[194] In addition to reworking our historical understanding of Decadence and/as the environmental, we must revise our formal approach to Decadent literature. Morgan discusses the additional forms of scalar dissonance that the movement engenders, suggesting that in written form, "decadence was an expression of the over-refined individual thriving at the expense of the whole: of the single, jeweled word taking precedence over the sentence, over the paragraph, the page, the plot."[195] Again, as with my earlier discussion of Hardy, plot seems to lose traction when it comes to environmental readings of the novel.

Or perhaps our approach to plot just needs some reconfiguration. Amy King turns to – and complicates the notion of – plot when she identifies a Decadent temporality in *Dorian Gray*.

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[191] Dennis Denisoff, "The Dissipating Nature of Decadent Paganism from Pater to Yeats," *Modernism/Modernity* 15, no. 3 (December 2008): 431.
[192] Ibid, 432.
[193] Benjamin Morgan, "*Fin Du Globe*: On Decadent Planets," *Victorian Studies* 58, no. 4 (December 2016): 611.
[194] Ibid, 617-618.
[195] Ibid, 621.

King argues that Decadence and natural language coincide to destabilize the narrative's method of relaying time; if Dorian's "physical perfection is represented as a 'bloom,'" argues King, "it is a perfection made possible by its very decadence: Dorian's peak aesthetic perfection is possible only when he freezes it, thereby separating its connotations from the natural world out of which those connotations were born."[196] Noting the "potential infinity of Dorian's life (and the narrative)," King contends that "the destruction of the (perennial) flower is the only narrative solution to the decadent bloom narrative."[197] If Wilde introduces the ever-blooming flower as a symbol of Dorian himself, he "drain[s] the figure of its capacity to capture a specific temporal moment in narrative."[198] When reading Dorian *as* a flower, then, narrative temporality and nature's own temporality find common ground, bolstering each other in a sort of mutual stasis.

Just as an ecocritical reading of Wilde turns to the entanglement of nature and culture, so might we consider how temporality can operate in both the natural and cultural realms. Whitney Davis highlights the paradoxical character of his claim that "what Darwin himself had envisioned as *natural* selection and its temporality must be seen under the aspect of *cultural* temporality."[199] Tracing the co-constitutive relationship between human culture and natural history, Davis concludes, "decadence is an organic metaphor."[200] He rejects the notion of Decadence as "the metaphor in which Nature has been applied…to Culture," turning instead to some giants of nineteenth-century thought to argue, "As [Darwin's] metaphor of 'natural selection' might suggest, and as Huysmans's orchid-collecting critic-connoisseur confirms, at its heart decadence is really a metaphor of Culture applied to Nature – of a human necessity evident

[196] Amy M. King, *Bloom: The Botanical Vernacular in the English Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 207.
[197] Ibid, 219.
[198] Ibid, 207.
[199] Whitney Davis, "Decadence and the Organic Metaphor," *Representations* 89, no. 1 (2005): 138.
[200] Ibid.

to us *in* and *as* culture applied to all nature both within and without human culture itself."[201] In *Dorian Gray*, the relationship between culture and nature operates in both directions, with each informing the other at respective points throughout the novel.

A reciprocal natureculture manifests remarkably in *Dorian Gray* as natural elements and decorative or human-crafted objects share characteristics, a trend that Wilde establishes in the opening scene. In addition to the confusion between interior and exterior space, the woodbine plants possess "dusty gilt horns" – a detail that, evoking Huysmans, draws the plants into the realm of the artificially created, as if these flowers were plated with gold leaf. Further, there is an anthropogenic consciousness in the shadows of birds; Sammells questions whether the shapes are "'real' birds outside, or silk patterns inside," ultimately concluding that Wilde creates a deliberate ambiguity around this question.[202] In fact, reading the birds as real figures that become embedded within the decorative elements of the scene accords with Wilde's tendency to blend nature and culture by signaling the transfiguration of the natural into crafted objects. Bees, for example, can be traced throughout the novel in this way. Aside from the bees that murmur through the grass in the opening, we see a bee "scramble all over the oval stellated globe of the tiny blossoms" of a lilac, and another flying in through Dorian's window to "buzz[] round the blue-dragon bowl" (32, 76). While bees seem to be a fixture of the natural world, they also appear elsewhere, less literally. Dorian, for instance, owns a "little pearl-coloured octagonal stand, that had always looked to him like the work of some strange Egyptian bees that wrought in silver" (96). And during one of the long, Decadent passages cataloguing Dorian's newfound passion for embroideries and tapestries, we find him reading about "the mortuary cloth of King Chilperic, with its three hundred golden bees," among other adornments (104). Alluding to Virgil

[201] Ibid.
[202] Sammells, "Wilde Nature," 129.

in particular,[203] Wilde's apian descriptions position the novel as part of a long literary tradition. Moreover, by consistently returning to an insect synonymous with the ideals of design – the ever-impressive architecture of the honeycomb – Wilde sets up an intersection between art and artist, between subject and object, that permeates the narrative as a whole.

During his investigation into fabrics, Dorian encounters a number of natural elements, in addition to bees, that occur in decorative objects and thus recall other sections of the book where the plants and animals appear in their literal forms. Wilde describes "The ducal of Charles the Rash…hung with pear-shaped pearls" (104) and the room "prepared at the palace at Rheims for the use of Queen Joan of Burgundy" that was "decorated with 'Thirteen hundred and twenty-one parrots…and sixty-one butterflies'" (104). Perhaps as a nod to Wilde's own artistic taste, the butterfly imagery recalls James McNeill Whistler's aesthetic signature. Further, these Decadent details accord with other, more overtly natural, scenes: they evoke a moment from Basil's garden in which "Two green and white butterflies fluttered past them, and in the pear-tree at the corner of the garden a thrush began to sing" (32) and prefigure the "curious Java parrot" that Lord Henry encounters (153). Thus, real elements as disparate as pears, butterflies, and parrots weave their way into works of decorative art that Dorian researches, in a move that twines nature and culture once more to create a sort of reverse anthropogenic universe, where the natural enables the artificial.

Beyond plot, Wilde employs sentence-level mechanics, particularly a plethora of linguistic turns, to demonstrate an awareness of how humans and nature shape one another. Just as literal nature becomes decorative, so does decorative language saturate the natural world, as is evident in passages where Basil's garden seems filled with elements that resemble Art Nouveau

[203] Jane Wright, "Apian Allusion in The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891)," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 29, no. 3 (2016): 156–58.

patterns: “like a blue thread a long thin dragon-fly floated past on its brown gauze wings” (21), “little clouds…like ravelled skeins of glossy white silk…drifting across the hollowed turquoise of the summer sky” (22), “the green lacquer leaves of the ivy” (25). As Dorian wanders through Covent Garden, he observes that “the sky hollowed itself into a perfect pearl” and details “huge jade-green piles of vegetables” (73). And in an evocative description of the moments before dawn, the narrator writes, “Veil after veil of thin dusky gauze is lifted, and by degrees the forms and colours of things are restored to them, and we watch the dawn remaking the world in its antique pattern” (100). Similarly, during the hunting scene at Dorian’s country estate, which takes place in the arguably the most natural space in the novel, the sky appears as “an inverted cup of blue metal” (145). Crafted of thread, gauze, silk, lacquer, pearl, and jade, the world appears as a work of art; by aestheticizing it through comparisons to jewels and fabric, Wilde constructs it as a valuable object, a thing of beauty. Beyond echoing the elided art-life boundaries that Dorian’s relationship with his portrait epitomizes, these artistic descriptions celebrate the glimpses of nature that occur within the grimy city through such attentive and elevated vocabulary.

The language that Wilde employs to describe the sky in these passages also has a particularly microcosmic valence. By conceiving of the sky as “hollowed turquoise,” “hollowed…into a perfect pearl,” and “an inverted cup of blue metal,” Wilde circumscribes a contained space from something typically boundless, like a much more artificial version of the network of boughs enclosing Hardy’s Little Hintock. Just as conservatories take the form of literal bubbles that protect nature within a controllable microclimate (more on this in a moment), so does Wilde’s hollowed sky seem to extend this manner of thinking to the larger world. Through the many descriptions that twine nature and culture, Wilde creates a larger, figurative

bubble that treats spaces within his fictional London as simultaneously aestheticized and natural. Public gardens and other plots of nature within the city, Anjna Chouhan notes, could "combine[] to form an imaginary retreat within an urban environment."[204] Similarly, when taken together, Wilde's conservatories, gardens, and evocative sensory descriptions of the urbanatural world collude to craft a general feeling of natural respite, even in the frame setting of an intensely grotesque and polluted London. The following sections discuss glasshouses, and the novel's setting itself, as a collection of microclimates that comprise an interconnected ecological system.

III. Curated Microclimates: The Garden and the Glasshouse

While Wilde's choice of words allows for a descriptive reciprocity between environmental and decorative elements, the ornamental and the natural often converge in moments where the novel's literal climate comes to the forefront. Scenes in the garden and in greenhouses regularly acknowledge the toxic quality of London's air. While posing for his portrait in Basil's studio, for instance, Dorian falls prey to Lord Henry's corrupting words and subsequently flees the studio, crying out, "I must go and sit in the garden. The air is stifling here" (29). Dorian subsequently retreats to this more natural setting, and when Lord Henry follows him outdoors, he discovers Dorian "burying his face in the great cool lilac-blossoms, feverishly drinking in their perfume as if it had been wine" (30). Dorian, in a moment of distress, finds himself stifled simultaneously by the interior climate and by Lord Henry's dangerous new ideas. As with the question of whether the birds in the opening scene are real or ornamental, we might ask if this moment speaks of literal or metaphorical pollution – or if it contains something of each. Regardless of this distinction, though, the most salient aspect of this scene is Dorian's

[204] Anjna Chouhan, "'The Usual Palm Tree': Lovers in the Conservatory on the Late Victorian Stage," *Victorian Network* 3, no. 2 (2011): 82.

reaction. Met with stifling air, he seeks a change in climate, finding a corporeal communion with the plant life in the garden.

In historical studies of Victorian built environments, the garden is often treated alongside the conservatory. William Taylor, for one, considers a number of curated natural spaces in *The Vital Landscape*, jointly analyzing "places like glasshouses and the Victorian house and garden" in order to demonstrate "how environmental awareness was the result of efforts to accommodate nature, to make room, alongside people, for its forms and processes, species and inanimate matter through works of architecture and landscape gardening in nineteenth-century Britain."[205] Though both conservatories and gardens allowed for such an accommodation, and even a celebration, of nature, there are nevertheless some key differences between the two. Chouhan draws upon Michael Waters' work on the garden to posit that, "while gardens involved 'uncomfortable' nature, and uncontrollable climates, the conservatory had manageable 'airiness and profusion, and darkness and luminosity.'"[206] Certainly, it is true that gardens, not being encased in glass with monitored climates, and susceptible to the surrounding atmosphere, are much less controllable and contained than are conservatories. Though gardens are not, like conservatories, fully enclosed, they still function as scaled-down microclimates within urban settings. Ensuring that "observers and participants could indulge in the aesthetic quality of nature," gardens often took the form of "miniature, idealised, and, most importantly, controllable recreations of rural landscapes."[207] Even the most natural-looking gardens would, of course, have been influenced to some extent by the human hand. Yet despite their varying degrees of artificiality and naturalness, gardens of any sort denote an anthropogenic impulse.

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[205] William M. Taylor, *The Vital Landscape: Nature and the Built Environment in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), xvii.
[206] Chouhan, "The Usual Palm Tree," 83.
[207] Ibid, 82.

The Victorian curatorial imagination shaped living collections from small backyard plots to grand public gardens. In the latter category, large-scale tourist attractions such as Kew Gardens brought together disparate parts of the British Empire and beyond. Kew offered an array of architectural styles – "its faux gothic castle, its Chinese pagoda, and other garden fakery" – that accompanied its eclectic mix of "costly exotics" as well as its attempts to mimic an American wilderness.[208] From a holistic perspective, a place like Kew seems like one huge, artificial microclimate; but it also registers, on another scale, as an assemblage of even smaller microclimates. Though not every garden could be as impressive as Kew, urban gardens comprised microclimates of their own, albeit scaled down much further. Even amidst the popularity of vast public gardens, contends Elizabeth Hope Chang, city plots both real and fictional "were demonstrating the contrapuntal tendency of the urban garden to run riot, to die from smog, or to dissolve into weedy formlessness."[209] While real gardens offered respite from the chaos of city life, fictional gardens served as sites to engage the imagination. Chang cites the symbolic potential of these urban gardens, arguing that "cultivation makes meaningful – and its absence makes obscured – the narratively transformative garden spaces of the city."[210] Fictional garden spaces in the city could be "allied with both private and public spheres," and "revise the novel's characters, major and minor, who enter them, realigning these characters' relations with the surrounding urban world and disrupting their narration of a stable, unified, and singular self."[211] Certainly in *Dorian Gray*, a novel rife with split personalities, the gardens and conservatories trouble the boundaries of time, space, and agency.

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[208] Alan Bewell, "Erasmus Darwin's Cosmopolitan Nature," *ELH* 76, no. 1 (2009): 35.
[209] Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Novel Cultivations: Plants in British Literature of the Global Nineteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 58.
[210] Ibid, 50.
[211] Ibid.

Returning to my earlier discussion of *Wuthering Heights*, the gardens of *Dorian Gray* can also be read through an ecogothic lens; however, Wilde's urban ecogothic, more in dialogue with artificiality and Decadence, suggests a natureculture comprised of not just human/nonhuman interchange, but also rural/urban interchange. *Dorian Gray* unites numerous ecological spaces in both London and its rural surroundings, forming a vast and composite system of microclimates. Chang notes the shared qualities of both city and country gardens: "Despite the impulse to read city gardens as unnatural and artificial in contrast to the country house's native grounds, the congeniality of the gothic form to both urban and countryside fictions betrays the contrivances of both. Cultivated natures, explicitly exotic or implicitly human-dependent, prevent the possibility of easy self-narration by the natural world in both the country and the city."[212] Despite the variation in sites of cultivation, rural and urban spaces, alike, allow for narrative transformation.

And then we have glasshouses, the ultimate structure of London's microclimatic network. Chang reads the domestic urban garden as "a formal if not material analogue to the hothouse in its isolation and symbolic value."[213] But it is the hothouse, and its capacity to enclose plant life within walls of glass, that circumscribes the most literal type of microclimate. Architectural historian Dustin Valen usefully lays out some conceptual and practical underpinnings for the construction of glasshouses. Like gardens, of course, they served as spaces where "foreign bodies and climates were domesticated on English soil."[214] However, their cultural prominence saw a shift towards ubiquity by the mid-nineteenth century. While their popularity initially remained in the realm of the wealthy, developments in manufacturing practices meant that

[212] Ibid, 83.
[213] Ibid, 57.
[214] Dustin Valen, "On the Horticultural Origins of Victorian Glasshouse Culture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 75, no. 4 (December 2016): 403.

glasshouses became more accessible to the middle class as the century went on.[215] The affordability, along with increased public access to these cultivated spaces, allowed more people than ever before to experience the varying climates of hothouses. Valen points to an 1829 *Gardener's Magazine* article wherein T. R. Rivèrè praised hothouses, "writing that 'art can do what nature, uncultivated, forbids,' and describing how even in the middle of winter there 'are days as fine and agreeable as any in the summer months.'"[216] Thus, the microclimate in all its shapes and forms emerged as a prevalent part of Victorian life.

Logistically, glasshouses offer an ideal framework through which to understand microclimates. Their very ability to sustain plant life rides on creating and maintaining artificial bubbles of air at a certain temperature. In descriptions of some famed nineteenth-century glasshouses, we find echoes of the curated urban garden, but with enclosure elevated to an extreme level. The infrastructure required to sustain artificial climates often proved extraordinary, such as the eight subterranean boilers and numerous ventilators installed at Paxton's Great Conservatory at Chatsworth, completed in 1840 and the predecessor to his celebrated Crystal Palace.[217] Beyond sustaining plant life, these artificial environments open up two new imaginative capabilities in particular. For one, they manipulate temporality itself, offering the simultaneous ability to stretch, suspend, and compress it. Accordingly, argues Isobel Armstrong, the Great Conservatory contained "Every time in one space" in addition to its coincident display of assorted global spaces and histories. [218] "Every time" refers, in part, to the tendency to shift temperatures in different parts of a glasshouse, so species that would normally

[215] Ibid, 405.
[216] Ibid, 405-406.
[217] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 184.
[218] Ibid.

thrive in different seasons and climates can all grow at once. This collapsing of time and space also connotes a sense of stasis – perhaps a surprising term to find in a discussion of organic life, but one that speaks aptly to how a glasshouse offers a stable climate year-round. In a climate like England's, a conservatory can create the stability of interminable summer. I also want to push further on the idea that a conservatory hosts "every time in one space"; we might further this discussion to claim that such conservatories likewise display every *space* in one *time*. Indeed, the conservatory has the unique ability to maintain an eternal present, lacking seasonal and yearly variations in climate.

Just as glasshouses can reconfigure relationships between space and time, so can they reconfigure humanity's relationship to nature – this, the second imaginative capability. Narrating the complex history of nineteenth-century glasshouses, William Taylor notes that these structures "brought together organic processes and functional architectural forms and contrived landscapes in one confined space in which life and death, the normal and the pathological, were made evident."[219] He proposes that we read the glasshouse as "an 'analogue' of nature": "Along with other spaces in which human beings encountered close quarters, the glasshouse enabled the 'newness' of nature to be accommodated, adapted or rendered familiar within certain bounds, all the while stimulating 'an experiencing of the empirical in circumscribed terms.'"[220] With the growing popularity of these bounded spaces, Taylor suggests, glasshouses transformed the Victorian understanding of science; it became real, visible, and tangible, and it subsequently "revealed hitherto unseen worlds that were novel and provocative."[221] Like Wilde's novel itself,

[219] Taylor, *The Vital Landscape*, 9.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.

glasshouses circumscribed imaginative microclimates, changing the way that people interfaced with the environment in the nineteenth century and beyond.

To probe further the unique capabilities of glasshouses, and to consider some key terms of this project as a whole, I turn in earnest to a discussion of artificial climates and historical context concerning their popularity. Glasshouses, of course, circumscribe a self-contained bubble around the plants within, thus creating a unique tension between natural and artificial (and a tension, it is worth noting, that Wilde's Decadent context will trouble). The need for these artificial climates resulted, unsurprisingly, from England's own weather patterns; weather consistently led to deep anxiety for conservatory designers and horticulturalists – a literal cloud hanging over their heads.[222] In response to meteorological concerns, artificiality came to be understood as the best, and perhaps the *only*, solution to growing many plants. John Frederic Daniell, an English chemist and physicist who influenced the theory and practice of prominent landscape designer and architect John Claudius Loudon, wrote a paper proposing that gardeners, "By paying careful attention to humidity levels and the evaporation and absorption of moisture by plants…could create an atmosphere 'perfectly analogous to the natural processes.'"[223] Paradoxically, as Daniell's research suggests, the natural could only be achieved through the artificial.

The artificial climates of glasshouses also came to symbolize a drive toward perfectionism. Following the success of his Crystal Palace, Joseph Paxton intended to enclose a significant portion of London's infrastructure in a glass walkway called the Great Victorian Way. In a report to the House of Commons, Paxton boasted, "I propose to make this arcade, first of all, because I believe it will be very desirable to have a covered way, which can be ventilated and

[222] Ibid, 91.
[223] Valen, "Horticultural Origins," 407.

made as perfect, as far as the atmosphere is concerned, as the country."[224] He envisioned this project as a manmade antidote to London's shortcomings, describing the logistics as follows:

> The maintenance of the roof of glass, which would have the means attached to it of carrying off the rain and the dirt which would fall upon it, and the keeping up of the roadway itself, would cost as little as the repair of an ordinary road alone. The roads in London wear out by the changes of our weather. You have rain for several days together, during which the streets, with the large traffic which is upon them, become mud, and in the dry weather this is ground up and pulverised. Here there would be a regular system of pavement… I shall be able to show the Committee that you can ventilate this covered communication, and can keep the place as cool and as well or even better ventilated than the ordinary streets of London…. Indeed, I contemplate that it would be made a place the advantages of which would prevent many infirm persons being obliged to go into foreign countries in the winter; some part of it might be so arranged as to keep the cold air from penetrating it during four or five months in the winter, and it would be almost equal to going to a foreign climate from the manner in which the temperature could be regulated.[225]

Though the Great Victorian Way never saw completion, Paxton's vision shows the entanglement of this atmospheric perfectionism with human life. As with a glass menagerie, a popular adaptation of the glasshouse where numerous animal species were brought into relation with a captive human audience, Paxton aimed to unite the world of "urban dispersal."[226] If artificial

[224] Great Britain Parliament House of Commons, *Reports from Committees* (Ordered to be printed, 1855), 80.
[225] Parliament House of Commons, 81.
[226] Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, 146.

climates could allow plants to thrive across disparate geographies, so could this perfected air nurture the health of humans in urban environments.

To further apply some conceptual underpinnings of glasshouses to human life, the notion that air could be perfected also gestures toward the prevalence of miasma theory. The glasshouse served as a useful model for public health advocates, offering not only an ability "to preserve delicate plant life," but also "critical illustrations of how artificial climates could be put to use for the preservation of human health."[227] These glass-encased environments formed alternative worlds where people could seek respite from inclement weather alongside the anthropogenic threats in London's very atmosphere, including pollution and smog. As Valen observes, "horticultural developments resonated with sanitary reformers, who warned about the dangers of vitiated atmospheres and cold climates while championing the curative powers of warm retreats."[228] Over the course of the nineteenth century, then, glasshouses shifted away from a purely elitist framework and toward societal reform, showcasing more progressive, public-facing ideals. Glass buildings, and the artificial environments that they circumscribed, became increasingly prominent parts of the metropolitan experience. And to return to the notion of the glasshouse as an entity with narrative potential, Armstrong notes, "It was a 'fictive' space, *creating* the environment. Stations, shops, markets, warehouses, factories, hospitals, universities, galleries, swimming pools, homes, and offices could all become humanly made social spaces through the agency of glass."[229] Thus, alongside its potential to create new atmospheres and to support new plant life, the conservatory offered new ways for people to interact with urban space.

[227] Valen, "Horticultural Origins," 412.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, 176.

Finally, as we prepare to turn back to Wilde's novel and its own system of microclimates, it is worth thinking about how glasshouses can function across multiple scales. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, writes Heidi Scott, "The domestication of natural systems, particularly gardens, aquaria, and greenhouses, provided miniature natures analogous to massive national projects like Kew Gardens and the Crystal Palace."[230] If Kew and the Crystal Palace were understood to be scaled-down versions of the British empire – its plants and its inhabitants – then the further miniaturization of domestic projects signaled the potential of an individual to relate anew to the larger environment. Perhaps the most popular model of a microcosmic glasshouse was the Wardian case, which enabled great numbers of people to cultivate artificial climates of their own within even smaller spaces than a private conservatory or city garden. These cases transcended class: they were inexpensive, "developed in the East End as portable glass-covered boxes in which plants grew, protected from urban smoke and factory pollution."[231] Bringing artificial microclimates to the masses, these glasshouses – scaled multiply – allowed the everyday Victorian to create their own worlds, their own climates.

Depending on its scale, the glasshouse could reinforce or equalize the class differences that both Wilde and Huysmans persistently code in their enclosed atmospheres. While the next section takes up *Dorian Gray* as, itself, an atmospheric container that locates microclimate in descriptive moments, this extended discussion of glasshouses in regard to class and social reform invites a concluding word on Wilde's own socialist agenda. Paxton's plan for the Great Victorian Way resonates with several ideals that Wilde puts forth in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," published the same year as his novel. Under socialism, Wilde argues, "The security of a society

[230] Heidi C. M. Scott, *Chaos and Cosmos: Literary Roots of Modern Ecology in the British Nineteenth Century* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 134.
[231] Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, 141.

will not depend, as it does now, on the state of the weather. If a frost comes we shall not have a hundred thousand men out of work… Each member of the society will share in the general prosperity and happiness of the society, and if a frost comes no one will practically be anything the worse."[232] Here, Wilde illustrates a direct correlation between climate and societal success, promoting a state of wellbeing where people are, quite literally, protected from the elements. And although an ideal socialist society will be better shielded from environmental concerns, its people will demonstrate health through their own organic potential. With socialism, Wilde writes, "the true personality of man…will grow naturally and simply, flowerlike, or as a tree grows."[233] The environment is crucial to stability and growth, as the microclimates of *Dorian Gray* reveal; if too much corruption permeates the enclosed environment, then Decadent decay will prevail.

IV. Dorian Gray*'s Climate Model*

Though *Dorian Gray* remains a newcomer to the ecocritical conversation, previous scholarship on literary glasshouses proves applicable to discussing the microclimates within Wilde's own novel. Some of Wilde's other works, in fact, have previously resonated with ecocritics: for instance, his society play *An Ideal Husband* (1895) features in Chouhan's scholarship. Numerous scenes take place in a conservatory, where Lord Goring frequently proposes to Mabel Chiltern beneath the "Third palm tree to the left, the usual palm tree."[234] In her article on dramatic representations of conservatories, Chouhan interprets glasshouses as spaces that offered an alternative form of pastoral escape that could activate the imagination

[232] Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: HarperCollins, [1891] 2003), 1175.
[233] Wilde, "The Soul of Man," 1179.
[234] Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: HarperCollins, [1895] 2003), 578.

without laborious travel to the countryside. Like Jesse Oak Taylor, she speaks to the artificial climate that such spaces engender, but she also suggests that conservatories were instruments through which city dwellers could be "transported into rural and even exotic worlds."[235] Despite their artificial climates and tendency to contain non-native species, conservatories were nevertheless the purest pockets of the natural world that Londoners could easily access amidst the hostile social and environmental climate of the surrounding city.

Dickens scholarship offers perhaps the most relevant inroad for thinking about how novels can use glasshouses to configure their own climate models. Both Isobel Armstrong and Jesse Oak Taylor point to *Bleak House* as a text that engages the contemporary concept of the glasshouse. Armstrong comments, "Though the novel was serialized from March 1852 to September 1853, there is not a single direct reference to the Exhibition in *Bleak House*. Yet there is a systematic reversal and dreamwork travesty of it, as in the sinister shade or glass dome that contains the whole of London, vibrating as if ready to shatter."[236] Understanding *Bleak House* as a novel that positions London within a glass dome finds a compelling parallel in the glasshouse logic that encloses the world of *Dorian Gray*.

Similarly, Taylor cites Ruskin to demonstrate the long critical legacy of reading *Bleak House* through a glasshouse-informed lens. Ruskin critiqued the novel "precisely because it seemed at home 'in streets where summer and winter are the only alterations of heat and cold; where snow never fell white, nor sunshine clear; where the ground is only a pavement, and *the sky no more than the glass roof of an arcade*.'"[237] Notes Taylor, "By placing it beneath the 'glass roof of an arcade,' Ruskin situates Dickens's fiction within an artificial climate in more ways

[235] Chouhan, "The Usual Palm Tree," 83.
[236] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, 246.
[237] Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 31.

than one."[238] Between Ruskin's Victorian-era appraisal and the current scholarly conversation, we see a precedent for understanding the novel in relation to an artificial climate – a literary equivalent to the Great Victorian Way. In contrast with the bubble that Armstrong envisions, however, Taylor interprets *Bleak House* as not "a closed system nested within an environment" but "a tangled thicket of interrelated assemblages and multitiered systems…with all of the systems open to and affected by others."[239] How, then, do we read *Dorian Gray*? Does Wilde construct a closed bubble around his literary world, or is it more of an assemblage?

I argue that Wilde offers both models of enclosure in one novel. In its Decadent language, the entire world of *Dorian Gray* seems contained in a closed, bubble-like space: all of England beneath a sky like hollowed turquoise or an inverted cup. But in its frequent turn to gardens and conservatories, the novel engages naturecultures and artificial climates as more of a network, an assemblage of different, small-scale pieces. If the entire narrative world exists beneath a Decadent dome, the dome itself comprises a diverse collection of microclimates. Even at Dorian's country estate at Selby Royal, likely the most "natural" environment in the novel with its vast hunting grounds, the guests generally socialize in his conservatory, which features such plants as palm trees and orchids. Though the conservatory evokes elegance and civility, its physical boundaries do not prevent the outside world from seeping in. When Dorian, mid-conversation, offers to fetch orchids for the Duchess, he proceeds to the far end of the conservatory and suffers a fall, upon which "Lord Henry rushed through the flapping palms to find Dorian Gray lying face downwards on the tiled floor in a death-like swoon" (143). While Lord Henry attributes Dorian's fainting to exhaustion, Dorian recalls an image: "pressed against the window of the conservatory, like a white handkerchief, he had seen the face of James Vane

[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid, 33.

watching him" (143). This moment suggests that even the boundaries of the bubble will not be enough to keep out external threats. And domed as it is, the narrative space, too, offers little protection; Dorian cannot safely travel, à la the Great Victorian Way, between microclimates.

The glasshouse proves a particularly apt conceptual model for *Dorian Gray* in its singular relationship to time. Its physical enclosure encases an artificial climate, of course, but as Armstrong argues, "The hothouse transforms space and annihilates time by producing 'spring and summer in the midst of winter…splendid flowers of the torrid zone in a temperate or cold country', synchronizing the seasons. It manufactures ideal time concurrently with the real time outside."[240] The glasshouse thus manufactures doubly: artificial climate *and* artificial time. Elizabeth Hope Chang points to glasshouse temporality – and Wardian cases in particular – as offering "obvious physical and visual proof of an off-set time frame, as flowers long dead in outdoor beds bloomed continuously indoors under their glassy protection."[241] The juxtaposition between withered outdoor flowers and those growing eternally (eerily, even) within a glass case also hints at an intersection between the natural and the supernatural, suggesting that *Dorian Gray*, much like *Wuthering Heights*, merits a place in the ecogothic conversation. Moreover, Chang's use of "frame" seems significant here, indicating the glasshouse's simultaneous capacity to frame time and space, and evoking, as well, the framing of Dorian's own portrait.

This reference to framing is no accident, as Chang's recent work on plants in nineteenth-century British literature, which often carefully tracks the colonial and imperial implications of their global trade, provides a keen and thorough engagement with the plant life in *Dorian Gray*. She reads, persuasively, the novel's representations of plants as both analogous to and in tension with its singular take on temporality. Writes Chang, "The novel's dependence on a terrible

[240] Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds*, 182.
[241] Chang, *Novel Cultivations*, 71.

distortion of human lifespan is a famous feature of its plot and, it would seem, a contradiction of its incorporation of organic realism." Here, it is useful to return to the opening garden scene that I discussed earlier in this chapter. Chang points to its complex temporality, noting the difficulty of distinguishing "what conditions of the garden's flowers are habitual and ongoing and which effects are momentary and perceived directly." As with a glasshouse, in Basil's garden "we are given period temporal markers that anchor us in the organic space of the garden – which is proceeding according to its own, initially unrelated time frame."[242] Similarly, Dorian finds pleasure in the novel's plant life, but his own relation to change – or lack thereof – symbolizes a glasshouse temporality. It is as if Dorian inhabits his own artificial climate, a product of his own making.

And the portrayals of the gardens structure Wilde's approach to Dorian's ethical journey, too. Chang explains, "tracing Dorian's growing moral depravity, a mix of observed omniscient narration and free indirect discourse relays: 'Summer followed summer, and the yellow jonquils bloomed and died many times, and nights of horror repeated the story of their shame, but he was unchanged.'"[243] Though the examples might seem abstract, jonquils (along with other flowers that Wilde references) are perennials, "and thus possess a self-perpetuating character metaphorically employed in English poetry and prose for many centuries."[244] The novel's central theme of stasis and suspension, as epitomized through Dorian's portrait, hints at Dorian himself enclosed in an artificial climate. In Wardian cases, notes Margaret Flanders Darby, "The glass case's protection allows the soul, the essential nature, to express itself, either of plant or child. It is a paradise of suspended animation as the bloom reaches its greatest potential and then is held

[242] Ibid, 72-75.
[243] Ibid, 73.
[244] Ibid.

there."[245] So, it seems, does Dorian's mutable portrait accord with the polluted world, while his literal body remains pent up in the perpetual temporality of a glasshouse.

The microclimates of *Dorian Gray* thus perform the double task of shutting out both London's physical, polluted climate and the corrupting social climate to which Dorian falls prey. Given Wilde's focus on interiors, gardens, and the estate at Selby Royal, and as the opening scene in Basil's studio indicates, London itself maintains a surprisingly minor presence throughout many parts of the novel, especially given that a large portion of the plot occurs outside of the city. But in the few moments when London does come to the forefront of the novel, the city takes on an ominous, threatening climate – literally and metaphorically. One such moment features Dorian narrating his own wanderings through London to Lord Henry, whose harmful influence has already begun to poison him:

> There was an exquisite poison in the air…. I felt that this grey, monstrous London of ours, with its myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins, as you once phrased it, must have something in store for me. I fancied a thousand things. The mere danger gave me a sense of delight…. I went out and wandered eastward, soon losing my way in a labyrinth of grimy streets and black, grassless squares. About half-past eight I passed by an absurd little theatre, with great flaring gas-jets and gaudy play-bills. (47)

With the numerous undesirable adjectives ascribed to it, London's climate stands in stark contrast to Basil's lilac-saturated garden. The air contains "an exquisite poison," while the "grey," "grimy," and "grassless" qualities of the urban streets – vague terms in contrast with Wilde's prior references to individual flower species – suggest the deleterious effects of industrial pollution. The moral climate comes through, too, in this passage; Dorian critiques the

[245] Margaret Flanders Darby, "Unnatural History: Ward's Glass Cases," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35, no. 2 (2007): 644.

"sordid sinners," and, in an ever-ambiguous Wildean turn, we are left wondering if the "exquisite poison" could reference both the dangerous air quality and the wretched activities occurring within the city.

Dorian's journey through London's physical and moral pollution, however, leads him to one of the microclimates in the novel's network. In landing at the "absurd little theatre," he first encounters Sibyl Vane in a scene that whisks us abruptly from the grungy urban labyrinth to a Decadent, garden-inspired environment. Though theatres have connotations of supreme artifice, a point that Wilde expounds upon during the devastating scene in which Sibyl loses her ability to act, this setting offers a sampling of nature within the sordid city, just as Basil's garden did. Sibyl, herself, appears plant-like: Dorian notes her "little flower-like face" as well as her lips, resembling "the petals of a rose" (49). And, most poignantly, Sibyl is performing the garden scene from *Romeo and Juliet*; Dorian fixates on her voice in this scene, noting, "it had all the tremulous ecstasy that one hears just before dawn when nightingales are singing. There were moments, later on, when it had the wild passion of violets" (49). Not only does Sibyl resemble a flower, but by creating the fictive garden through her acting, she draws Dorian, along with the rest of the audience, into this space that seems so at odds with the city immediately surrounding the theatre. Even the theatre itself, with the "horrid little private box" and "vulgar drop-scene" that classify the whole "tawdry affair," as Dorian describes it, requires this garden-like microclimate through which to escape (48). Dorian and Sibyl's theatrical storyline exemplifies Wilde's broader tendency to think of nature as staged; beyond the gardens that appear in his plays, we might think of *Salomé*'s lush evocation of a natural world that is not present on stage: the little green flower, the cedars of Lebanon, and Herod's beautiful peacocks that manifest in dialogue alone.

Turning back to the novel, perhaps the most wretched scenes of all, which render the natural microclimates even more vital, occur in the opium dens of the squalid East End. Beyond their filthy state, the opium dens are inherently polluted places "where one could buy the oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new" (134). As Dorian travels by coach to the opium den, even the air changes: he moves through "streets like the black web of some sprawling spider," filled with "Wreaths of white mist" (134, 135). Upon entering the opium den, he encounters the most grotesque scene of all:

> At the end of the hall hung a tattered green curtain that swayed and shook in the gusty wind which had followed him in from the street. He dragged it aside, and entered a long, low room which looked as if it had once been a third-rate dancing-saloon. Shrill flaring gas jets, dulled and distorted in the fly-blown mirrors that faced them, were ranged round the walls. Greasy reflectors of ribbed tin backed them, making quivering discs of light. The floor was covered with ochre-coloured sawdust, trampled here and there into mud, and stained with dark rings of spilt liquor. (135)

From this vile description, Wilde positions the opium den as possessing the most contaminated and filthy climate within a contaminated and filthy city. As with his venture to the theatre, his time at the opium den is punctuated with signs of revolting anthropogenic influence: gas jets, greasy reflectors, stained sawdust. But this space is not a wholly contained microclimate, for it remains open to the poisonous streets – the wind follows Dorian inside, and the floor of the room has become a soupy mixture of sawdust and mud. Moreover, as he continues into the room, he encounters a poisonous artificial climate: "the heavy odor of opium met him" (135). The very weight of this scent, as well as the city air's infiltration of this space, indicates that Dorian has

entered an illicit realm where there is no respite from the polluted climate – both morally and environmentally.

Unlike the interior-exterior conflation present in *Wuthering Heights*, which articulates a rural communion between human and ecological entities, the sheer danger of Wilde's urban climate underscores the importance of microclimates as sites of refuge. The microclimates within the narrative network perform the critical work of delineating boundaries. Windows and doors, a fundamental way for Brontë to wed multiple human and nonhuman agencies, must here remain closed; they signify the necessity of shutting London itself out of microclimatic spaces, including Dorian's own home. Shortly before Dorian kills Basil, the two meet in the fog-filled street. When Basil hails Dorian, he queries, "Didn't you recognise me?" (110). Dorian replies, "In this fog, my dear Basil? Why, I can't even recognise Grosvenor Square. I believe my house is somewhere about here, but I don't feel at all certain about it" (110). Then, he impels Basil to "Come in, or the fog will get into the house" (110). Dorian here speaks to a complex fear with both elitist and health-related implications: the fog – the city climate – will enter and taint the private spaces, these carefully curated microclimates that make up their own networked system.

Taken together, the gardens and conservatories prove a necessary and effective antidote to London's corruption. Having produced the repellant fogs and the grimy city, humans must now counter the detrimental anthropogenic environment with new creations that stem from nature, Wilde suggests in his incorporation of these natural environments. Though the novel ends with Dorian's famous demise, these climates offer the potential to counter the wickedness that he enacts. Musing upon his cruel treatment of Sibyl, Dorian steps onto the grass outside and "drew a deep breath. The fresh morning air seemed to drive away all his sombre passions. He thought only of Sibyl. A faint echo of his love came back to him. He repeated her name over and over

again. The birds that were singing in the dew-drenched garden seemed to be telling the flowers about her" (75). For Dorian, the garden's pure climate presents a corrective to the debauched things of the world – his recent fight with Sibyl, as well as the more sinister parts of the city. He is in a proper and healthy climate, breathing in "The fresh morning air." This small plot of flower-filled land proves similarly relieving, as well as puzzling, after Dorian learns of Sibyl's death and ponders aloud to himself, "So I have murdered Sibyl Vane…murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with a knife. Yet the roses are not less lovely for all that. The birds sing just as happily in my garden" (79). Here, Dorian's attention to the garden's continued prosperity serves as an important moral checkpoint against which to measure the grotesque city and the poisonous opium dens. If Dorian juxtaposes his beautiful garden with his sins, suggests Wilde, then he might eventually come to realize the error of his ways, instead of fully succumbing to the influence of the corrupt, smog-filled city climate. But Dorian cannot remain in the microclimates for long enough to survive; he succumbs to both poisonous thoughts and, perhaps, to the poisonous air around him.

With the novel's fixation on death and decay, Wilde participates in a larger *fin-de-siècle* discourse that anticipated the close of a century and of Britain's imperial supremacy. In the following excerpt from a famed exchange, Lady Narborough, Dorian, and Lord Henry discuss endings in their own temporal context:

> "*Fin de siècle*," murmured Lord Henry.
>
> "*Fin du globe*," answered his hostess.
>
> "I wish it were *fin du globe*," said Dorian with a sigh. "Life is a great disappointment."
>
> "Ah, my dear," cried Lady Narborough, putting on her gloves, "don't tell me that you have exhausted Life." (130)

Lady Narborough shifts our attention from the end of the century, a time that implies renewal and continuity as the next century begins, toward the more ominous end of the planet. In the manuscript, Wilde initially used the more recognizable phrase "*fin du monde*," which he later altered to "*fin du globe*."[246] Though nuanced, Morgan suggests, this revision moves from the "abstract, potentially multiple, shapeless" realm of *monde* to the "material, singular, shaped" implications of *globe*.[247] In the context of this chapter, *globe* much more clearly suits the work of framing that Wilde's various microclimates perform (and, of course, it beckons to the framing of the titular portrait itself). For a contemporary audience, however, as the Doomsday Clock ticks ever further toward midnight and our collective demise, the Decadent concern over *fin du globe* registers with fresh urgency. Unlike Dorian, we face not mere disgust, but the literal consequences of a warming globe. Wilde's reflection on class and environment proves all the more relevant – and frighteningly so – as we consider the devastating and uneven impacts of the climate crisis that has begun to wreak havoc on our whole planet.

[246] Morgan, "*Fin Du Globe*," 619.
[247] Ibid.

Chapter IV

Meteorological Inversions: Scaling Weather and Climate in *Orlando* and *Between the Acts*

I. Woolf at Wembley

Following Wilde's *fin-de-siècle* anxieties into the twentieth century, this project concludes not with the famed Victorian glasshouse of the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition, but with another exhibition that occurred several decades later: the British Empire Exhibition of 1924. Held at Wembley Park on the outskirts of London, the exhibition ran for six months in its first year and reopened for a time in 1925. Much like its Victorian predecessors, the British Empire Exhibition presented a gaudy display of Britain's imperial wealth and control "that constructed a fiction of its own stewardship and benevolent interest in foreign territories."[248] All told, over 27 million people visited this "empire in miniature"[249] – among them, Virginia Woolf. Though the exhibition has long since been dismantled, Woolf's essay "Thunder at Wembley" (1924) remains as a striking critique of this cultural moment. The essay touches only peripherally on the exhibition's most famed attractions, including the ferro-concrete pavilions that recreated, in miniature, the empire's numerous colonies and territories. Instead, "Thunder at Wembley" proves especially curious in Woolf's limning of naturalcultural relations and the more-than-human entanglements that she encountered while visiting the exhibition. Rather than fixating on the human structures and artifice that we traditionally associate with world's fairs, she points – often hyperbolically – to the fragility of buildings in the face of natural forces.

Woolf begins her essay with the declaration, "It is Nature that is the ruin of Wembley; yet it is difficult to see what steps Lord Stevenson, Lieutenant-General Sir Travers Clarke, and the

[248] Kelly Sultzbach, *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination: Forster, Woolf, and Auden* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 117.
[249] Scott Cohen, "The Empire from the Street: Virginia Woolf, Wembley, and Imperial Monuments," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 50, no. 1 (March 2004): 94.

Duke of Devonshire could have taken to keep her out. They might have eradicated the grass and felled the chestnut trees; even so the thrushes would have got in, and there would always have been the sky."[250] From this introduction, Woolf draws on natural agency to justify her critique of the exhibition's infrastructure: while attempts to plaster over the natural world have enabled this display of imperial spectacle, it has proved impossible to wholly eradicate natural forces from this fabricated space. Her opening claim pits the competence of the exhibition's powerful organizers against the natural environment of Wembley's very site, replete with thrushes and the ever-powerful sky. Even in the face of the money, labor, and landscaping that these men have brought, the formidable natural forces remain, permeating Wembley. As she implies with the coy phrase "there would always have been the sky," and as the essay's title reinforces, Woolf establishes that, though her setting is technically Wembley, her subject is not quite (or not *only*) the British Empire Exhibition but, more potently, the *weather* at the exhibition. In focusing her analysis on the weather, she draws attention away from the exhibition itself and foregrounds the natural context in which it takes place.

As in Thomas Hardy's depiction of a woodland at war with itself, "Thunder at Wembley" sources its drama from the nonhuman world. Its climax centers around a storm's arrival, which Woolf narrates in the essay's evocative final paragraph:

> The sky is livid, lurid, sulphurine. It is in violent commotion. It is whirling water-spouts of cloud into the air; of dust in the Exhibition. Dust swirls down the avenues, hisses and hurries like erected cobras round the corners. Pagodas are dissolving in dust. Ferro-concrete is fallible. Colonies are perishing and dispersing in spray of inconceivable beauty and terror which some malignant power illuminates. Ash and violet are the

[250] Virginia Woolf, "Thunder at Wembley," in *Collected Essays Vol. 4* (London: Hogarth Press, [1924] 1966), 184.

> colours of its decay. From every quarter human beings come flying – clergymen, schoolchildren, invalids in bath-chairs. They fly with outstretched arms, and a vast sound of wailing rolls before them, but there is neither confusion nor dismay. Humanity is rushing to destruction, but humanity is accepting its doom… The Empire is perishing; the bands are playing; the Exhibition is in ruins. For that is what comes of letting in the sky.[251]

In the essay's climax, Woolf calls on ferocious, chaotic imagery to depict the consequences of "letting in the sky" – an act that, as she makes clear in the opening paragraph, is both involuntary and inevitable. Uncontrollable natural forces flood this description: the sky plays host to a commotion of whirling, swirling, and flying things, from dust to human bodies. The microcosmic aspect of the imperial setting further offers Woolf the opportunity to draw broad claims about the fate of humanity and empire. She scales simultaneously up and down in her final attention to the exhibition's tempestuous ruin: it is both a localized microclimate within the general bounds of London *and* a microcosmic representation of the entire empire. The weather, as the force that wreaks such destruction, likewise operates on several scales at once. Woolf's apocalyptic rhetoric moves from global to local as the essay draws to a close: first, "*Humanity* is rushing to destruction"; then, "*The Empire* is perishing"; and finally, "*the exhibition* is in ruins" (emphases mine). Though Woolf derived inspiration from authentic ominous weather at the exhibition,[252] the destruction here is largely rhetorical, figured through her own hyperbole. While the microcosmic exhibition of empire offers an ideal setting for a figurative reading of large-scale destruction, she embellishes the chaos to create a fantastic scene that envisions its own *fin du globe*.

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[251] Ibid, 186-7.
[252] Cohen, "The Empire from the Street," 85.

Woolf's emphasis on the weather event's overbearing presence underscores the conspicuous absences that characterize her essay. As Kelly Sultzbach suggests, "Woolf is interested in narrating what *isn't* in the exhibit," which "highlights England's solipsistic exclusion of all that doesn't programmatically reflect its unquestioned control."[253] Just as Woolf marshals the storm to illustrate human vulnerability, so does she rely on its violence to make a sweeping critique of British empire and its systemic failure. Likewise, Scott Cohen fixates on the essay's appraisal of empire – a cutting critique that gains traction through the sheer absurdity of the apocalyptic storm. Cohen offers a reading of the eponymous thunderstorm that goes beyond the figurative, arguing, "The final 'catastrophe' stems not from imperialism's policies, but rather an unavoidable event outside of human control."[254] With this culminating weather event, Woolf's depiction of the British Empire Exhibition seems to hinge on a literal instance of *deus ex machina*.

When read in tandem with Woolf's novels, "Thunder at Wembley" itself becomes a scaled-down exemplar of her tendency to harness weather as a fictional tool. In recent years, her writing – including both essays and fiction – has increasingly become a subject of ecocritical discourse. In particular, scholars tend to read her work through the lens of ecofeminism and/as embodied perception.[255] Yet her novels merit greater ecocritical attention for their reliance on the meteorological. Woolf frequently instrumentalizes climate and weather: two terms that have

[253] Sultzbach, *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination*, 117.
[254] Cohen, "The Empire from the Street," 86.
[255] See: Carol H. Cantrell, "'The Locus of Compossibility': Virginia Woolf, Modernism, and Place," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 25–40; Katharina Donn, "Beyond the Wasteland: An Ecocritical Reading of Modernist Trauma Literature," in *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, ed. Hubert Zapf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 551–568; Justyna Kostkowska, *Ecocriticism and Women Writers: Environmentalist Poetics of Virginia Woolf, Jeanette Winterson, and Ali Smith* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Charlotte Zoë Walker, "Letting in the Sky: An Ecofeminist Reading of Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction," in *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. John Parham (Florence, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 172–185.

been pivotal to this project and, as Paula Maggio argues, two terms that have been largely overlooked in Woolf scholarship.[256] Using Maggio's claim as a starting point, in addition to recent work from Alexandra Harris and Jesse Oak Taylor, I seek in this chapter to build on the small body of scholarship that parses Woolf's reliance on weather as a narrative instrument. In Woolf's fiction, weather repeatedly operates as a crucial mechanism for scaling human subjects against both nonhuman entities and nonhuman timescales.

As befits a modernist, Woolf's novelistic turns to meteorology tend to be bound up with complex questions of temporality. Understandably, time and weather have long proved inextricable. Anny Sadrin expounds upon the overlap between "chronology" and "meteorology," which proves so frequent "that in some languages, such as French or Italian, the same word, *temps* or *tempo*, can be used to render pure temporality as well as duration and repetition (time, times), to distinguish the verbal modalities that indicate the propinquity or remoteness of events (tense), and to appreciate the quality of circumstances surrounding them (weather)."[257] With such potential for conflation and confusion, different meteorological scales often usher in multiple chronological scales. The other texts in this project may have fit more neatly into distinct meteorological categories: Brontë has her weather, Hardy his atmosphere, and Wilde his climate. My reading of Woolf's novels, on the other hand, unsettles the divide between these terms. I especially want to linger on entanglements of weather and climate in Woolf. Scientific definitions certainly drive a rigid wedge between the two. Moreover, to return for a moment to linguistic roots, the Greek origins of "weather" and "climate" cause John Durham Peters to assert, "Weather is not climate. One is *kairos* and the other is *chronos*. Nobody talks about

[256] Paula Maggio, "Digging for Buried Treasure: Theories about Weather and Fiction in Virginia Woolf's Essays," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 78 (2010): 24.
[257] Anny Sadrin, "Time, Tense, Weather in Three 'Flood Novels', 'Bleak House', 'The Mill on the Floss', 'To the Lighthouse,'" *The Yearbook of English Studies* 30 (2000): 98.

yesterday's weather, but climate consists of long-term averages that can reach back decades, centuries, millennia, and more."[258] With her manipulation of chronology, however, Woolf quite often renders weather *as* climate, and climate *as* weather. In Woolf's play with narrative time, singular weather events take on the long-term implications of climate, while climatic shifts are compressed to a scale more befitting of weather.

Woolf's overarching interest in chronological and meteorological intersections renders many of her novels appropriate objects of study in this context. This chapter analyzes *Orlando* (1928) and *Between the Acts* (1941), which provide a compelling juxtaposition in their relative treatments of temporal scale, and in how they break down boundaries between climate and weather. A satirical biography, *Orlando* narrates a four-century romp through the life of the eponymous individual who famously goes to sleep as a man and wakes up as a woman partway through the book. Since its publication, the novel has received significant scholarly attention for its treatment of gender and sexuality. However, its ecocritical framework invites further examination, particularly in how Woolf employs weather as a narrative agent. Rather than treating weather as "mere background that can be dismissed by the occasional descriptive passage," argues Maggio, Woolf paints it as "a vital natural force that influences the action and impacts the decisions of the novel's main character."[259] Further, I suggest that given her attention to weather and climate, Woolf frequently destabilizes the divide between foreground and background – a technique recognizable from Hardy's fiction. Woolf's numerous essays on writing do, indeed, find her espousing the importance of approaching nature as an integral element of human life. Nature is not to be used, she notes in "Phases of Fiction" (1929), "as an

[258] John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 253.
[259] Maggio, "Digging for Buried Treasure," 25.

obstacle to overcome or as a background."[260] Rather, Woolf centers the weather: in *Orlando*, she draws out the violent instantaneity of weather events, using these singular moments to mark shifts in the climate itself. Weather, accentuated in this way against the backdrop of the *longue durée*, verges into the territory of a climatic trend.

In contrast, *Between the Acts* essentially presents an inverse relationship between meteorology and chronology. While *Orlando* spans the Elizabethan period through the early twentieth century, Woolf's posthumously published novel takes place over the course of a single summer's day. At Pointz Hall, a country estate several miles removed from London, a small crowd gathers to watch a pageant consisting of scenes from (heavily abridged) English dramatic history. In just a few hours, the pageant covers about four centuries, or roughly the same time span as Orlando's life. Given the similarities between their timeframes, I read *Between the Acts* as in dialogue with – and, even, as a condensed version of – *Orlando*. If *Orlando* initially seems suited to address climate, given its multi-century range, then *Between the Acts* lends itself to the more instantaneous scale of weather. Indeed, the day of the performance is marked by recurring concern over the weather; characters frequently pause to wonder whether rain will disrupt the pageant, or if it will be fine after all. Yet with Woolf's temporal manipulation, the novel invites us to consider its weather on a larger scale. Against the backdrop of abbreviated historical time – represented in both the pageant and a book known as "an Outline of History" that one of the characters picks up throughout the day – the novel's weather occurrences take on the scaled-up significance of climate.

In these two novels, Woolf relies on microcosmic contexts to navigate huge scalar leaps. While *Orlando* finds her stretching a single human life across centuries, *Between the Acts*

[260] Ibid (as a citation).

shrinks centuries down to fit into a narrative that occurs over the course of just a few hours. Reading Woolf through a climatic lens, as Taylor contends, "helps foreground the imaginative challenges of the Anthropocene in terms of the archives by which it becomes legible."[261] I build on this conjecture to argue that Woolf makes legible the Anthropocene by constructing a keen interplay between climate and weather. In *Orlando*, short-term weather events illuminate long-term climatic shifts; in *Between the Acts*, the opposite is true. Taken together, these novels evince a palimpsestic temporality that reconfigure our understanding of scale. Through the layering of small and large time scales, and of human characters and more-than-human forces, Woolf blurs the line between weather and climate, *kairos* and *chronos*.

II. Ecological Modernism

Only recently has modernist literature, often acknowledged for its scrutiny of such subjects as urban life and technological progress, begun to garner the type of ecocritical interest that it merits. Modernism and ecocriticism have long been said to intersect with "a certain polite reluctance,"[262] reflecting the tendency for nature to go "dangerously unacknowledged in the twentieth century, as predominant cultures delighted and indulged in modernity."[263] Perhaps we need to reconfigure our understanding of modernism to more fully accommodate the deeply – even intrinsically – ecological nature of many modernist texts. To read Virginia Woolf, for instance, is to become immersed in a world saturated with environmental detail across subjects and scales. In novels, essays, and short stories alike, she constructs her narrative space through

[261] Jesse Oak Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 194.
[262] Donn, "Beyond the Wasteland," 551.
[263] Bonnie Kime Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 2.

the careful application of modernist techniques, from perspectival shifts to temporal layering. Her rapidly oscillating focus, which moves between characters and across varied spans of time, enables her environmental vision of a complex, connected ecosystem.

In addition to doing away with the tendency to separate modernist scholarship from ecocriticism, I also intend for this chapter to critique the often stark division between Victorian literature and twentieth-century modernism. Disciplinary periodization, the change from one century to the next, and the turnover of British monarchs all contribute to this rigidity. Woolf herself, born in 1882 and coming of age as the century turned, sought to delineate between the Victorians and the Edwardians; she frequently makes this distinction apparent, as in "A Sketch of the Past," where she aligns her father's generation with the former and her own with the latter.[264] As Julia Briggs notes, however, even the division between centuries and British rulers did not prove a definitive marker of generational difference, for in 1922, Woolf referred to writers between 1895 and 1914 as "Edwardian."[265] Yet in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf famously offers 1910 as the crucial date of division.[266] Given the numerous inconsistencies in categorization, the boundaries between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries should be understood as quite porous.

Analyses of Woolf's anti-Victorian sentiments point to her novels and essays alike for their critiques of nineteenth-century morals and constraints.[267] Rather than rehashing these extant arguments, however, I want to reintroduce Woolf as a modernist whose work can be understood

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[264] Julia Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 127.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 4.
[267] Christina Alt, "Woolf and the Natural Sciences," in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jessica Schiff Berman (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 249–61; Christy L. Burns, "Re-Dressing Feminist Identities: Tensions between Essential and Constructed Selves in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 40, no. 3 (1994): 342–64; Helena Feder, *Ecocriticism and the Idea of Culture: Biology and the Bildungsroman* (Farnham, UK: Routledge, 2014); Louise Westling, "Virginia Woolf and the Flesh of the World," *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 855–75.

in continuity with the ecological fiction of Emily Brontë, Thomas Hardy, and Oscar Wilde. Each of these three novelists draws upon a specific tool set to depict a microcosmic setting, decenter the human, and circumscribe a naturalcultural atmosphere: ecogothic tactility, descriptive enclosure, and Decadent ecological assemblages. Woolf finds resonance with all three predecessors. Unpacking several hallmarks of modernist writing, Carol Cantrell encourages us to conduct more ecologically informed readings of Woolf's texts by turning to tenets including "the attack on dualistic thinking" and "the foregrounding of backgrounds."[268] Dualistic thinking receives a lashing in *Wuthering Heights*, with Brontë's eagerness to elide interior and exterior, human and environment, culture and nature. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, too, Wilde features a series of microcosmic spaces where the natural world bleeds into realms that center the aesthetic, the artificial. While Hardy also works against a binaristic understanding of characters and environment, his technique of inverting foreground and background proves crucial to unsettling this dualism. Given Woolf's attention to the natural world amidst the context of a spectacular exhibition in "Thunder at Wembley," I am compelled to note a lineage that builds on Hardy's attention to agential birds and sparring trees. Analyzing Hardy, Woolf herself writes, "He already proves himself a minute and skilled observer of Nature; the rain, he knows, falls differently as it falls upon roots or arable; he knows that the wind sounds differently as it passes through the branches of different trees. But he is aware in a larger sense of Nature as a force."[269] Despite their radically different styles, Hardy and Woolf each navigate between minute observations and this "larger sense" of the environmental, working towards a similar sense of an irrevocably entangled ecology within microcosmic settings.

[268] Cantrell, "The Locus of Compossibility," 26.
[269] Virginia Woolf, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy," in *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, 4 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, [1928] 1966), 257.

In a sense, the work of Brontë and Hardy (as well as Wilde, of course) could be described as displaying proto-modernist characteristics. Modernist literature, as Cantrell acknowledges, often strives "to explore alternative conceptions of perception, to dramatize the involvement of the perceiver within what is perceived."[270] While expanding how we understand and narrate perception is certainly a key facet of modernism, it sounds familiar, too: for instance, Eduardo Kohn's "ecology of selves," so imperative to thinking about *The Woodlanders*, comes to mind once again. The prominence of porosity likewise carries over from my analysis of Hardy. Bonnie Kime Scott links Woolf's status as a modernist with her ecological engagement by arguing that Woolf understood reality "through a porous relation of the human self to the material world."[271] "Thunder at Wembley" stands as an exemplar of textual porosity, with its emphasis on the weather's vicious invasion and destruction of human-built structures. This interpretation of its porosity also accords with a reading of experimental modernist aesthetics that "frequently blurred the boundaries between bodies and objects, bodies and selves, and human and nonhuman materiality more generally."[272] In several ways, then, modernism applies its own stylistic experimentation while carrying on the legacy of literary-ecological practices that Victorian novelists fine-tuned.

Woolf, as this project's modernist representative of choice, differs from nineteenth-century environmental novelists in her loosening of plot, which comes about through her play with temporality. As previously discussed in the chapter on Hardy, Gillian Beer differentiates between writing that attends to plot and writing that attends to description. While Hardy's most

[270] Cantrell, "The Locus of Compossibility," 26.
[271] Bonnie Kime Scott, "Ecocritical Woolf," in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jessica Schiff Berman (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 319.
[272] Molly Volanth Hall and Kara Watts, "Into the Ether: An Invitation to Bodily Reorientations," in *Affective Materialities: Reorienting the Body in Modernist Literature*, ed. Kara Watts, Molly Volanth Hall, and Robin Hackett (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019), 17.

ecological moments are those where he diverges from his human-centered plots to narrate the interactions between flora and fauna in the woodlands, Woolf does not offer so neat a plot structure in *Orlando* and *Between the Acts*. Her novels consist less of plot coupled with environmental themes, and more of an overall sense of human/nonhuman entanglement and networks. "Did the plot matter?" wonders Isabella in *Between the Acts* as she puzzles through the narrative structure (or lack thereof) in Miss La Trobe's pageant. "Don't bother about the plot: the plot's nothing," she concludes.[273] This moment is one of many where the novel tells us about itself, for Miss La Trobe's plot is as amorphous as Woolf's own. As befits an ecocritical context that centers nonhuman time scales, characters, and agencies, plot need not always be privileged to craft an ecology of selves.

In *Orlando* and *Between the Acts*, Woolf demonstrates an especially playful resistance to plot in her manipulation of time scales – an effective characteristic of environmental writing that seeks to animate the more-than-human world. While both novels feature structures that comprise an aggregate of (often nonlinear) impressions, and both experimentally juxtapose brief timescales with long ones, they present opposing approaches to temporality. *Orlando* stretches out the life of its eponymous character over the course of about four centuries, positioning a single human against a fantastical historical timeline. In contrast, *Between the Acts* unfolds in present time over the course of a single day; however, the central activity of the day itself is the performance of a pageant that rehearses centuries of English history. So, while Orlando (as an individual) experiences life from Elizabethan times through the early twentieth century, the actors and audience of *Between the Acts* travel theatrically through a nearly identical span of time over the course of mere hours. The compression and elision of time in these two novels puts

[273] Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1941] 1969), 90-91.

pressure on seemingly measurable units. What does it mean for a single human to age just decades while whirling through hundreds of years? And what does it mean for a few hours to contain centuries of history?

Attending to Woolf's modernist dances with time is integral to thinking in environmental terms. My own research has sought alternate ways of conceptualizing ecological threads in the novel, countering the scholarly tendency to scale up for the Anthropocene by turning to literary forms that aim to scale *down*. Along the way, navigating between scales has proved both confounding and crucial. An especially perturbing issue has concerned the difficulty of distinguishing between several key terms: climate, weather, and atmosphere. While all three possess distinct meteorological meanings, they tend to get equated in all sorts of contexts, from colloquial discussions of climate change to their metaphorical underpinnings. Climate exists at a sort of nexus between the other two; climate and weather often appear interchangeable in literal contexts, while climate and atmosphere are synonymous in more metaphorical discussions. Through readings of Woolf's novels, I want to think more concretely about their literal conflation: how, for instance, good or bad weather transforms into a mild or tempestuous climate. Woolf's navigation between large and small time scales can be useful for understanding why differentiating between weather and climate tends to prove so complicated. The key challenge seems to be separating them out when weather and climate (meteorology), or a day and a century (chronology), operate concurrently.

Famous for destabilizing time, modernism offers an evocative background against which to position this inquiry. Taylor has coined the apt term "climatic modernism" to speak to this phenomenon, explaining it as "a condition in which modernity refigures our relationship to deep time, making any moment at once immediate and radically dispersed on scales that exceed the

human memory."[274] Within the framework of climatic modernism, then, we must understand the small scale (the individual moment, the fragment of a thought) as, too, intertwined with the large scale (deep time, the ancestral past). By crossing temporal divides, weather and climate morph into one another. Though Taylor's notion of climatic modernism will help me parse and unsettle the contentious distinction between climate and weather, my argument turns away from his emphasis on that third term, atmosphere. As Taylor writes, his own analysis "explores Woolf's treatment of atmosphere in her functions as both a novelist and a critic against the backdrop of climatic time."[275] While Taylor points to an unsurprising concurrence between two large-scale modes of environmental thought – a simultaneous interest in climatic and atmospheric approaches – my own argument rests on unsettling the presumed divide between weather (as a momentary phenomenon) and climate (as a long-term, collective understanding of weather patterns).

If weather can be pinned down to a single moment and climate is the aggregate of weather events over time, what happens when Woolf, in *Between the Acts*, focuses on a single day's weather as the backdrop of a pageant covering centuries? When we look at the immediacy of the present moment against the centuries that exist within it, can we scale up a weather event to the climatic level? And for *Orlando*, what do we do with the long historical perspective that Woolf uses to frame individual moments? If the novel's vision of the nineteenth century opens with a dark storm cloud, do we parse that moment as one of inclement weather or inclement climate? When the Thames freezes over, heralding the advent of the Great Frost, why does an instance of bad weather immediately transform into the *long durée* of climate? In the following analysis of these two models, I want to push back against – and offer an alternative to – the rigid

[274] Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 189.
[275] Ibid, 188.

distinction between "climate" and "weather," analyzing how they meld in Woolf's inverted chronologies.

III. Climate as Weather in Orlando

Orlando's multi-century timespan renders it a productive example for uncovering the tension between scaled-down weather and scaled-up climate. Throughout the novel, climate recurs as a significant term for describing and comprehending temporal shifts. In fact, Taylor goes so far as to argue for *Orlando*'s status as a climate change novel, or at least as a generic precursor to one; with its frequent nods to anthropogenic climate change, Taylor contends, *Orlando* proves "a formative example of what has come to be called climate fiction (or 'cli-fi'), novels that seek to dramatize the effects of climate change."[276] *Orlando* finds Woolf drawing upon climate to do various types of narrative work, most saliently using it "to dramatize relationships between history, culture, and the individual."[277] In many ways, Woolf strategically conflates historical change with climate change to such an extent that their phenomenological aspects converge: in *Orlando*, "climate change is historical and history is climatological," writes Taylor.[278] Woolf explores the potential for climatic shifts to represent historical ones by narrating changes between eras and centuries in terms of their differing climates. While Woolf certainly entangles historical climate change and climatological history, the precise nature of the novel's temporal and climatic shifts suggests that Woolf is manipulating scale in yet another way. Here, my analysis builds off of Taylor's to argue that, though *Orlando*'s centuries sprawl on and on, Woolf repeatedly (and satirically) shows them to be clearly divided from one another in terms of

[276] Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 201.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid, 207.

climate. The suddenness with which this division occurs seems to blur the boundaries between climate and weather, for Woolf often pinpoints the precise moment – down to the strike of a clock – of climatic rupture. In other words, she draws upon climate in these pivotal moments to differentiate between one era and another, the close of one century and the dawning of the next, but her recourse to a brief timescale marks the climatic shift as, simultaneously, a momentary and smaller-scale change in the weather.

Orlando is punctuated by several instances where dramatic shifts occur in historical period, climate, and weather, or some confluence of all three. Perhaps the most famed of these is the advent of the Great Frost, which occurs shortly after we first meet Orlando as an adolescent boy in the Elizabethan age. Having found a suitable wife, Orlando seems to be maturing and progressing in his personal life. But just as his lawyers are drawing up his marriage contract, these plans disintegrate, for,

> with the suddenness and severity that then marked the English climate, came the Great Frost.
>
> The Great Frost was, historians tell us, the most severe that has ever visited these islands. Birds froze in mid-air and fell like stones to the ground. At Norwich a young countrywoman started to cross the road in her usual robust health and was seen by the onlookers to turn visibly to powder and be blown in a puff of dust over the roofs as the icy blast struck her at the street corner… The fields were full of shepherds, ploughmen, teams of horses, and little bird-scaring boys all struck stark in the act of the moment, one with his hand to his nose, another with the bottle to his lips, a third with a

> stone raised to throw at the ravens who sat, as if stuffed, upon the hedge within a yard of him.[279]

Most immediately striking is the sheer instantaneity with which the Great Frost attacks England. Throughout the passage, Woolf catalogues numerous examples of dramatic split-second transformations as the inclement weather hits. Completing simple tasks has instantly become impossible: flying birds freeze and plummet, a woman turns to frozen powder while crossing the street, little boys are petrified mid-action. Though this moment marks the start of a lasting climatic shift, the "suddenness" and "severity" of its onset pushes it into the realm of a singular weather event, such as a violent snowstorm or a plunge in temperature that accompanies a cold front. By depicting a climatic event in terms of a rapid change in weather, Woolf collapses the distinction between long-scale climate and short-scale weather, working across great swathes of time to read the entirety of the little ice age into its mere onset.

Woolf's imagining of the Great Frost culminates with the same sudden severity with which it began. Reeling from his failed romance with Sasha, Orlando makes his way to the banks of the Thames, only to encounter the little ice age's violent dissipation: "Where, for three months and more, there had been solid ice of such thickness that it seemed permanent as stone, and a whole gay city had been stood on its pavement, was now a race of turbulent yellow waters. The river had gained its freedom in the night" (61-62). This climatic reversion occurs almost as suddenly as the onset of the Great Frost; three months of the little ice age are undone in a few hours, adhering to the pace of a weather event rather than a climatic one. Though Orlando notes the sublime appearance of the iceberg-strewn river itself, he scales down his observations to describe those people newly unfrozen from the river: "But what was the most awful and

[279] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1928] 1973), 33-34.

inspiring of terror was the sight of the human creatures who had been trapped in the night and now paced their twisting and precarious islands in the utmost agony of spirit" (62). As with the initial freeze, Woolf illustrates its melting through individual stories, ricocheting from person to person, group to group. An extended observation registers the Great Frost's undiscriminating effects on individuals and groups who, in the midst of reading or singing or proclaiming, have gotten "swept out to sea" or "dashed against a tree" (62-63). And Orlando's final glimpse of the vigorous river reveals "strange sights," including "a cat suckling its young; a table laid sumptuously for a supper of twenty; a couple in bed; together with an extraordinary number of cooking utensils" (63). Through these fragmented tableaus, Woolf conveys the smaller-scale, individual dramas within the diluvian wreckage. The wreckage, as in the turbulent vision of Wembley, signals porosity; Briggs reads the river as "a figure for time itself, carrying away a bizarre medley of human and non-human life."[280] Such a medley attests to the anthropogenic state of this climatic occurrence from start to finish. The powerful and sudden descent of snow, ice, and frost stops birds and people alike in their tracks; disappearing into frozen powder, the woman crossing the street dissolves into the weather itself. As the river melts and surges, it unsettles an ecosystem that has bound together human and more-than-human lives for three months. Yet as soon as the melted ice releases its captives from the Thames' clutch, people, animals, and objects remain part of the river, drifting and drowning among the lingering icebergs.

Like Emily Brontë's collapsing of interior and exterior space, worlds of nature and worlds of culture, *Orlando*'s Great Frost finds Woolf eliding boundaries of both agential and temporal natures. But while Brontë fixates on smaller-scale weather events, Woolf renders

[280] Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf*, 134.

weather as a comprehensible microcosm of larger-scale climate change. Rather than purely decentering the human to narrate an entangled naturalcultural world, she attends to the human alongside the natural, the climatic, the tempestuous. Returning to the notion of anthropocentrism, Briggs offers a reading of the little ice age in human terms: its commencement sets "the stage for a drama of love as Orlando first catches sight of Sasha…skating towards him," while "[Sasha's] departure coincides with the flood."[281] In intertwining a period of climate change with a love story, Woolf scales down the Great Frost to an intelligible human level on yet another register, even offering Sasha herself as a human iteration of this climatic shift. If the Great Frost can be understood simultaneously as a foregrounded act of more-than-human force and as a backdrop that sways human lives, both individually and collectively, its scalar malleability also welcomes concurrent readings as both a climate change narrative and as a set of singular weather events that frame it.

With this elision and coupling of the human and the natural, and of weather and climate, *Orlando*'s Great Frost demonstrates the narrative potential inherent in categorizing an ecological event across scales. In an analysis of Woolf's oeuvre, Scott positions the scalar shifts in *Orlando* against those in her other novels: "Natural balance or equilibrium is regularly punctuated with disturbances on a local and minute scale (the tree that falls in *Jacob's Room*…) or a catastrophic one (the meteor that led to the extinction of dinosaurs). The little ice age represented in Woolf's *Orlando* falls somewhere in between."[282] While the little ice age inhabits a liminal space between local and large-scale catastrophic disturbance, Woolf also invites us to read it *as* both local and large-scale catastrophic disturbance. The impact of the Great Frost allows it to coexist across scalar realms, touching the minute and the individual if we scale down (e.g., to

[281] Ibid.
[282] Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave*, 194.

plummeting birds and cooking utensils) at the same time as it highlights the collective and catastrophic when we scale up (e.g., to its temporal breadth and the cumulative impact on those frozen in the Thames).

In *Orlando*, such precise scalar oscillation – and, in particular, the confluence of its micro- and macro-scales – might be usefully read alongside scholarly considerations of the individual versus the masses in the face of ecological disaster. Rob Nixon, taking up the subject of global warming, addresses the challenges of dealing with a concept that so greatly exceeds human scales of space and time as to be practically unnarratable. Nixon evaluates techniques for narrating acts of "slow violence," of which global warming serves as his supreme example, that may not have the "visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power" of an avalanche, a fire, or a tsunami.[283] Nixon establishes the stakes of this scalar shift by considering the relative narratabilities of different disasters. Troubling conventional understandings of environmental and other large-scale traumas, these acts of slow violence "overspill clear boundaries in time and space."[284] In so doing, they invite questions about the very suitability of fiction as a container for such concepts. As Ursula Heise notes, "climate change poses a challenge for narrative and lyrical forms that have conventionally focused above all on individuals, families, or nations, since it requires the articulation of connections between events at vastly different scales."[285] Even though *Orlando*'s little ice age pales in comparison with global warming, lasting but a few months, Woolf's narrative treatment of it suggests that fiction can imaginatively incorporate periods of climate change at numerous scales. Woolf confronts the challenge of narrating a long-term event

[283] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3.
[284] Ibid, 7.
[285] Ursula K Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 205.

by scaling climatic shifts down to moments of sudden, rapid instantaneity that frame the Great Frost's arrival and dissolution. These moments make sense of a large-scale climatic shift, and in their resemblance to singular weather events, they can be seen, comprehended, and traced on scaled-down, individual levels.

Woolf's strategy in relaying the Great Frost is not an anomaly; throughout *Orlando*, she relies upon similar ways of manipulating climatic conventions to distinguish between the characteristics of different temporalities. She establishes this approach from the outset, in contrasting the novel's sixteenth-century beginning with her own contemporary era: "The age was the Elizabethan; their morals were not ours; nor their poets; nor their climate; nor their vegetables even. Everything was different. The weather itself, the heat and cold of summer and winter, was, we may believe, of another temper altogether… The rain fell vehemently, or not at all. The sun blazed or there was darkness" (26-27). As with the parallel between the Great Frost's timespan and the framing of Orlando and Sasha's relationship, Woolf scales down several centuries of climatic shifts to intelligible levels over the course of the novel. Here, in her narrative of the Elizabethan era, she distills decades into reductive patterns: "The flower bloomed and faded. The sun rose and sank. The lover loved and went" (27). In contrast with the descriptions of Hardy (and, to some extent, of Wilde), Woolf's approach to time privileges a swift movement through entire days, seasons, and life cycles – a technique that relies not quite on plot itself, but that seems plot adjacent. The overarching disparity between climates across centuries, and particularly between the Elizabethan and the modern eras, also allows Woolf to make a broader claim about generational differences in morals, in poets, and even – blending the coy and the literal – in vegetables. While this passage contains something of the novel's frequent recourse to humor and absurdity, it also speaks to the all-encompassing impact of particular

climates – climates that then get scaled down even further to "The weather itself." As with her essay on Wembley, however, Woolf's discussion of weather remains exaggerated: heat and cold appear in a hyperbolic extreme, as do rain and sun. Although this is not the "sudden and severe" climatic shift of the Great Frost, Woolf compares centuries through their weather patterns to consider how the climate can be broken down into more sudden and severe actions.

Yet the description of the Elizabethan age, while showcasing Woolf's impulse to define an era by its climate, lacks the immediacy of what is perhaps the novel's most dramatic instance of climate-as-weather: the shift from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth. Unlike the more general contrast between the Elizabethan climate and that of Woolf's twentieth century, this moment of change can, as with the Great Frost, be pinned down to a single point in time. As she leans out of her window, Orlando, now a woman,

> … noticed a small cloud gathered behind the dome of St Paul's. As the stroke sounded, the cloud increased, and she saw it darken and spread with extraordinary speed. At the same time a light breeze rose and by the time the sixth stroke of midnight had struck the whole of the eastern sky was covered with an irregular moving darkness, though the sky to the west and north stayed clear as ever. Then the cloud spread north. Height upon height above the city was engulfed by it. Only Mayfair, with all its lights, burnt more brilliantly than ever by contrast. With the eighth stroke, some hurrying tatters of cloud sprawled over Piccadilly. They seemed to mass themselves and to advance with extraordinary rapidity towards the west end. As the ninth, tenth and eleventh strokes struck, a huge blackness sprawled over the whole of London. With the twelfth stroke of midnight, the darkness was complete. A turbulent welter of cloud covered the city. All

> was dark; all was doubt; all was confusion. The Eighteenth century was over; the Nineteenth century had begun. (225-226)

Amidst a play-by-play description of weather, the nineteenth enters with a sense of urgency. It takes mere seconds for a small cloud to darken, spread across, and engulf the entirety of London. With the fixation on cloud movement, this temporal shift also invites an ecological reading in the context of the Industrial Revolution; the "huge blackness" suggests – in literal terms – London's turn-of-the-century pollution, a harbinger of the smoggy climate to come in Wilde's *fin-de-siècle* world. Further, this passage speaks significantly to the figurative in terms of how, as with the paragraph on the Elizabethan climate, Woolf intertwines weather with mood: the cloud brings about literal darkness, but it also gives rise to a surge of doubt and confusion that permeates the new century's very mood.

Thus, in what seems like an instantaneous weather event, the eighteenth century gives way to the nineteenth at the end of one chapter. Woolf segues seamlessly into the next chapter by scaling right back up, linking the coming of the cloud directly to a transformation in the overall climate:

> This great cloud which hung, not only over London, but over the whole of the British Isles on the first day of the nineteenth century stayed, or rather, did not stay, for it was buffeted about constantly by blustering gales, long enough to have extraordinary consequences upon those who lived beneath its shadow. A change seemed to have come over the climate of England. Rain fell frequently, but only in fitful gusts, which were no sooner over than they began again. (227)

With this passage, Woolf navigates simultaneously between spatial and temporal variation. First, she scales up our sense of place by noting that the cloud covers not only London, but also the

British Isles as a whole. Then, she summarizes the series of weather events by making a general statement about climate. Together, the shadowy cloud, "blustering gales," and fitful rain offer evidence to support her conclusion that England's climate – not merely its weather – has changed. Though the cloud's advent can be narrated in terms of weather, refuting the resistance to narration that we see with the "slow violence" of climate change, it also marks an immediate climatic shift. The nineteenth century's sudden arrival also contains overt reverberations of John Ruskin's 1884 *Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* and thus invites critiques of the impending Victorian age itself. [286] Ruskin's lecture tends to be read as a prophecy of anthropogenic climate change, and as Taylor notes with a similarly presentist tilt, "Woolf's ironic attribution of cultural shifts to climate change now offers us a means to recognize that the inverse has in fact occurred: cultural shifts have changed the climate."[287] To some extent, the correlations between cultural and climatic shifts go in both directions. But the suggestion that climate impacts culture also suggests a compelling counterpoint to Brontë's reading of weather as an entity that crosses boundaries between humans/interiors and nature/exteriors. Weather events mark individual moments where the climate changes in *Orlando*, but it is the scaled-up version – the collectivity of weather that becomes climate itself – that occasions such a cultural shift.

Ultimately, Woolf's treatment of climate and/as weather thematizes the very temporal attenuation and collectivity that she unsettles in the character of Orlando. Orlando moves ceaselessly: through time, through space, through cultural values and lovers and genders. Simply put, Orlando consists of copious selves, "of which there may be more than two thousand" (314). With these frequent fluctuations, Orlando exists in the liminal space between consistency and

[286] Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 206.
[287] Ibid, 209.

pliability. Exemplifying this consistency, Orlando serves as the reader's main touchstone throughout a narrative that whirls us through four centuries of history. Nevertheless, as Helena Feder argues, Orlando's instability results in "making environment (human and nonhuman) central to the text."[288] Feder writes, "The fantastic movement of time and space around one equally fluid individual exposes the absurdity of rationalism and the assumption of human superiority at its core."[289] In other words, as with Hardy's agential woods, *Orlando* decenters the human by shifting scale. By moving from century to century, Orlando surpasses human scales, living for a superhuman period of time. But as Christy Burns[290] and Judith Paltin note, Orlando's identity is also re-shaped by external powers, becoming "wholly reconstituted by new social and historical factors as it travels through its periods."[291] Just as Woolf invites us to think weather and climate alongside each other, so does she encourage us to understand Orlando – the human – as a site where small-scale and large-scale forces converge. Where we might read setting as a site of enclosure in other novels, here, the figure of Orlando becomes somewhat of a microcosm, stressing that climate and culture exist as much in individual moments, and in the individual, as they do across centuries.

IV. Weather as Climate in Between the Acts

Between the Acts (1941), Woolf's posthumously published final novel, stands in many ways as the temporal inverse of *Orlando*. While *Orlando* shepherds its protagonist through multiple centuries, from the Shakespearean era to the twentieth century, *Between the Acts* spans a

[288] Feder, *Ecocriticism and the Idea of Culture*, 24.
[289] Ibid, 77.
[290] Burns, "Re-Dressing Feminist Identities," 342–64.
[291] Judith Paltin, "Frustrated Energies in Modernism's Female Arrangements," in *Affective Materialities: Reorienting the Body in Modernist Literature*, ed. Kara Watts, Molly Volanth Hall, and Robin Hackett (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019), 111.

single day of the present time: early in the morning, various family members awaken in their country house, Pointz Hall; they prepare to host an annual pageant as the day moves on; in the afternoon, the pageant occurs, interspersed with dramatic scenes occurring "between the acts"; and the actors and audience depart around nightfall. Despite its constricted frame, the novel constantly alludes to large swathes of time, creating a similar scalar disjunction to that which we see in *Orlando*. For one, the theme of the pageant itself is English history, as conveyed through a set of chronological acts that take on various dramatic styles; these acts share a time frame with *Orlando*, beginning with a Shakespearean scene, moving through a restoration drama and a Victorian spectacle, and culminating with an avant-garde take on the contemporary moment. Through the pageant itself, Woolf moves not only through a single day in June 1939, but also through entire centuries of English dramatic history. Though she covers essentially the same time span here as she does in *Orlando*, the centuries are heavily mediated through their dramatic portrayal, which can be synthesized into just a few hours.

Woolf further establishes temporal compression as pivotal to this novel by bringing in a cursory engagement with deep time. She bookends the narrative with scenes of Mrs. Lucy Swithin, a widow who lives with her brother in Pointz Hall, reading a nondescript book on England's past, vaguely titled "an Outline of History." Mrs. Swithin, upon being roused early by raucous birdsong on this summer morning,

> had stretched for her favourite reading – an Outline of History – and had spent the hours between three and five thinking of rhododendron forests in Piccadilly; when the entire continent, not then, she understood, divided by a channel, was all one; populated, she understood, by elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and,

she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanadon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom presumably, she thought, jerking the window open, we descend. (8-9)

This paragraph brings to mind Hardy's journals, with their transcriptions of passages that describe more-than-human agents in a primordial world. Mrs. Swithin reads with an especially palimpsestic (and whimsical) eye, layering forests over contemporary London and populating familiar streets with long-extinct creatures. As she throws open the window while continuing to think of the communion between mastodons and humans, she also – in a move reminiscent of Brontë's collapse of interior and exterior spaces – figuratively melds her participation in the present day with her imaginative understanding of deep time.

Woolf underscores the Outline as a framing device by having Mrs. Swithin resume reading after the pageant – and its swift journey through the centuries – has concluded. In the final scene, she has returned to her bedroom:

> It was time to read now, her Outline of History. But she had lost her place. She turned the pages looking at pictures – mammoths, mastodons, prehistoric birds. Then she found the page where she had stopped.
>
> The darkness increased. The breeze swept round the room. With a little shiver Mrs. Swithin drew her sequin shawl about her shoulders. She was too deep in the story to ask for the window to be shut. "England," she was reading, "was then a swamp. Thick forests covered the land." (217-218)

Woolf presents her characteristic modernist elision of time in closing the novel. By returning Mrs. Swithin to the precise position wherein she began the narrative – in the dark bedroom, by the open window, reading the Outline of History – Woolf suggests that it is as if no time has passed, although, of course, she has just concluded narrating both an entire day and a pageant

covering centuries of English history. Moreover, Woolf plays with continuity by exposing Mrs. Swithin's reading practice as nonlinear. Having lost her place, Mrs. Swithin flips back through what she has just read that morning, skimming and thus speeding up her intake of evolutionary history. Once she finds her place and settles back in with her Outline, her total engrossment renders her indifferent to the open window. Woolf lingers on the open window once more to juxtapose the breeze-filled room – characterized by the *weather* of the moment – with the climate of England's swampy past. With the coupling of these scenes, Woolf stretches and compresses and overlays time in discrete yet interconnected ways, framing the novel with an awareness of intricate temporal layers. This framework encourages us to think history through a microscale; it becomes something to be outlined, to be presented in amusing pageant form over the course of an afternoon.

The novel operates palimpsestically in its layering of time scales, particularly through figuring the present day of the novel itself against other mediums *within* the fictional narrative, such as the Outline of History and scenes from the pageant. In its setting, too, Cantrell suggests that *Between the Acts* depicts "a place composed of layers and layers of kinds of speech, only some of which are composed of human language. Human history, geological process, the ongoing present of life in the biosphere – all are articulate presences lightly felt as part of ordinary life."[292] To this catalogue of more-than-human languages, and in conjunction with the novel's interest in various literary forms, I want to introduce the novel's interpolation of the weather itself as a more-than-human form of communication that can be read. As with *Orlando*, *Between the Acts* both centers and conflates weather and climate. However, whereas *Orlando*'s long timespan scales climate shifts down to the level of weather, *Between the Acts* inverts this

[292] Cantrell, "The Locus of Compossibility," 34.

relationship by setting the weather events of a single day against the context of both English dramatic history and deep time. If climate becomes weather in *Orlando*, then weather, in essence, becomes climate in *Between the Acts*.

While Woolf bookends the novel with Mrs. Swithin's reading of an Outline of History, she incorporates recurring references to the weather to frame the day of the pageant itself. This narrative tactic, not unfamiliar for Woolf's readers, evokes *To the Lighthouse* (1927), which hinges on the question of whether the weather will permit the Ramsay family to undergo the title journey. *Between the Acts* finds Woolf exploring a similar question of contingency, though – unlike the Ramsays' postponed trip to the lighthouse – the show must go on. As the denizens of Pointz Hall begin their morning preparations for that afternoon's pageant, Isa Oliver imagines a conversation between her father-in-law, Bartholomew Oliver, and his sister, Mrs. Swithin, wherein they debate what the day will bring:

> "If it's fine," Mrs. Swithin continued, "they'll act on the terrace…"
>
> "And if it's wet," Bartholomew continued, "in the Barn."
>
> "And which will it be?" Mrs. Swithin continued. "Wet or fine?"
>
> Then, for the seventh time in succession, they both looked out of the window.
>
> Every summer, for seven summers now, Isa had heard the same words; about the hammer and the nails; the pageant and the weather. Every year they said, would it be wet or fine; and every year it was – one or the other…
>
> "The forecast," said Mr. Oliver, turning the pages till he found it, "says: Variable winds; fair average temperature; rain at times."
>
> He put down the paper, and they all looked at the sky to see whether the sky obeyed the meteorologist. (22-23)

This conversation is humorous in precisely how little it accomplishes – so little, in fact, that Isa does not even bother to listen to the dialogue, for she knows it by heart after seven years. Though weather appears to be the topic of discussion, Isa understands that this approach is reflective not of a singular weather event, but rather of a pattern of weather over the years. In this way, the day's weather takes on a more climatic tenor from the start. A consistency, a predictability, has accumulated. Woolf bolsters this aura of stasis through repetition: Mrs. Swithin and Bartholomew's lines are marked for how they "continue" on each other's phrases; their simultaneous turns to the window, though catalogued once a year, transpire "in succession"; and Isa achieves appropriate redundancy by noting the conversation's recurrence both "Every summer" and "Every year."

After this fruitless debate about a more-than-human force that they cannot possibly control, the siblings have reached no conclusion. Isa reflects, "Every year they said would it be wet or fine; and every year it was – one or the other." The weather report itself proves incredibly vague. "Variable winds; fair average temperature; rain at times" offers no determinate information. "Variable," "average," and "at times" all leave room for changeable weather without noting specific times or temperature ranges. They look at the sky for confirmation of this nebulous forecast, but it reveals nothing new. "Certainly the weather was variable," we learn as the sky shifts between sun and clouds, light and dark (23). In other words, the only certainty is the weather's *un*certainty. And so, following a series of inconclusive attempts to predict the weather, Mrs. Swithin concludes, "It's very unsettled. It'll rain, I'm afraid. We can only pray" (23). "And provide umbrellas," adds the ever-practical Bartholomew (23).

Aside from being a topic of debate, weather in *Between the Acts* is also a narrative tool that imbues more-than-human forces with agency. With prayer and umbrellas presented as the

only solutions to ward off a rain shower (indeed, "there would always have been the sky"), the pageant carries on as scheduled, despite the threat of "variable" weather. No one knows what the day will bring, though frequent conjectures litter the novel. Just before the prologue, for instance, the weather "was turning out, against all expectation, a very fine day" (76), while as the pageant's Victorian scene begins – echoing the tumultuous advent of the nineteenth century in *Orlando* – "Clouds were passing across the sky. The weather looked a little unsettled" (150). The storm holds off until the very final act, which Miss La Trobe, performing double duty as director and playwright, has envisioned as an experimental moment: "'After Vic.,' she had written, 'try ten mins. of present time'… She wanted to expose them, as it were, to douche them, with present-time reality. But something was going wrong with the experiment. 'Reality too strong,' she muttered" (179). As she stands in a panic before the audience, "the shower fell, sudden, profuse" (180). It arrives, in fact, with the same severity as the advent of the Great Frost: "No one had seen the cloud coming. There it was, black, swollen, on top of them. Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping" (180). In response, the audience begins to shield themselves: "Hands were raised. Here and there a parasol opened. The rain was sudden and universal. Then it stopped. From the grass rose a fresh earthy smell" (180). In its "sudden" start and stop, the shower further echoes *Orlando* in acknowledging the speed with which both weather and climate abruptly shift. Within the context of this lone June day, the rain shower marks a singular weather event, resolved nearly as soon as it began.

But Woolf imbues this rainfall with great significance, transmuting it from a microcosmic moment of inclement weather to a harbinger of impending global doom. This rainfall is more than a rainfall: as in the storm that punctuates "Thunder at Wembley," it reaches simultaneously beyond its temporal, spatial, and literal registers. As a whole, *Between the Acts* uneasily

anticipates the onset of World War II, which would officially begin just months after the pageant's performance; critics often interpret the title as a reference not only to the acts of the pageant, but of the liminal space between the two World Wars.[293] Though the novel's direct references to contemporary warfare are few and fleeting, Maud Ellmann writes that, in Woolf's depiction of air itself, war saturates the very atmosphere of Pointz Hall. Not only does the novel conclude "with a premonition of air war – twelve airplanes in battle formation interrupt the vicar's banalities," but characters' discussions of air, "along numerous allusions to emptiness within the published text, suggests that air war conquers everything but air itself. In fact, air wages a kind of war against the pageant, constantly interfering with the illusion that Miss La Trobe is trying to sustain."[294] Thus, the storm's arrival through the vehicle of air serves as not just an interruption, but an ominous and an overtly symbolic one, given its occurrence at precisely the moment when the present-day act of the pageant is due to start. In a pertinent reading of the weather in *To the Lighthouse*, Sadrin notes the long history of meteorology's ties to fate in the artistic tradition. For instance, she argues, "When political storms are brewing in Shakespeare's history plays, the thunder can often be heard as a background noise, and many are the tempests in literary texts that herald tragedy and warn us that time is out of joint."[295] Woolf's turn to the pageant form, then, traces a direct lineage from Shakespeare's theatrical tradition to her own play-within-a-novel. Moreover, the Shakespearean connection illustrates a further link between Woolf and Hardy. Of the latter's novels, Woolf writes, "To find anything approaching the violence and convolution of Hardy's plots one must go back to the Elizabethan drama."[296] By

[293] Joel Hawkes, "The Title of Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, no. 89 (Spring 2016): 26–27.
[294] Maud Ellmann, "Everyday War: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Virginia Woolf in World War II," *Novel* 50, no. 1 (2017): 92.
[295] Sadrin, "Time, Tense, Weather," 97.
[296] Woolf, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy," 265.

drawing on elements of Elizabethan drama in her own depiction of this interwar pageant, Woolf herself links past, present, and future through a legacy of violence – and violent weather.

The pageant's sudden shower represents a departure from Shakespeare's famed tempests in one overt way, however. In a move reminiscent of Wilde, Woolf's rainfall exacerbates the tension between reality and artifice: against the backdrop of a manufactured performance, this weather event is spontaneous and, for actors and audience alike, *real*. Woolf explores this theatrical tension throughout the novel by incessantly considering what it means to conflate set with setting. For instance, Miss La Trobe deems the grounds of Pointz Hall "'The very place for a pageant!' The lawn was flat as the floor of a theatre. The terrace, rising, made a natural stage. The trees barred the stage like pillars. And the human figure was seen to great advantage against a background of sky" (76). Woolf makes apparent the synchrony between the natural setting and a conventional theatre, nudging the landscape into the realm of the artificial: lawn morphs into floor, trees into pillars, sky into background. Numerous analogous moments ensue to circumscribe a markedly naturalcultural environment: the lows of cows punctuate the performance, but so do the "tick tick tick" of the gramophone and the "chuff chuff chuff" of a machine; during a scene meant to represent 1860, real swallows fly across a sheet roughly painted to look like a lake (164). Between the sounds and movements of animals and the unpredictable weather, the pageant points to the more-than-human as not only natural, but also machinic – comprising something like N. Katherine Hayles' theorization of a "*planetary cognitive ecology* that includes both human and technical actors."[297] Woolf's human-technical intersections hint at the effects of a modern, industrialized world on our conceptions of agency and nature. Here, she finds common ground with Wilde in illustrating that other potential of the

[297] N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 3-4.

more-than-human to signal not only environmental agency, but also the powerful potential of the theatre to highlight the mechanical and the artificial.

It is in the sudden downpour, however, that Woolf allows artifice to give way most wholly to reality. Miss La Trobe, while expressing deep concern over nature's intrusions during other acts, finds herself utterly powerless at the advent of the storm. Her reactions serve as a microcosm of the war itself, and the climate it will bring – climate here intended in its political and affective registers. Fittingly, Miss La Trobe's surrender of control accords with theorized links between weather and war, and Mary Favret's troubling of how "the metaphor of weather as war raised questions of human agency."[298] Though Favret's work attends in particular to the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century context, it proves quite relevant here in her notion that, prior to scientific knowledge of the correlations between weather and war, "the language of weather offered…a history of affect – even, perhaps, the climate we call modern wartime."[299] More complex than a symbol of impending disaster, then, the rainfall that strikes during the pageant anticipates a wartime climate. And given that Miss La Trobe sets aside ten minutes to represent the present, even this brief storm, when scaled up and slotted into the play's temporality, hints at a climatic shift that will last months, if not years.

The storm's ominous implications gain further traction in comparison to other sections of the pageant, which tend to register climate quite statically. In the Elizabethan age, an actress playing an old woman croaks out: "*'Twas a winter's night… / I mind me that, to whom all's one now, summer or winter. / You say the sun shines? I believe you, Sir. / 'Oh but it's winter, and the fog's abroad.' / All's one to Elsbeth, summer or winter…*" (89). Seasonal language features, too, in the refrain of those playing the villagers: "*Digging and delving* (they sang), *hedging and*

[298] Mary A. Favret, "War in the Air," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (October 2004): 552.
[299] Ibid, 533.

ditching, we pass…. Summer and winter, autumn and spring return… All passes but we, all changes…but we remain forever the same… (The breeze blew gaps between their words)" (139). Taken together, these and other moments collapse large scales of time, resisting the short-term tendency to catalogue changes in weather or season. All is the same, whether summer and winter; the seasons are little more than a climatic backdrop, indistinguishable and cyclical. Yet at the same time as the villagers, acting out the past, sing of seasons so constant that they can be understood in terms of climate, the present day's weather, in the form of wind, interrupts their words. In this latter passage, Woolf points to the abundant scalar and agential entanglements at work: between weather and climate, between past and present, between humans and natural forces. Cantrell reads *Between the Acts* as a novel "both open-ended and 'thick,' woven of multiple layers of life processes, including the human but not restricted to it."[300] "Thick" seems a fitting expression for such confluences of weather and climate that occur throughout Woolf's narrative. We see them blend in the play's history, in the novel's present, and in those many moments that refuse to differentiate between the "artificial" world of the pageant and the "real" world of the audience.

To stick with this "thickness," this layering, Woolf's treatment of weather and climate in *Between the Acts* is pivotal not only to how she unsettles timescales, but also to how she weaves from background to foreground by, for instance, narrating other-than-human agencies and moving nonchalantly between different elements of her scenes. In its title alone, the novel acknowledges that much of its narrative will take place between, in the liminal spaces. During the acts, Woolf's narrative oscillation calls into question which elements are foreground and which background. Do we attend to the "acts" themselves, to the concurrent murmurs of the

[300] Cantrell, "The Locus of Compossibility," 34.

audience, to the animals and machinery that serve as a bizarre soundtrack, to the present-day drama that comprises much of the narrative? If the plot is, indeed, nothing, then how do we understand the compression and organization of time in that Outline of History and in the pageant itself? I find it useful to again connect Woolf's interest in background with Hardy's. Cantrell describes the setting of *Between the Acts* as "not merely background but a complex presence – a 'place' in the phenomenological sense."[301] The traditional interchange between foreground and background can be understood in terms of climate and weather, where climate offers a sort of long-scale background interrupted by sudden weather events. Woolf's scalar manipulation of climate and weather – especially in how she conflates and inverts the two – urges us to do away with sharp delineations between foreground and background and, instead, to value her novel for its complex tangle of subjects, agents, and settings.

At the end of the section on *Orlando*, I suggested a reading of character as, itself, microcosmic. In ecocritical analyses of the novel, how are we to understand character in relationship to temporality? While many, if not all, of Woolf's novels complicate this dynamic, *Between the Acts* and *Orlando* stand out for how their characters navigate a world of temporal manipulation where opposing timescales coexist: Orlando lives through multiple centuries, but Woolf also measures time in hours, with the strike of a clock; the pageant, meanwhile, fills up a single afternoon, yet hastens through centuries over the course of several acts. In some ways, each text empowers the character, centering on Orlando's narrative from the Elizabethan era through the modern age and allowing the actors in the pageant to participate in theatrical time travel. In other ways, the novels also position character as subordinate to climate, weather, and additional large-scale entities and events, such as war: for instance, Miss La Trobe and her

[301] Ibid.

theatre troupe are helpless in the face of inclement weather that disrupts the pageant, as they will soon, once again, be helpless in the face of war, while Orlando, buoyed along for centuries, serves as a container for centuries of climatic shifts. Woolf's novels – and the microclimates that they comprise – offer formal techniques that, in scaling down the human emphasis, transcend limits of character, of environment, and of narrative itself.

Coda

Environmental Immersion

This project opened with the intent to counter the critical trend of scaling up for the Anthropocene, instead offering ecological readings of the novel that attend to the micro-scale. Decentering humans has been essential to this endeavor; each novel offers different ways to foreground the more-than-human world, or, at least, to complicate the common western presumption of human superiority. If, as Dipesh Chakrabarty claims, "To call human beings geological agents is to scale up our imagination of the human,"[302] then these chapters scale down the human by centering techniques through which other agencies flourish. Just as Woolf's scalar shifts reposition human-temporal relationships, so does thinking character alongside the key term of each prior chapter complicate questions of agency, of humanness. In the ecogothic *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë positions Heathcliff and Cathy as residents of a claustrophobic world who, despite their tactile correspondence with the tempestuous weather, remain wholly unable to harness its power to shape their own lives. For those human and more-than-human characters of Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*, enclosed in Little Hintock's ecosphere, agency emerges through descriptions that highlight non-human plots, as well as those that imbricate human with the regional atmosphere. In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Decadence assumes ecological significance within an assemblage of curated microclimates, valorizing the natural-cultural interchanges of the primarily urban world. And Virginia Woolf, in *Orlando* and *Between the Acts*, complicates temporal scales – particularly those that measure a human lifespan and those that span centuries of environmental events – by inverting the relationship between weather and climate.

[302] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 206.

In true ecocritical fashion, writing this dissertation has prompted me to draw connections across periods and centuries. However, not only does the framework demand that we think through and with literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but it also gestures to what lies beyond. While reflecting on Victorian and modernist pasts, we inevitably turn to considerations of the futures that await us – and, of course, the various modes of communication that will allow us to conceptualize, process, and envision those futures. The future can be a weighty topic; it is, after all, a strange thing to write a dissertation on environmental forms as our climate crisis accelerates. Even stranger, this past year, has been the precarity of writing about microcosms as a pandemic, racing from continent to continent, shrank the scale of life as we once knew it. As I drafted the final chapters, I began, increasingly, to feel like Lockwood: mired in an insular (and, at times, unrecognizable) world. My research and writing, which once allowed me to float between a rotating network of coffee shops and library carrels, became confined to a single room of a single house. My 13-inch laptop screen, subdivided into rectangles and grids, replaced the vitality afforded by face-to-face meetings, conferences, and classes. I found myself in the curious, and incredibly privileged, situation of thinking about scaled-down environments and immersive ecologies while inhabiting a microcosm of my own.

Traces of our current moment emerge, perhaps unexpectedly, throughout the entire project. While I wrote of Dorian Gray's efforts to shut out the smoggy London air from his home, we layered masks over our mouths and noses to prevent the spread of a deadly virus. And, again like Dorian, we sought solace in the natural world – on socially-distanced walks, around backyard firepits in the depths of winter – when our own claustrophobia became too much to bear. At times, the project provided some comfort; in theorizing the networked microcosms of Wilde's hothouses and conservatories, for instance, I was reminded of the constant threads

uniting the newly separate pieces of our lives. As a garden flourished behind my house, and as I saw a handful of day-old chicks through adolescence and into egg-laying maturity, I enjoyed, anew, a lived experience of naturalcultural entanglement.

These experiences also serve as reminders that nothing – and especially no single work of literature or art – can be as immersive as the environment itself. Yet I do believe, quite strongly, in the power of narrative to render visible our environmental crisis. A novel, alone, cannot portray our crises and our environmental conditions. Representation remains imperfect (though perhaps more comprehensive) when we thread together a network of novels; projects like this are merely the tip of the iceberg. And while I believe that the novel's ecological forms allow for intricate and essential ways of writing the more-than-human, additional mediums engage variously with that ecology of selves to which we all belong. Yes, we turn to the novel, but we turn not *only* to the novel. Poetry, theatre, film, visual art, podcasts, music, games – these can all convey, both in human terms and through strategies that valorize the more-than-human, what it is like to live through disaster and to think on a more-than-human scale. The practice of close reading reminds us to scale down at the same time as we scale upward. If ecological-artistic immersion is a process of accumulation, of reading and viewing and listening abundantly, it also offers us the chance to linger in the details. Alongside vast, capacious scales of thought and time and space, the small scale persists.

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