Perpetual Nature: Continuities between Romantic and Modernist Nature Poetry

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Arts in English* at the North-West University

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Examination: March 2020

Student number: 24887986

Abstract

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School: North West University (NWU), School of Languages

Key words:
Ecocriticism; Nature; Poetry; Modernism; Romanticism; New Materialism; William Wordsworth; Percy Bysshe Shelley; Thomas Stearns Eliot; Edward Estlin Cummings

The premise of this dissertation is that there are Romantic continuities present in the Modernist nature poetry and -imagery of T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings, which is especially apparent when compared to the nature poetry of William Wordsworth and Percy Shelley. Throughout this dissertation I sought to highlight the intriguing, albeit neglected, continuities that exist between Romantic and Modernist poetry in terms of the poetry's approach to, and relationship with, the natural world. This was done with a view to contradicting modern criticism's idea that Modernist nature poetry *always* seems to illustrate the disconnection between humans and the natural world, and that any meaning found in nature is simply a delusion. The goals of this dissertation involved: 1) analysing the ways in which the selected Romantic and Modernist poets portray nature, and the relationship between human beings and nature, in their poetry; 2) examining continuities that exist between the portrayal of nature in the selected Romantic and Modernist poets' poetry; 3) considering an historical explanation as to why such unexpected continuities exist between the selected Romantic and Modernist portrayals of nature.

Firstly, the research illustrated the possibility that similarities in historic circumstances of the Romantic and Modernist periods led to and perpetuated certain ideas regarding nature and the natural world which is expressed in the poetry of the selected poets. These repeating historical factors (present in both the Romantic and Modernist paradigms) includes the following: 1) mass-industrialization and urbanization, 2) the subversion of authoritative/political systems, 3) disillusionment caused by violence and warfare, 4) scientific findings that changed people's understanding of the universe, 5) a general decline in spirituality/religious belief, and finally 6) the sense of a loss of meaning in society due to the aforementioned circumstances. In short, the collapse of culture and society led the respective Romantic and Modernist poets included in this study back to nature, in search of meaningful experiences.

Next, an analysis of the nature poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot and Cummings demonstrated that there are indeed prominent continuities in their use of natural imagery. These continuities include: 1) a sense of disconnection with nature due to urban sprawl, as well as a desire or longing to be reconnected with it. 2) The idea that, in a world of cities and machines, humans have lost the ability to appreciate the splendour if natural surroundings, which has led to disenchantment with the world. 3) Natural phenomena, especially images of the river, are reminders of a universal connectedness, which flows through both nature and the human mind and, with an invisible tie, binds all things. 4) Nature is the dwelling of supernatural or more-than-human elements, making it a sacred place, permeated by some "Power" – whether it is many gods, God, or an entirely different, unnamed deity. 5) It is mostly in, or through, nature where the speakers of the different poems become aware of the existence of the spiritual realm or the presence of a higher power. It seems that nature influences the mind in such a way (what Wordsworth calls a "blessed mood") that one can gain an awareness of a world of meaning beyond everyday perception. 6) Nature itself has a power – it is a teacher of virtues, such as love and kindness, but most of all nature teaches us humility, and the wisdom of humility is endless (as Eliot states). It is by means of teaching humans humility that nature allows one to transcend oneself and one's usual boundaries, and find a universal meaning or connectedness by seeing into the secret life of things. 7) In the nature poetry of the poets included in this study, nature is a sort of final refuge, where meaning and even spiritual connectedness remain possible, after such things had become lost in a chaotic society.

This research challenges the statements of Robert Langbaum (*The Modern Spirit*, 1970) who put forward the idea that Modernist nature poetry necessarily depicts nature as a meaningless space, totally detached from the life of humans. It also supports the findings of more recent critics, such as Jonathan Bate who argues for the ecocritical value of Romantic poetry, as well as Modernist critics such as Etienne Terblanche and Elizabeth Black who put forward the psychological and even religious importance of nature in Modernist poetry.

Acknowledgements

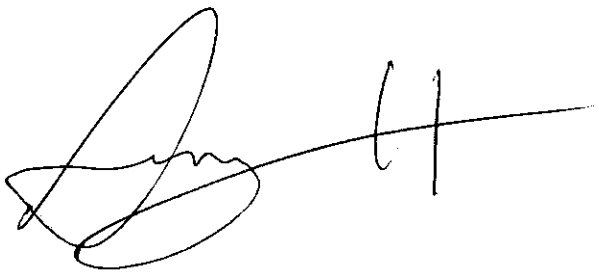
I would like to start by thanking God for this path on which He has led me, and for His grace which has allowed me to complete this dissertation.

Next, I express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors and mentors, Professors Nic Meihuizen and Etienne Terblanche. Our Honours classes filled with your passion for poetry sparked my interest in this particular study. Prof Terblanche, thank you for your excellent observations and suggestions at the onset of this study. Prof Meihuizen, thank you for your ongoing support throughout this endeavour. It has truly been an honour to work with both of you.

Finally, thank you to my friends and loved ones for their support – in particular my parents, Ronell and Trevor, and my partner, Reino. I gained so much from your support, and you have been an invaluable part of this journey.

Solemn Declaration

I, **Ashley Hambly (24887987)**, herewith declare that the dissertation entitled, ***Perpetual Nature: Continuities between Romantic and Modernist Nature Poetry***, which I hereby submit to the North West University is in compliance with the requirements set for the degree: **Master of Arts in English**. I declare that the content of this dissertation is my own work and ideas, and it has not been submitted to this or any other university.



Student Signature

March 2020

Table of Content

Chapter 1: Introduction

"What has happened to nature poetry?" This is the question posed by Robert Langbaum in his seminal critical essay, "The New Nature Poetry" (first published in 1959). When this article was re-published in *The Modern Spirit* (1970) Langbaum added that there seems to be a reluctance to name any good poet a nature poet, because "nature poetry can no longer have serious relevance" (101)[1]. The reluctance to make use of the term "nature poet" did not mean that poetry about nature ceased to exist in the twentieth century. Langbaum goes on to argue that, in fact, modern nature poetry hasn't become extinct, but that it "has enjoyed a revival", and he offers examples such as Wallace Stevens' poem, "The Snow Man" which contrasts the anthropomorphic experience of a winter landscape with that of "the mindless mind of a snow man" (102), and "A Grave" by Marianne Moore in which she demonstrates "the unmeaning nullity of the sea" (103). According to Langbaum (104-105) this "new nature poetry" affirms the "difference between man and nature" and avoids what John Ruskin called "the pathetic fallacy" (projecting human feelings onto natural objects). The modern nature poetry that Langbaum speaks of differs from Romantic nature poetry in that it avoids such projection (104), whilst accepting, and even respecting, the fact that nature is intrinsically other. Langbaum continues that the acceptance of nature being "unalterably alien" carries "empathy several steps farther than did the nineteenth century poets" (104).

Though Langbaum's essay is more than five decades old, it remains a seminal text that more recent ecocritics still refer to as a point of reference for Modernist nature poetry. One such critic is Michael Webster (2000) who writes that, with the aforementioned statements, Langbaum means that Modernist empathy with nature becomes greater, because the "gap [between humans and nature] requires the poet and reader to work harder to empathize with creatures seemingly alien to us" (109). Webster's observation is debatable, and I believe that the modern empathy with nature lies in acceptance of, and appreciation for, the natural realm, rather than intellectual strain to reach some form of sympathy with the otherness of nature. Whatever the case may be, I cannot help but agree with Webster's complaint that Langbaum completely ignored the nature poetry of E.E. Cummings in his discussion of Modernist nature poetry (110). In spite of his 43 nature poems and 46 poems about

[1] I will make use of the MLA (Modern Language Association) referencing style throughout this dissertation, since it is internationally recognised and used by a number of literature journals. The MLA style also inhibits the flow of reading far less than alternative referencing styles.

animals Webster suggests that Cummings is often left out of Modernist discussions because he is too idiosyncratic, too a-political, and too romantic, despite the fact that his "manner of creating visual and syntactic movement" is undoubtedly modern and even "avant-garde" (110-111).

One may well understand why Cummings' poetry may be labelled as "too romantic" when considering the following extract from one of his sonnets:

> i thank You God for most this amazing
> day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
> and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
> which is natural which is infinite which is yes (*Complete Poems* 663)

This poem takes a theistic/religious view of nature. The green trees are leaping spirits and the blue sky is a dream. Rather than being an unthinking and unmeaning other, nature takes on a spiritual dimension, and becomes an affirmation of the existence of a power that is greater-than-human. Nature has an intense emotional, mental, and psychological effect on the speaker, and in the final lines of the poem he writes: "(now the ears of my ears awake and / now the eyes of my eyes are opened)". The beauty of nature somehow awakens the speaker on a deeper level (be it emotional or spiritual), and there seems to be an intense connection with the natural world.

One cannot deny that such an emotional reaction to nature is Romantic. Among other considerations, this sonnet is reminiscent of what Jonathan Bate calls "The Romantic Ecology", or a deep reverence for nature that recognises humans' physical and psychological connection to, and dependence upon, "the green earth" (40). Given Langbaum's statements about the portrayal of nature as "unalterably alien" and his notion of an "unmeaning nullity" in modern poetry, it is surprising to find a poem such as this one by Cummings (who is undoubtedly a modern poet). This leads to an intriguing question – why does such a Romantic view of nature exist in a modern poem, and are there other Modernist poems with similar inclinations?

To answer this question, one must consider how this poem, and others like it, may be connected to Romanticism, or rather the nature poetry of the English/British Romantic poets. This is a necessary comparison, since, as T.S. Eliot states in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", the historical sense is indispensable and "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (37). Eliot continues that no poet can be valued alone, and that "you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead" (37). In light of Eliot's statement, it would be remiss not to compare Modernist nature poetry that has Romantic inclinations to original Romantic nature poetry, in order to uncover possible continuities and discontinuities that exist in the poetry of these epochs.

The concern with nature, though it has evolved throughout the last few centuries, certainly isn't new. One could posit that an artistic, poetic and philosophical interest in the relationship between humans

and nature first thrived in the eighteenth century, at the inception of what we now know as Romanticism. The initial Romantic interest in nature, according to Johnathan Bate (7), was fuelled by the "return to nature" movement associated with the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. I would argue that, in all likelihood, when he suggested a return to nature, Rousseau was referring to human nature, and his initial goal was to urge his readers to acknowledge their natural instincts, emotions and intuition. However, this return to nature took a rather literal turn, and poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge, for example, often went on excursions in the countryside.

Arguably, the most celebrated nature-poetry of the eighteenth century is that of William Wordsworth. The well-known writer and critic of the Victorian era, John Ruskin, wrote that the poetry of Wordsworth can be used as a textbook on how to "walk with nature", and the twentieth century critic, Johnathan Bate, believes that lessons of coexistence with nature in Wordsworth's poetry remain relevant even in our own time (8). A poem in which this co-existence with nature is particularly evident is in Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey". In a much-discussed passage he writes:

> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought
> And rolls through all things. (*The Works of Wordsworth*, lines 121-131)

The speaker in the poem is aware of a presence that exists both in nature and in the human mind, connecting human beings and the natural world. In these lines Wordsworth expresses the idea that nature can influence the human mind in such a way that it becomes aware of a universal presence or connection. This idea that a deity may exist in, and be observed through nature strongly resonates with Cummings' sonnet mentioned earlier, and may serve to illustrate a connection between Romantic and Modernist nature poetry.

Wordsworth, however, is not the only Romantic poet with an awareness of a spiritual presence in nature. According to Lord Byron, his good friend, Percy Bysshe Shelley, read Wordsworth to the point of nausea (Wu 1046). Duncan Wu reckons that Shelley was immensely attracted to the pantheistic life-force in Wordsworth's poetry, such as "Tintern Abbey", and that Shelley's own poetry seems to illustrate the existence of "a Power similar to Wordsworth's ideas" (1046). This statement

may strike one as odd, considering that Shelley is better known for his political poetry, such as *The Mask of Anarchy* and *Queen Mab*, and declared himself to be an atheist. However James Thrower (as quoted by Robert Ryan 193) observed that, in terms of Romantic politics and religious reformation, "[t]he majority of thinkers whom later writers designated *atheoi* are found upon closer inspection to deny only the notion of the gods as expressed in popular belief, […] as a prelude to putting forward a more sophisticated and developed conception of the divine".

Robert Ryan argues that Shelley is the author of "one of the great religious poems of our literature", namely "Mont Blanc" (193). In this poem, the speaker observes the ravine in which the river Arve flows, and states that "The everlasting universe of things / Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves". Much like Wordsworth, Shelley seems to be aware of a force that exists both in the human mind and in natural surroundings, and connects the two. In the next stanza, Shelley (or the speaker in the poem) starts to sense that some higher power resides in the river and mountain peaks:

> Thus thou, Ravine of Arve—dark, deep Ravine—
> Thou many-colour'd, many-voiced vale,
> Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail
> Fast cloud-shadows and sunbeams: awful scene,
> Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
> From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne (*Oxford Anthology* lines 12-17)

This description of "Power" which has its throne in the snow-covered mountains, and which rolls in the river, establishes the poet's deism, rather than his atheism. In light of this poem, I would argue that Shelley also suggests that a higher being or presence resides in nature, and that this same presence exists in the human psyche. Nature in "Mont Blanc" is a sacred space where one may observe some sort of "higher being" – an observation which serves as a principal reason for including Shelley in the present dissertation.

A similar spiritual view of nature is also present in Cummings' poetry, who, much like Shelley and Wordsworth, makes the reader of "i thank You God for most this amazing / day" aware of a more-than-human presence which exists in nature. If Langbaum's observations regarding the alienation between humans and nature in Modern poetry were completely correct, then such Romantic inclinations should no longer exist in Modernist nature poetry. Yet again, the question arises of whether there are other modern poems, or even poets, with similar Romantic dispositions.

For a possible answer to this question, one may refer to James Longenbach (100), a prominent Modernist scholar, who in 1999 made the surprising statement that "T.S. Eliot's Modernism makes far more sense when seen as a continuum, beginning with *The Lyrical Ballads* (Wordsworth and Coleridge's famous collaboration published in 1798). Longenbach postulates that *The Waste Land* may be understood as a sequence of attempts to unify the world through the unification of individuals

(120) – something that Wordsworth also attempted in the poetic endeavours of *The Lyrical Ballads*. However, Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* often places its sense of "unity" or connection in nature, and the relationship between nature and the individual. In light of Longenbach's statements, one cannot help but wonder if perhaps a similar sense of connectedness with nature might also be present in Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

As a whole*, The Waste Land* may perhaps be thought of as a collection of broken (often disturbing) scenes from an urban, artificial, and mechanized society. Yet, upon closer inspection, one finds noteworthy references to nature or natural phenomena. The most significant reference to nature in *The Waste Land* occurs in the final section of the poem, "What the Thunder Said". The speaker finds himself isolated in a mountainous, desert-like area where there is no water. In this seemingly meaningless expanse of rock and sand there is no comfort, and yet it is in this inhospitable landscape that the speaker becomes aware of a strange presence following him and an unnamed companion:

> Who is the third who always walks beside you?
> When I count, there are only you and I together
> But when I look ahead up the white road
> There is always another one walking beside you (lines 359-362)

Michael North's accompanying footnote (17) mentions that this passage bears a strong resemblance to the story told in Luke 24 of two men on the road to Emmaus who did not recognise the risen Christ. I would add that the dry, desolate landscape is also reminiscent of Christ's escape to the desert where he could fast and pray. Etienne Terblanche (2016) writes that Eliot's use of desertscapes has not received the attention it deserves, since, in his poetry, the desert is a "disturbing icon" of isolation and dislocation (56). He goes on to argue that Eliot's recurring desert-image is a sort of premonition of things to come, such as desertification, deforestation and global warming (57-58). As eccentric as this argument might seem, Terblanche writes that Eliot himself acknowledged "nature's spirit: its meaningful energy, which moves one", and that the earth might, in fact, have enormous freedom to influence almost everything, "including poetic thought" (57).

This agency that the earth, or nature, enjoys (according to Terblanche) is most apparent in the desert landscape of *The Waste Land* in which the Thunder can speak and be heard. In ancient Sanskrit, the Thunder says – "DA / Datta", "DA / Dayadhvam", and "DA / Damyata". According to North (18), the section where the Thunder speaks is based on a section of the *Brihadãranyaka Upanishad* where God presents three disciplines, namely *Damyata, Datta*, and *Dayadhvam,* which respectively mean control, give, and compassion. In the natural, albeit barren, desert surroundings the Thunder, or an ancient god, can speak and may finally be heard by people who are otherwise disconnected from meaningful experiences.

The idea of a desert being a sacred landscape is centuries old (consider religious texts such as the Bible), and according to De Vries, in his *Dictionary of Symbols*, the desert has long been associated with "a place of divine revelation" and the presence of supernatural beings (133). Despite seeming inhospitable, the desert in *The Waste Land*, which is devoid of society, culture and all things man-made, is a type of final refuge where divinity still exists and the existence of something greater-than-human can still be observed. Perhaps then, for Eliot, nature, even in its most barren form, is the realm of the spiritual and/or the divine.

The presence of higher powers in the desert in Eliot's poem could be compared to the "Power" that Shelley depicts in "Mont Blanc", since both of these poets observe the presence of a greater being in an inhospitable and frightening landscape. With this in mind, one is suddenly confronted with the Romantic Sublime in modern poetry. The philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote extensively on the Sublime, which traditionally refers to objects inspiring awe, because of the magnitude of their size, depth, or force, such as the ocean or a storm, or that transcends human understanding, such as deities and the like (Burnham, "Immanuel Kant: Aesthetics"). The vastness of mountainous and desert landscapes inspire both awe and fear, and within this sublime experience the poets or speakers of "Mont Blanc" and *The Waste Land* become keenly aware of the presence of a power which is in both cases impressive and yet disturbing. It is intriguing to find an example of the Sublime in a modern poem, and the presence of such a particularly Romantic element in a Modernist poet's work indicates that there might well be other Romantic tendencies in Eliot's nature poetry as well.

In light of these examples, I would argue that there are certain Romantic continuities present in the poems of Eliot and Cummings, when compared to the poems of Wordsworth and Shelley. As seen in the examples above, these Romantic and Modernist poets have a shared sense of nature being a spiritual, perhaps even divine, space. Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot and Cummings all write about a higher being or deity in nature, as well as nature being a space in which spiritual experience is possible. In particular, the two Modernist nature poems I have referred to in the discussion above (though many more examples might be found throughout Eliot and Cummings' oeuvres) contradict modern criticism's idea that Modernist nature poetry *always* seems to illustrate the disconnection between humans and the natural world, and that any meaning found in nature is simply a delusion.

This research will highlight intriguing, albeit neglected, continuities which exist between Romantic and Modernist poetry in terms of the poetry's approach to, and relationship with, the natural world. For this purpose, the nature poetry and/or natural imagery of the Modernist poets, T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings, will be compared to that of their Romantic predecessors, William Wordsworth and Percy Shelley. Such a nature-oriented comparison will, quite obviously, scrutinize the poems through an ecocritical lens. Ecocriticism, according to Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), is the study "of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (122). Glotfelty believes that such studies have

become essential in an "age of environmental limits" (123), and that it is the duty of literary criticism, at the very least, to examine the relationship between signs and the earth.

It almost goes without saying that the continuities between Romantic and Modernist poetry that this research aims to emphasize have a strong historical dimension, since continuities and discontinuities are quite literally temporal by nature. Thus, to support the premise that continuities exist between Modern and Romantic nature poetry, I will focus on the historical aspects of the Romantic and Modernist eras that might have led the poets to turn to nature in their respective times. I will especially emphasize similarities in socio-political circumstances of these respective centuries, which could have influenced continuities in the poetry. In short, I wish to explore the socio-historical circumstances that influenced the turn to nature during these respective epochs. This means that a historical and ecocritical approach will be combined to emphasize the nature-oriented continuities between Romantic and Modern poetry.

During the course of this study, I will focus on the following research questions: 1) How do William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings portray nature, especially the relationship between human beings and nature, in their respective poetic projects? 2) What continuities exist between the portrayal of nature in the selected poets' Romantic and Modernist poetry? 3) Why are such continuities present in poetry where existing criticism would lead one to believe they should not exist?

With the above-mentioned research questions in mind, the goals of this dissertation will include: 1) Analysing the way(s) in which the selected Romantic and Modernist poets portray nature, and the relationship between human beings and nature, in their poetry. 2) Examining continuities that exist between the portrayal of nature in the selected Romantic and Modernist poets' poetry. 3) Considering an historical explanation as to why such unexpected continuities exist between the selected Romantic and Modernist portrayals of nature.

This research aims to prove that continuities exist in the nature poetry of Romantic and Modernist poets, by comparing and contrasting the poetic works of William Wordsworth, P.B. Shelley, T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings. This dissertation will posit that there are strong similarities, even a "golden-thread" which exists throughout the nature poetry of the above-mentioned poets. This golden-thread is that nature is a meaningful and/or spiritual space with an inherent power or potential which can influence the poet's mind to the point that he/she might gain a greater understanding of things beyond their usual grasp, such as a spiritual or divine understanding and an insight into their own place in time and space.

This thread which runs through the poetry of the above-mentioned poets, leads to the question of *why* such continuities exist in the nature poetry of these Romantic and Modernist poets. I will illustrate that the existence of continuities in the poetry point to continuities in the general historical circumstances

in which the respective poems were created. The French Revolution of the eighteenth century, followed by the reign of Napoleon Buonaparte and the ongoing British-French war was a tumultuous and violent time in European history. Culture and society were changing rapidly, and the crumbling of old societal structures could have driven Romantic poets to nature in a search for new meaning and stability. The Modernists quite possibly turned to nature for the same reason. The early twentieth century saw not one, but two devastating World Wars. These were dark times in which it seemed as though European society, and most of the world for that matter, would come to an end. As the cracks in culture and social order started to show, nature became a refuge and a space in which meaning and spiritual experience was somehow still possible. Thus, I will aim to illustrate that during historical periods of increased violence and chaos, nature becomes a space in which meaning could still exist, and greater-than-human experience is possible, in spite of the failures of human culture and society.

In order to uncover *why* poets turned to nature, and which continuities are present in Romantic and Modernist nature poetry, I will make use of an inferential hermeneutic approach. According to the *Lexicon van Literaire Termen* (176) hermeneutic studies, or studies aiming to explain the meaning of a text, date back to the Middle-Ages when the approach was used to analyse religious texts. This concept became more complex as hermeneutics progressed, which led to the development of the romantic-hermeneutic school by such scholars as Friedrich Schleiermacher. The most important development was that of the "*dubbele cirkel*" or double circle of interpretation, which included the psychological circle (subjective aspect) and the historical/grammatical circle (objective aspect) (176). The goal of the subjective circle is to understand the author's own ideas and motivations for creating the text, while the objective circle focusses on the social, political and historical circumstances that influenced the text (176).

During the course of this study, I will consider both the objective and subjective aspects of the nature poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot, and Cummings. The social and historical circumstances during which the poetry was created could shed light on the reason(s) why these poets turned to nature, while the subjective aspect, or a consideration/comparison of how these poets portray nature in their respective poems, will aid in uncovering some of the continuities that exist between Romantic and modern nature poetry.

Since this study will be considering the relationship between literature and the natural environment, it almost goes without saying that I will follow the hermeneutic method from an ecocritical point of view – focussing on the portrayal of nature and/or the use of natural imagery in selected poems by the above-mentioned poets. Due to the ecocritical nature of this particular study, I will only focus on poems in which nature is the central theme, or poems which contain significant references to nature. I shall incorporate as many poems by each poet as possible, but special attention will be given to such poems as Wordsworth's "Lines Written above Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude*, Shelley's "Mont

Blanc", "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Ode to the West Wind", Eliot's renowned poems *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, and finally I will focus on Cummings' Hummingbird poem, moon poems, and his much-anthologized Spring poems.

In this chapter the background of this study, along with the problem statement, research aims and the central theoretical statement has been introduced. The second chapter is a brief discussion of what is meant by nature and nature poetry, as well as the most important aspects of ecocriticism in relation to this particular study. Chapter 3 focusses on the relevant socio-historical circumstances that most likely influenced the general artistic/poetic/philosophical turn to nature during both the Romantic and Modernist eras. Chapter 4 contains a close-reading and analysis of several nature poems by the selected poets, with a view to comparing and contrasting the Romantic and Modernist poems in order to emphasize the continuities that exist in the nature poetry of the respective poets. The final chapter is a conclusion to the study, in which I consider the findings of the previous chapters, along with suggestions for possible further studies.

Chapter 2: The Roots and Branches of Ecocriticism

A brief overview of Ecocriticism, and the different positions within ecocritical studies

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> "To touch the course skin of a tree is thus, at the same time, to be touched by the tree."
> – Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961)

In his book, simply titled, *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard (2012, 1) states that there is a general agreement that what the reader might know as "modern environmentalism" began with Rachel Carson's "A Fable for Tomorrow" from her book, *Silent Spring* (1962), in which a town is described in the pastoral tradition of harmony with nature. However, this pastoral vision is soon torn apart by a curse that befalls the town, killing most of the plants and livestock (Garrard 1). This "curse of death", the reader finds, is actually the fault of the humans living in the town, since they became greedy, and are eventually "cursed" for exploiting nature. According to Garrard, this so-called fable becomes a metaphor for pollution and degradation due to anthropogenic activity (1).

Yet, considerations regarding the natural world (and the relationships that humans have with nature) may be traced back millennia, not just to the 60s. Garrard asserts this fact and says that ways of imagining the place of humans in nature may be traced back to the Biblical books of Genesis and Revelations (2). However, I believe that the human awareness of our relationship with nature could, and should, actually be traced back to the Stone Age. Around 17,000 years ago, prehistoric painters covered the walls of caves and caverns, known today as Lascaux, Altamira, and Pech-Merle, with the figures of ancient animals, such as wild bovine and horses (Kleiner 21). According to Kleiner (2013, 21) these animals didn't form part of these ancient people's diet, and many theories exist as to why these paintings were created – the most popular being that these animals somehow formed a part of their mythology (Kleiner 21). Whatever the case may be, forces of nature or nature-gods are part of many ancient religions, including that of the Egyptian civilization, and of course the beliefs and cultures of Native-American societies. One could say that since a time before recorded time, humans have been thinking about nature and their relationship with it. Ecocriticism, therefore, should be described as studies concerned with the depictions of nature in culture, art, and literature and not the general consideration of nature itself.

In the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryll Glotfelty writes that the beginnings of environmental literary studies can be traced back to the 1980's, but that that the study field only really took off in the late 90's (xvii). *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* was founded in 1989 by Alicia Nitecki, and the purpose of this new newsletter was to publish short essays, book-reviews, notes and information pertaining to the study of nature and the environment (Glotfelty xvii). In 1991 a special MLA session titled "Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literature Studies" was arranged by Harold Fromm, and by 1992 the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was formed (Glotfelty xviii). *ISLE* magazine, or *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, was first published in 1993 with a view to providing a forum for academic works focussing "on the human and nature [human/nature] dichotomy and related concerns" (Glotfelty xviii).

Glotfelty clearly traces the early development of modern ecocriticism, but before moving on it is important to establish that nature and humans should not be viewed as a dichotomy. In *What is Nature? Culture Politics and the Non-human*, Kate Soper states that "nature refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity" (15). Yet, in the same book, Soper writes that nature is "that which we are not and that which we are within" (26). Soper seems to suggest that humans and nature are separate things, and yet one must pose the question – can an individual or even an entire species be "within" something, but somehow not a part of it? Quantum physicist David Bohm (as quoted by Serpil Opperman) argues that such a fragmentary vision (dividing humans and nature) "is an attempt to divide what is really indivisible", and contends that "both the observer and observed are merging and interpenetrating aspects of one whole reality" (23).

The human interconnection with nature is a fact that must be acknowledged for our own sake and that of the planet on which we live. Interconnectedness is an important concept within ecocriticism as well. Glotfelty quotes Barry Commoner's first law of ecology, which states that "Everything is connected to everything else" (xix), and she adds that ecological criticism shares the premise that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (xix). These statements point to an undeniable connection with nature, and a reciprocal relationship between all living (and perhaps even non-living) matter. So the overarching "law" of ecocriticism is that everything is somehow connected to everything else. But what is ecocriticism itself?

Possibly the best-known and most popular definition of ecocriticism is that of Glotfelty, who writes: "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). She adds that ecocriticism takes an "earth-centred approach" to literary studies (xviii). In *Ecocriticism,* Garrard also refers to Glotfelty's useful definition, but adds his own broader definition, stating that "the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (5). Considering Garrard's definition, it would seem that

ecocritical studies have branched out into not only literary studies, but also cultural studies that scrutinize the ways in which nature is portrayed, and ask questions about what it means to be human. However, Garrard's definition of ecocriticism seems rather anthropocentric, since he places so much emphasis on the human aspect of this field. Studying how humans portray and interact with nature is certainly an important part of ecocriticism, but I believe that ecocriticism is a biocentric, rather than anthropocentric, field of study. Possibly the most comprehensive (and nature-oriented) definition of ecocriticism, is that of Richard Kerridge from *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (1998):

> The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces (4).

Kerridge's definition implies that ecocriticism aims to study the ways in which nature is portrayed in many, if not all, cultural tropes – which include art and literature, but also religion, mythology, politics, advertising and even popular culture. If I may be so bold, I would like to posit that, in its broadest sense, ecocriticism studies how nature is portrayed by humans across all communicative spheres. Furthermore, it critiques the way in which nature is represented and tries to highlight environmental issues, as well as the need to rethink what we "know" about the natural world and our relationship with it. Donald Worster (as quoted by Glotfelty) states that "We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function, but rather because of how our ethical systems function" (xxi). Glotfelty adds that ecocritics should strive to understand our botched ethical systems, and use their understanding to reform such systems (xxi).

This is too big a task for a field of literary criticism, but Worster and Glotfelty's comments highlight the important socio-political aspect of ecocritical studies, as well as the responsibility of the ecocritic, who should aim to insert nature into the public consciousness. Garrard also supports these statements, writing that ecocriticism is "an avowedly political mode of analysis", and that ecocritics often tie their literary and cultural analyses to a "'green' moral and political agenda" (3). Carroll, Brockelman, and Westfall (1997) also affirm that within ecocritical studies, "there is a demand for a moral approach to nature that goes beyond picturing nature as a mere utility for human production and use" (3). These critics imply that ecocriticism serves a moral purpose, as well as a social and political one. Finally, Hans Bertens (2014) notes that "where traditional criticism is mostly content with simply noting hierarchies [culture versus nature], ecocriticism actively seeks to dismantle them" (225). Ecocriticism ultimately seeks to be more than a type of literary criticism; it is a social, political and moral movement that not only considers how nature is portrayed in different media, but how nature ought to be portrayed. Ecocriticism is therefore a movement that brings nature into the public consciousness by

analysing and even confronting the ways in which we think about, write about, and go about the natural world.

Despite its socio-political agenda, one must keep in mind that ecocriticism is, at its roots, a mode of analysis or literary criticism, and like any other criticism it focusses on certain aspects within literature (or written media in a broader sense). Garrard (3) writes that ecocriticism is a literary analysis of the use of rhetorical strategies involving nature, such as the pastoral, apocalyptic imagery, wilderness, and allusions to these modes of writing. Basically, ecocriticism identifies the ways in which nature is depicted in written and spoken communication. The ecocritic, according to Garrard (3), must ask questions such as "How is nature represented in this sonnet?", or "How has the concept of wilderness changed over time?" However, there are different perspectives, or ways of approaching ecocritical studies, and there is certainly no such thing as a cookie-cutter ecocritic. Garrard identifies the following positions within ecocriticism: cornucopia, environmentalism, deep ecology, eco-feminism, social ecology and eco-Marxism, and finally what he calls "Heideggerian ecophilosophy".

Cornucopia, according to Garrard (18), is the disbelief in the global environmental crisis. Cornucopian thinkers believe that "such dangers are illusory or exaggerated", and that human activities are not responsible for the state of the planet (Garrard 18). This highly anthropocentric position also prioritises human progress over any environmental concern (Garrard 18). The cornucopian way of thinking is dangerous, since it implies that the earth is an endless source of materials that can and should be used and even exploited by humans in the name of progress. I believe it is this sort of thinking that has caused the global environmental calamity in the first place.

Environmentalism, on the other hand, is a far greener way of thinking. According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, an environmentalist is "a person who is concerned about protecting the environment" (477). Garrard (21) agrees that environmentalists are individuals who are concerned about environmental issues, such as global warming and pollution, but he adds that they wish to maintain or improve their standard of living as conventionally defined, and would not welcome radical social change. This statement from Garrard seems rather harsh, since he implies that environmentalists are nothing more than armchair activists who acknowledge environmental degradation, but do nothing about it. Even if this were true, the fact that environmentalists are at least concerned about nature is a step in the right direction.

A more radical approach to environmental issues is known as Deep Ecology. According to the introduction of *The Greening of Faith*, the main premise of Deep Ecology (or ecotheology) is that nature has intrinsic value, and that it is not a mere utility for human production (Carroll *et al*. 3). The recognition that our needs are not more important than those of other living creatures is a movement referred to as post-humanism, according to Hans Bertens (213). Posthumanism seeks to move past the myths of exceptionalism and to emphasize the ties that bind humans to other species and to one

another (Bertens 216). Bertens refers to Donna Haraway (a posthumanist scholar) who puts forward the argument that humans ought to be 'modest witnesses' with the necessary empathy towards nature (215). According to Garrard, Deep Ecology itself finds a voice in the work of Arne Naess (23). In his book, *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (1995), Naess expresses the core idea of Deep Ecology (as quoted by Garrard):

> The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes (24).

Garrard suggests that Deep Ecology sets itself up against the "Nature versus Culture dualism" that exists within modern human thought, and that it demands recognition of the intrinsic value of nature (25). However, this movement has been accused of being misanthropic, due to inhumane statements made about population issues by certain advocates (25). Arne Naess himself put forward the idea that the flourishing of life on earth is only possible if the human population is brought under control (24). The idea of population control to save the environment has even spilled over into popular culture. Most recently, Sir David Attenborough made statements implying that the human population must shrink for the sake of the environment, and this idea even became the main theme of a recent Marvel Studios film (*Avengers: Infinity War*, 2018) in which the villain seeks to wipe out half of the population in the entire universe in order to save planets from environmental destruction. This way of thinking is certainly controversial, and I do not wish to explore such ethical issues in the course of this particular research project. Kevin Hutchings maintains that the accusation of misanthropy against ecocriticism and Deep Ecology is ungrounded because it is misinformed (7). Not only are there many scholars who do not promote irresponsible and inhumane ideas, but, Hutchings continues, such allegations rely on a binary opposition between humans and nature (7) – an opposition that simply should not exist.

Deep Ecology (or the more humane branches thereof) promotes good and responsible relationships between humans and the natural world. The Deep Ecology movement has even spread to some of the highest religious circles, such as the Interfaith Council and The World Council of Churches (Carroll *et. al* 2). This "greening of faith" is often referred to as ecotheology, and this movement uses religious arguments to emphasize the importance of the responsible "stewardship" of nature (Carroll *et. al* 2). Stewardship is a loaded word, and so are the religious aspects of Deep Ecology – both are aspects that I will not be discussing any farther, seeing as these particular issues are not the focus of this study.

The above-mentioned examples of the concepts within Deep Ecology prove what a rich field of study it is, and how many branches there exist within ecocriticism itself. However, there are many more branches, as I have mentioned before. Ecofeminism, for instance has become an important ecocritical concept in the last decade or so. Garrard writes that Ecofeminism involves the recognition that nature

and women are both equally oppressed by androcentric attitudes or "the logic of domination" (26). This dominance is supposedly due to an underlying "master model" in which women have been associated with nature, the material, and the emotional, while men are associated with culture and rationality (Garrard 26). Ecofeminists attack the nature-culture (and female-male) hierarchy by exalting nature and emotion over culture and reason (Garrard 26). This practice has been questioned, according to Garrard, in terms of its actual ecological concerns, since the real focus shifts from nature to gender inequality (27). However, ecofeminism does emphasize environmental justice to a great degree by trying to undermine the logic of domination based on gender and species (Garrard 29). I believe Ecofeminism is certainly a useful tool to address environmental injustice, but since its underlying priority is to subvert the gender hierarchy, it is not necessarily a biocentric mode of study. Ecofeminism is not the only Ecocritical branch with a social concern. Social Ecology and Eco-Marxism are, as their names suggest, politically and socially involved environmental studies. According to Garrard, their position focusses on the need to "change the structure of society so that production to meet real needs replaces production for the accumulation of wealth" (31). Eco-Marxists believe that in doing so, the ecological problem of limits produced by capitalism's structural need for perpetual growth could disappear (31). Basically, such critics are against the exploitation of natural resources for the attainment of personal wealth, and much like Ecofeminism, Social Ecology challenges existing power systems that dominate and misuse nature. A critique of power structures is, and I think always has been, a powerful tool for change. Yet, one may question the extent to which Social Ecology and Eco-Marxism truly prioritise nature, since at the core of such studies social and political concerns remain. I do not mean that gender inequality and socio-political issues are less important than ecology – on the contrary, these are issues that must be addressed. However, I would argue that ecocriticism ought to be biocentric above all else; nature itself is in dire need of a voice in modern society and -criticism and ought to remain the priority of this field of study, rather than more anthropocentric concerns.

The final approach to ecocriticism mentioned by Garrard is Heideggerian Ecophilosophy. Garrard states that the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) has inspired a number of ecocritics, including Garrard himself (34). Heidegger's starting point, according to Garrard, is the fundamental difference between "mere material existence" and the "revelation of being", or the "thing-ness of things" (34). Essentially, Heidegger's statements imply that non-human organisms and objects have a "secret life" and a complex form of existence which ought to be acknowledged by humans, even if this secret existence can never be completely understood. Interestingly, Heidegger mentioned that poetry about nature allows nature to truly "be", which is more than merely existing (Garrard 34).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), a philosophical heir of Heidegger, states that when writing about the natural world "… this language 'belongs' to the inanimate landscape as much as it 'belongs' to ourselves" (Garrard 34). This means that nature poetry (or writing about nature) affords nature and

natural objects a voice which they do not normally have. According to Garrard, Merleau-Ponty believes that there is no human perception of nature that is not reciprocated by nature itself (34). This is reflected in his statement, “To touch the course skin of a tree is thus, at the same time, to be touched by the tree.” It would seem that Heideggerian Ecophilosophy encourages one to consider that nature does not merely exist (as an inanimate object does), but that nature truly *is* – in fact, it is just as much as we are. It also suggests a sort of reciprocity between humans and nature, rather than a dualism. When your hand touches a tree, or rock, or blade of grass you are, in turn, touched by the tree, rock, or grass. And if you write (or perhaps even speak) of touching the tree, your language belongs to that tree (and maybe all trees) just as much as it belongs to you. The Heideggarian approach to ecocriticism may seem whimsical at first, but there is an entire field of study dedicated to the idea that nature is alive, and that it has agency, namely New Materialism.

The premise of New Materialist criticism (which is a new and developing branch of ecocritical studies) is that “the world is a dense network of agencies” according to Serpil Opperman (*Material Ecocriticism*, 2014). According to Opperman, New Materialism has proposed a new world view – one that recognises the vitality of all things and calls “for an integral relationship between humanity and the more-than-human world” (22). Opperman also points the reader to the postmodern philosopher, Charles Hartshorne, who imagines “the universe as a vast system of experiencing individuals” (24). Hartshorne believes that there is no reason for limiting consciousness and feeling/emotion to the realm of human beings, and he suggests that one should sympathise with what he calls “the universal life of things, the ocean of feelings, which is reality in its concrete character” (Opperman 24). New Materialism takes ecocritical ideas a step further by suggesting that nature should be considered beyond its mere existence, and ought to be recognised as a network of thinking, feeling individuals that influence and are influenced by any and all things that surround them.

Opperman (24) also refers to Jane Bennet, a prominent New Materialist philosopher and political writer, who argues that acknowledging the vitality of non-human entities allows us to gain an awareness of “a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” (*Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things,* 2010). Bennet’s statement implies the existence of powers within nature that affect us (and I suppose can be affected by us). I will not argue that, in an age of science and objectivity, this seems like a rather strange idea. However, the notion that nature has some inherent potential isn’t entirely new. In his essay, *Of The Pathetic Fallacy* (1856), John Ruskin attempts to get the terms “objectivity” and “subjectivity” out of his and his reader’s way by arguing that, in spite of what philosophers would have one believe,

> the word "Blue" does not mean the sensation caused by a gentian on the human eye; but it means the power of producing that sensation; and *this power is always there, in the thing,* whether we are there to experience it or not, and would remain there though there were not

> left a man on the face of the earth. [It is true that] a gentian does not produce the sensation of blueness if you don't look at it. But it has always the power of doing so; its particles being everlastingly so arranged by its Maker. (Italics are my own.)

Ruskin isn't simply demonstrating that a certain flower is blue; his argument indicates that all things in nature have an inherent power or potential to create certain sensations – be it a colour or a scent, or a feeling or experience. It would seem that, although New Materialism is a relatively new field of study, the idea that the natural world has some inherent power or agency has existed for millennia, if one also considers the culture and religion of the Stone Age.

The discussion above demonstrates that ecocriticism is a many-faceted field of study, which consists of a complex and interwoven web of ideas. There are aspects of ecocriticism, such as Animal Studies, that I have not discussed because these do not inform my particular method, and perhaps fresh approaches to ecocritical studies are emerging at this very moment. During my ecocritical study of Romantic and Modernist nature-poetry, I will make use of a hybridized approach, borrowing Deep Ecology's idea that nature has inherent value and ought to be respected, merged with the New Materialist notion that nature is conscious, and has agency or power. Along with this, I will consider Heideggerian Ecocriticism's argument that we are inextricably tied to nature through a reciprocal relationship between the natural and the human world. Thus, my own approach is informed by the following notions: 1) that nature has value, that 2) nature has some form of power (be it as agency or influence), and that 3) humans and nature are connected. This hybridized form of ecocriticism will be applied to the nature-poetry of the Romantic and Modernist poets mentioned in the first chapter, to highlight how these poets (Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot, Cummings) portrayed nature in their respective poetic oeuvres, and to highlight the continuities that exist between eighteenth and twentieth century nature poems.

During the course of this discussion, I have used the word "nature" more than a hundred times. However, the term nature is a debated one. Critics have different views on what exactly the word means, and whether it should be used at all. Charles Baudelaire in *The Painter of Modern Life,* denounces conceptions of nature as a model of beauty or goodness, stating that in "all the actions and desires of the purely natural man, you will find nothing but frightfulness." Baudelaire's bleak view of nature does not make it sound like anything worth studying, but one must consider that he is referring to "human nature" or the so-called "natural" instincts of human beings, and not to plants, rivers, animals or the rest of the natural realm. Baudelaire (I think) does not mean that a mountain or creek teaches us to be evil, but that human nature, or rather our instinctual behaviour, is immoral and corrupt. The anthropocentric view of what the word "nature" refers to, doesn't end with Baudelaire. When looking up the word "nature" on Oxford English Dictionary Online, you will find that only the eleventh entry explains that nature can refer to phenomena such as fauna, flora, and different

geographic occurrences. Most, if not all, of the other entries tie the word nature to humans, human instincts, personalities, and even in its archaic forms to basic bodily functions. Although these are all valid uses of the word, one must keep in mind that ecocritical studies ought to be more biocentric than anthropocentric, and the goal is to focus on nature itself (fauna, flora, geography) and the relationship between nature and human beings, rather than exclusively human attributes and actions.

Kate Soper defines nature as "that part of the environment which we had no hand in creating" (16). As mentioned earlier, she also states that nature refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity (15). Thus nature, according to Soper, is an "otherness from humans" (15). Again, I would like to emphasize that I do not agree with the idea that humans and nature exist at opposite ends of a spectrum. The first law of ecocriticism is that everything is connected to everything else – this goes for human beings and nature as well. Separating humans and nature would be to deny the existence of either human beings or the natural world, since humans and nature are intertwined, constantly affecting and being affected by one another.

Soper, in spite of how she defines nature, also admits that the idea of nature being wholly untouched by man or isn't always the case, and she quotes Karl Marx's *German Ideology* in which he states that "the nature which preceded human history no longer exists anywhere" (18). The fact that there is supposedly no pristine nature left leads many critics to believe that the term has become obsolete. Johnathan Bate (56) refers to the well-known academic, Alan Liu, who in his 1989 article, "Wordsworth: The Sense of History", made the point that "There is no nature." Bate believes that saying there is no nature is "profoundly unhelpful" in a time when there is an urgent need to address the environmental consequences of our consumer-culture (56). Even if there is no longer any part of nature that remains wholly unaffected by human activities, Soper (20) also believes that denying nature's existence is denying the validity of our everyday reference to nature. She even goes on to state that perhaps referring to cattle grazing in a field should be a valid reference to nature, since it makes a distinction between this space and an urban/industrial environment (20).

Note that the distinction above is one of space (urban vs natural), and not one of species (human vs nature). I once again refer to quantum physicist, David Bohm, who (as mentioned earlier) states that dividing humans and nature is an attempt to "divide what is really indivisible", since both are "interpenetrating aspects of one whole reality". I am no physicist, but I agree with Bohm's idea that trying to divide and categorise what is human and what is nature is a fragmented view of reality. If you were to ask someone what a human living in New York, a penguin in Antarctica, and an olive tree in Italy have in common, their immediate answer would probably be "Nothing". However, all three of these organisms share something very large – a planet. Millions of organisms live on the same rock orbiting a nearby star at an ideal distance, all breathing what is essentially the same air, all within the same biosphere. This is the whole reality of existence on earth. Perhaps we tend to categorise things,

simply because the bigger picture is too large to grasp, but one must keep in mind that categories simply should serve as classifications, not divisions or separations. For instance, a city is an urban space, with artificial structures, but a tree growing on the sidewalk is not artificial. The placement of the tree might be artificial or unnatural, but the tree itself is not, and neither are the birds and bugs that live in it. So, what nature is and what exactly it means is a grey area. One can say that man-made structures are certainly not nature, but then what about gardens? Or perhaps one could argue that nature is comprised of living organisms, but this definition would exclude rocks and mountains (which are certainly not man-made). Clearly, any attempt to define nature is a slippery slope and grey areas will inevitably remain.

For the purpose of my study, I define nature as that which in its essence is not man-made. Humans cannot make a mountain – we can drill tunnels through one or alter its shape by force, but we cannot produce it ourselves. The same goes for plants and animals, which we can breed, domesticate, and genetically modify, but cannot create without a seed, or egg or cells from some other living organism. Nature, then, is that which can only be altered, but never created from scratch. I realise this definition sounds a bit like the law of conservation of energy (energy cannot be created nor destroyed – only converted from one form to another), and I suppose much can be said of the idea that nature is a form of constantly converting energy. However, since this is not a scientific study I will stick to the simple definition that nature is that which, in its essence, is not made by man. Also, when referring to nature poetry later on during this study, I will be referring to poems that make use of nature imagery, or in which nature (as defined above) is the main theme or topic.

Defining what is meant by the term nature in an ecocritical study is important. However, even if one can (loosely) define what nature means in a single sentence, it is important to consider that there are still several different approaches to writing about nature. Garrard (44-201) lists the following approaches to thinking and writing about nature: 1) the pastoral, 2) wilderness, 3) apocalypsism, 4) dwelling, and 5) Gaia theory. When analysing nature poetry, one must consider these different ways of writing about nature, since an understanding of these concepts shed light on the way the particular poet and poem portrays the existence of nature and the relationship between humans and the natural realm.

M.H. Abrams (127) writes that the pastoral tradition originated in the third century B.C., specifically in the work of Greek poet, Theocritus, who wrote poems representing the lives of Sicilian shepherds. Theocritus' *Idylls* were later imitated by Virgil in his Latin *Eclogues,* which according to Abrams established the model for what we now know as the pastoral (127). Abrams defines the traditional pastoral as "an elaborately conventional poem expressing an urban poet's nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized rural setting" (127). During the Medieval period, Christian pastoral combined the Greco-Roman pastoral tradition with the

Biblical Garden of Eden, or Christ as the shepherd, giving many pastoral works a "Christian range of reference" (Abrams 128).

Garrard writes that the Classical pastoral tradition (Greek/Roman/Medieval) became a preferred mode of Neoclassical nature-writing in the eighteenth century, quite possibly because it provided a locus, legitimated by tradition, for the feelings of loss and separation from nature produced by the Industrial Revolution (44). Raymond Williams' work, *The Country and the City* (1973) discusses pastoral nature-poetry of the Romantic period, and Williams suggests that Romanticism's interaction with the Industrial Revolution brought about a shift in the imaginative associations with the country and the city, since humans grew increasingly apart from the natural world (46-48). Romanticism scholar and author of *Man and the Natural World* (1991), Keith Thomas, (referred to by Garrard) wrote the following in 1984 regarding the nature poetry of the eighteenth century:

> … there had gradually emerged attitudes to the natural world which were essentially incompatible with the direction in which English society was moving. The growth in towns had led to a new longing for the countryside. The progress of cultivation had fostered a taste for weeds, mountains and unsubdued nature.

Clearly, urbanization and the Industrial Revolution brought about a nostalgic longing for natural spaces and non-urban lifestyles. Abrams suggests that pastoral nature poetry during and after the Romantic period contrasted the simple country life to a complicated existence in the city, usually to the advantage of the former (128). However, pastoral depictions of nature and the countryside are often unrealistically idealised, because these depictions tend to dismiss the daily struggles and poverty of rural people. Marxist scholars have also suggested that the pastoral seeks a refuge from socio-political issues rather than confronting them (Garrard 46). Yet, Abrams argues that the pastoral was used to criticize class structures in European society, and refers to Wordsworth's "Michael, A Pastoral Poem" (1800), in which he offers realistic rendering of a rural tragedy due to class difference and urbanisation (128). With the exception of Wordsworth's aforementioned poem, the Pastoral depiction of nature and the countryside is problematic because it is superficial and idealised to the point of being dismissive. Nature isn't only sunny skies and green meadows, and plants, animals and humans face harsh conditions and the struggle to survive.

Modern ecocritics have also grown weary of the pastoral trope, due to its idealization of rural life and its failure to address actual environmental issues, such as biodiversity loss (Garrard 53). It would seem that in a modern, scientific, and environmentally-conscious society pastoral depictions of nature have become irrelevant. Ideas of a pristine, ever-constant nature and idealized rural life now seem ignorant, but one must keep in mind that this wasn't always the case, and even if scientists dismiss the Pastoral tradition, it still has value from a literary perspective, and ecocritics must keep it in mind during studies of Classical, Medieval and Romantic poetry.

The Pastoral concept was soon replaced by the idea of wilderness, which was the antithesis of the Pastoral tradition. Wilderness, in this sense, refers to the inability of humans to truly control nature. However, unlike the pastoral tradition, the concept of wilderness only came to artistic prominence during the eighteenth century. Garrard (73) suggests that this is because the fear of wilderness became minimalised or started to vanish altogether because nature could be finally tamed by modern technology (mountains could now be crossed by roads and tunnels, and deep crevices by bridges, etc.). When the fear or nature and wilderness subsided, appreciation for wild or untamed landscapes started to emerge. This new-found appreciation for wild spaces brought about the notion of "The Sublime", which Edmund Burke (1729-97) describes in great detail in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Burke (1757), quoted by Garrard, claims that "the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature […] is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of Horror" (71). Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory* (1995) writes that Burke's sublime was found in "shadow and darkness and dread and trembling, in cave and chasms, at the edge of the precipice, in the shroud of cloud, in the fissures of the earth" (450).

In his thesis about the Romantic imagination, Firat Karadas also discusses the sublime, arguing that the sublime is "formless", "boundless" and is found in the mind (30). Karadas refers to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), in which he posits that, in order to represent the sublime

> "[imagination] goes beyond the limits of experience [and creates] ideas of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, the realm of hell, eternity, creation and so on and presents them with completeness for which no example can be found in nature" (30).

Garrard states that it was in Romantic poetry that the sublime found its "apotheosis", and he uses the example of Percy Shelley's "Mont Blanc" which features the "archetypical locus" of the European sublime, namely the Alps (71). The ideas of wilderness and the sublime, however, do not sit well with some modern ecologists and ecocritics. The trouble with wilderness and the sublime, which Garrard also mentions (77), is that they often emphasize nature's "otherness", and seem to disconnect the human and non-human world. In his article, "Toward an Ecological Sublime" (1999), Christopher Hitt also writes that the fundamental issue with the sublime (and wilderness) is that it depends on the "notion of nature's otherness" and the separation between humans and nature (603). However, Hitt (606) believes that the existence of wilderness itself should not be denied, and he refers to William Cronon who, in "The Trouble with Wilderness", argues that,

> On the one hand, the notion of wilderness is dangerous because it underwrites humans' separateness from, and ultimately superiority over, the natural world. On the other hand, I also think that it is no less crucial for us to recognize and honour nonhuman nature as a world

> we did not create, a world with its own independent nonhuman reasons for being as it is. The autonomy of nonhuman nature seems to me an indispensable corrective to human arrogance.

Hitt puts forward that humility before nature, as described by Cronon, is a neglected, but consistent element of the natural Sublime (606). Hitt, greatly informed by Kant's studies of the Sublime, also writes that in experiencing wilderness and the Sublime, we become aware of how insignificantly small we are in comparison with the vast natural world (606). Ideally, Hitt writes, the Sublime experience should serve as a remedy to humans' false ideas about their supremacy over nature, since a sense of the sublime comes about when humans encounter a nonhuman world "whose power ultimately exceeds theirs" (609).

In theory, if humans could accept nature as being vast, or powerful beyond complete human control, it would be ideal. Yet, anyone who knows a bit of history will know that human beings almost always have the urge to regulate and tame wild landscapes – whether it is by means of deforestation, or hunting, or agriculture, or blasting tunnels through mountains. As I have mentioned above, the Romantic appreciation of wild landscapes was only possible because modern technology had started to tame nature, and fear thereof seemed to subside. The fact of the matter is that humans seem to fear wilderness, and will seek to subdue it as long as it seems to be a powerful "otherness". Hitt also writes that environmental philosophy has demonstrated that "estrangement from nature is the problem, not the solution", which means that harmony with nature must be created, rather than ideas that promote separateness (612).

Ultimately, the concept of wilderness is problematic. I agree that wilderness should be acknowledged as something that is far bigger and more powerful than humans, and that we should gain a sense of humility when coming face to face with the vastness of the natural world. However, I also realise that depicting nature as "other" is dangerous, since, in most cases, humans (especially in the Western world) seek to subvert the other, because they fear it, and wish to dominate it. For this reason, a more unified view of the relationship between nature and human beings is necessary – one that encourages a harmonious relationship, rather than a struggle for power and dominance.

Garrard believes that the pastoral and wilderness tropes contribute greatly to the human perception of nature, but he writes that, from an ecocritical perspective, these tropes are "fundamentally unhelpful" (117). He feels that pastoral and wilderness perspectives are those of "the aesthetic tourist" (117), which means that the onlooker simply observes and/or appreciates nature, without feeling any further connection or responsibility towards it.

The trope that Garrard calls "dwelling" is apparently not a momentary state of being; it implies "the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work" (117). Garrard traces the idea of dwelling back to Virgil's *Georgics*, in which Virgil apparently

encouraged responsible agricultural practices, such as the "planting of fertility-enhancing legumes before hungry cereals" (118), which would prevent depletion of soil nutrients. Virgil was encouraging a sort of responsible stewardship, and a reciprocal relationship between man and nature. Though Garrard argues that "dwelling" is the least problematic view of the human relationship with the natural world, I believe that this particular view renders nature mute, as though it is a backdrop to the lives of the people living in and amongst it. A remedy for this would be to place more emphasis on nature, and to give nature agency, as suggested by New Materialist critics (such as Opperman and Bennett mentioned above). This would suggest a combination of responsible "dwelling" and the acknowledgement of "wilderness" and/or the Sublime aspect of nature.

Garrard himself is aware of this issue posed by the "dwelling" trope and therefore suggests introducing Gaia Theory in ecocritical studies. Gaia theory was developed and introduced in the late sixties by ecologist, James Lovelock, and essentially suggests that all of earth is "alive" and acts as one massive living organism, rather than billions of individuals. Scientifically speaking, this theory is disputable, but Garrard suggests that Gaia has been a striking symbol for climatologists, philosophers, and deep ecologists because "ascribing organismic unity and giving it the name of an Earth-goddess allows Gaia to be appropriated as the object of global environmental consciousness and perhaps veneration too" (201). This sounds very like the concept of nature's agency suggested by New Materialist critics. Earth, then, is alive in its own right, just as much as we are – again consider Ruskin's suggestion that a gentian always has the power to create the sensation of bright blue, though no human eye may ever happen upon it.

Michael Webster also has something to say about the idea that Earth may be animated in his article, "E.E. Cummings: The New Nature Poetry and the Old". Webster suggests that "…the modern poet empathizes with the living unconsciousness of nature, perhaps because it represents a deeper truth about human nature" (110). It is somewhat anthropocentric to imply that the natural world reflects human nature, yet the concept of nature being a "living unconsciousness" with which a poet can empathise is fascinating. Webster's statement also suggests that the idea of dwelling, along with Gaia Theory (or the idea of nature's agency), could be successfully applied to poetry. This is exactly what I intend to do in this particular study. I will examine the nature poetry of William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings through my makeshift lens of dwelling and agency. What this means is that I will focus on how these poets portray nature in terms of the reciprocal relationship between nature and humans, as well as to what extent Gaia (or nature's agency) manifests in their respective poetic projects.

I cannot ignore pastoral or wilderness perspectives that also exist in the poetry, but the aim is to demonstrate how the underlying idea of reciprocity, and of earth's agency or power, connects these particular Romantic and Modernist nature poets. I will validate this argument with examples from as

many relevant poems as possible. However, before I analyse the poetry, I want to consider possible circumstances that led to these poets' turn to nature in their respective times. Therefore, the next chapter will examine social and political circumstances that led, or at least contributed, to the turn to nature in the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hereafter will follow the ecocritical analysis of the chosen Romantic and Modernist poets' work.

Chapter 3: Revolution, War, and the Winds of Change

An overview of the historic events and circumstances that influenced the turn to nature of the Romantic and Modernist periods

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> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him for contrast and comparison among the dead. […] what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it.

These are the words of T.S. Eliot, taken from his seminal 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (115). Eliot's words are echoed in the well-known statement that "No art exists in isolation" (Fleming 52). In essence, any art, whether a painting or a poem, is in some way a product of its time, while also being influenced by the art that preceded it – reacting against its predecessors or reviving older styles.

In the first chapter, I mentioned that continuities and discontinuities in poetry are necessarily temporal in nature, and that the continuities in Romantic and Modernist nature poetry of the selected poets may be linked to similarities in the historical circumstances of these respective times. In this chapter, I consider circumstances, events, and developments that took place during the Romantic and Modernist paradigms, which could have spurred on the poetic turn to nature. My goal with this chapter is not simply to regurgitate historical facts that most of us learnt in high school or on the History Channel, but to answer a central question of this research, namely *why* the Romantic and Modernist shift towards nature may have taken place. This might also shed light on reasons why Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot and Cummings turned to nature in their respective poetic projects and offer possible explanations regarding the continuities in these poets' nature poetry. I hope to answer these questions by investigating similarities in the socio-historical circumstances and "zeitgeists" of these two epochs which may have perpetuated the interest in nature.

In the *Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, Bernard Bergonzi writes that the years from 1910 to 1930 form one of the richest periods in English literary history – comparable with the end of the sixteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth (408). This means that the Modernist

movement produced as much literary wealth as the Renaissance and Romanticism. One can ascribe the boom in literature during the Renaissance to the development of the printing press, an increase in literacy among the general public, and even the advent of Protestantism. The Renaissance was a total watershed that essentially changed the course of history. This could perhaps signify that the Romantic and Modernist periods are the other defining moments of modern history.

In *Days That Changed The World*, Hywell Williams (2006) lists what he believes to be "the 50 defining events of world history". This list spans well over two millennia and includes everything from the assassination of Julius Caesar to the 1969 Apollo moon-landing. Of these fifty historical events which Williams believes defined history, it is interesting to note that four of these events took place during the Romantic age (late eighteenth and early nineteenth century), while six of them took place during the early twentieth century, or the Modernist era. This is quite a lot, which means that Romanticism and Modernism in the arts both developed at times when the world was changing rapidly. Though Williams' book is more of an interesting read than a peer-assessed academic source, I found it intriguing that so many events which may have influenced the course of history took place within these two specific epochs.

The terms Romanticism and Modernism both refer to very broad movements in art, literature, philosophy and general thought. However, since the focus of my study is poetry, I will refer to Romanticism as a historical phase of literature, described by Bloom and Trilling as English Romanticism, which started around 1783 when William Blake's earliest poems were published, and came to an end in the late 1820's around the time Lord Alfred Tennyson's first public volume was printed (3). Claire Lamont states that the poetry of English Romanticism has created a concept or standard of what poetry ought to be (274), while Bloom and Trilling believe that Romanticism ran a complex course through the Victorian and Modernist periods, and argue that poets such as Hardy and Yeats were no less Romantic than Blake or Shelley (3). Historically speaking, Romanticism is "the literary form of the Revolution which began in America (1775-83) and the West Indies (1780s), flowered in France (1789) and spread from France through space and time into the continuing upheaval of our own century" (Bloom and Trilling 5). Yet Romantic literature in itself is revolutionary, since poets started to focus much more closely on the emotions and "inner life" of individuals as well as the beauty and splendour of the landscape.

Modernism, in its own way, was also a revolutionary form of art and literature, and Bergonzi (408) writes that Modernism can be broadly defined as the "radical remaking of all the arts that went on in Europe and America in the years before 1914". J.M. Roberts affirms the radicalism of Modernist art, and writes that by the first decade of the twentieth century it was already difficult for trained eyes to recognize art in much of what was done by contemporary artists (946). Yet Modernism didn't come to

an end in 1914; it flourished until after the Second World War and still has an effect on art and poetry that is being created today. Bergonzi (408) suggests that some of Modernism's most prominent characteristics include the unparalleled complexity of modern urban life which is reflected in literary form, and the idea that the intense but isolated image (or moment of epiphany) provides our truest sense of the nature of things. These characteristics are evident in the poetry of both Eliot and Cummings (as I will discuss in the next chapter), in which the city and machines are often depicted with dark undertones, and images of rose gardens, birds, and natural phenomena often lead to small moments of epiphany

However, Bergonzi's suggestion that Modernist literature sought to depict the complexities of contemporary life leads to the question of *why* life in the twentieth century seemed so complicated (and, since Romanticism was also a revolutionary movement in literature, one could assume that the poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also observed an increasingly complex society). There is no ready answer to the above question, but throughout this chapter I will consider some of the most important historical events that took place during the Romantic and Modernist periods, in order to understand how such radical and revolutionary events shaped these epochs and sparked an interest in nature and the revival of nature poetry.

The Romantic turn to nature could, in part, be ascribed to the rise of natural science in the previous century. Carlton Hayes (360) explains that, during later seventeenth century, intellectual interests gradually shifted from interests in the supernatural[2] to what was called "natural science", and that this shift in intellectual pursuits and interests is commonly called the "Enlightenment". This new-found interest in natural science was encouraged by the rise of the "scientific academy" (Hayes 360). In 1662 the English Royal Society was chartered by Charles II, and its goal was "'to examine all systems, theories, principles, hypotheses, elements, and experiments of things natural, mathematical, and mechanical invented, recorded or practiced by any considerable author, ancient or modern'" (Hayes 361). In *50 Days that Changed the World*, Hywell Williams includes the graduation of Isaac Newton from Cambridge University (1665), since Newton's discoveries about the laws of gravity and motion transformed both scholarly and popular views about the physical world (78). Johannes Kepler also demonstrated that the sun caused the motion of the planets, rather than simply illuminating them, which was a major step towards a mechanical explanation of the universe (Williams 79). Newton's theories, along with Kepler's demonstrations of how gravity was the force controlling planetary movement, changed not only scientific culture, but Western culture as a whole.

[2] The term, "supernatural" here does not refer to phenomena such as ghosts, spirits or monsters, but is used (by Hayes) as a shorthand for religious beliefs and interests in non-scientific explanations of the world, such as alchemy and astrology.

Many philosophers supported the ideas and theories put forward by the Enlightenment, and the English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, argued that all nature was simply a machine (Hayes, 376).

Along with its far-reaching effects on intellectual thought, the Enlightenment also had an effect on the arts. During the eighteenth century "naturalism" appeared in visual art, deriving its inspiration from idealized nature, rather than from the more conventional Greek and Roman art (Hayes 384). Interestingly, Hayes argues that the idealization of nature was "part and parcel of the Enlightenment" (384). He believes that it was an expression of the new faith in natural law and natural rights, and that naturalism was spurred on by the interest of European intellectuals in the forests and native peoples of the New World (384). While scientists were interested in natural laws, many painters were seeing and showing the beauties of English nature, which ushered in the Romantic painting of the nineteenth century, and began the transition from eighteenth century Classicism to nineteenth century Romanticism (Hayes 385).

The new-found appreciation for nature was also expressed by the young French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), who captured the imagination of a host of eighteenth-century intellectuals (Hayes 409). At the time, many philosophers were praising the intellect, and were inclined to scorn the emotions, but Rousseau reminded the eighteenth century that "it may be as sane to enjoy a sunset as to solve a problem in algebra" (Hayes 410). Rousseau was a pioneer of Romanticism, and he was interested in the "natural man" – who he thought was a virtuous being, or a truly "noble savage" (Hayes 410). In his first significant essay, the "Discourse on Arts and Sciences" (1749), Rousseau contrasted the naturalness and supposed inherent goodness of primitive people with the artificiality and acquired wickedness of those who were civilized (Hayes 410). Rousseau's constant cry was "Back to nature", and in his novel, *Emile* (1762), he suggested a new type of education in which children should be allowed to follow their natural inclinations, instead of being driven to artificial studies which only corrupted them (Hayes 411). "Back to nature" speedily became a fad of the day, and even the courtiers at Versailles pretended to like nature; Queen Marie Antoinette (1755-93) even built herself a little farmhouse and played the role of dairy-maid, while her ladies in waiting took to fishing in the outdoor pools (Hayes 411). Rousseau's influence gave rise to the Romantic tendency to revolt against Classical modes, and to seek inspiration in natural surroundings (Hayes 411).

All this seems like a clear-cut and rather simple explanation for the Romantic interest in nature. Yet, the scientific findings of the Enlightenment, Rousseau's "Back to nature!" movement, and royals building cottages in the countryside were certainly not the only influential events that occurred during the Romantic epoch. This suggests that there could also be other, perhaps equally important, factors that led to the rise of nature poetry during the Romantic period.

The beginning of the twentieth century (or the Modernist period) saw its own turn to nature, though it is perhaps not as well-known or extensively discussed as the Romantic turn to nature. However, twentieth century's turn to nature didn't (at least in its initial stages) dominate the arts as much as it did legislature, and public attitude. In 1901 Theodore Roosevelt became the US president, and he used his authority to establish five national parks, four national game reserves, 51 federal bird sanctuaries and a whopping 150 national forests (*US Department of the Interior*). In a speech in Kansas on August 31st, 1910, Roosevelt stated that

> There is a delight in the hardy life of the open. There are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness that can reveal its mystery, its melancholy and its charm. The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value (*US Department of the Interior*).

Roosevelt not only conserved nature, but also sensed within it a "hidden spirit." Britain soon followed the American example and in 1925 the Council for the Preservation of Rural England was set up (Cook & Stevenson 174). This was followed by Sir Raymond Unwin's 1933 report to the Greater London Regional Planning Committee, in which he suggested a "green girdle" around London to provide recreational space (Cook and Stevenson 174). In 1938 the Green Belt Act was officially enforced, which protected 25,000 acres around London from further development (Cook and Stevenson 174). Finally, in 1942, the Scott Report recommended the creation of National Parks throughout the UK, and in 1949 the National Parks Act set up national parks and special protection for areas of outstanding beauty (Cook & Stevenson 174).

The reasons behind the Modernist turn to nature are not as apparent as those of the eighteenth century, but there are many possibilities. First, it is interesting to note that the modern turn to nature (like the Romantic one) was preceded by ground-breaking scientific discovery. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859, and his Theory of Evolution via natural selection became the foundation of modern evolutionary studies (Desmond *Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Desmond states that, at first, Darwin's theory shocked a religious Victorian society by suggesting that humans and other animals shared a mutual ancestry (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). However, Darwin's biology, which obviously wasn't based on religious belief, appealed to the rising class of professional scientists, and by the time of Darwin's death (1882) his revolutionary theories had spread through all of science, as well as literature and even society itself (Desmond *Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

While Modernism was in its infancy, and the Western world was beginning its second turn to nature, Albert Einstein published a series of scientific papers in 1905, which contained an early version of his Theory of Relativity, along with its famous equation, $E=mc^2$ (Williams 138). In 1916 Einstein

published his general Theory of Relativity, which maintained that neither time nor motion are absolute – instead they are relative to the observer. Einstein also demonstrated that gravitation was not a force, as Isaac Newton had postulated in 1687; Einstein suggested that we are part of a far more "mysterious world" in which gravity was a distortion, or curved field, within the space-time continuum (Williams 138). Einstein's work had essentially displaced a 200-year-old world view seeing as his insights were at variance with the predictable and uniform laws of Newtonian physics. (Williams also reminds the reader than an unfortunate side-effect of Einstein's discoveries regarding atoms and atomic energy, was of course the age of nuclear weaponry.)

In terms of the Modernist turn to nature, discoveries in natural science may have turned people's attention to nature, much like the Enlightenment of the seventeenth century. Yet, during both the Enlightenment and the early twentieth century, the interest in nature stretched far beyond the scientific community. Hayes (395) believes that during and after the Enlightenment, the rapid development of natural science, along with the spread of "rationalism", prompted what he calls "rationalist scepticism". This statement could easily be applied to the twentieth century as well, since a universe which operated and developed by means of its own laws and processes did not leave much room for the presence of an all-powerful deity. Hayes continues that during and after the Enlightenment "there was a considerable scepticism among intellectuals as to the sacredness of the Scriptures and the truth of the miracles recorded in them" since was no rational explanation for the miracles recorded in the Bible (396). This means that seventeenth- and eighteenth century individuals who believed themselves to be "enlightened" must surely have questioned the existence of God or any other deity. Hayes also argues that novel scientific findings shook the foundations of Christianity (396). Such considerations undoubtedly damaged the foundations of Western culture which, up to the seventeenth century, was largely based upon religious/Christian ideals.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was a further breakdown of religious beliefs, due to irreconcilable differences between science (including Darwin's Theory of Evolution and Einstein's Relativity Theory) and a literal understanding of scripture. People were shocked at the idea that plants and creatures slowly evolved into the forms we know, rather than being created from scratch by an all-powerful deity, and this idea is still rejected by many religious groups (including many Christian denominations and the Roman Catholic Church). These discoveries must have added to an air of religious scepticism that had already existed for two centuries. Einstein's discoveries had much the same effect. Williams (in *50 Days that Changed the World*) writes that Einstein's arguments were comprehensible enough to be "psychologically disturbing, even to non-scientists" (140). Relativity Theory made the world, and the universe, a strange and uncertain place where all experience was relative and there was (even in science) no absolute truth. This new knowledge undoubtedly added to pessimism about the meaning of life and existence.

Williams states that ever since the 1890's "there was already pessimism about the future along with a suspicion that Europe, and perhaps civilization itself, was running out of steam" (140), and one could assume that Relativity Theory added to such feelings of uncertainty. Roberts believes that by the 1920's previous certainties regarding an explicable mechanical universe, rationality, authority and even objective moral criteria were being torn down (945). Though, as Roberts puts it, many people still tried to cling to "old shibboleths" even if the foundations of Western society were no longer firm. This led to a further decline in religious belief, and (especially in the wake of World War I) the industrial world essentially became "post-Christian" (Roberts 946). Simply put, this means that religion was no longer part of the everyday lives of people in developed areas, and religious institutions and symbols had lost their vitality.

It becomes clear that scientific progress during both the Romantic and Modernist period challenged religious beliefs, spirituality, and the way people saw the world and their own place within it. The Enlightenment shed light on how gravity, motion, and the movements of the planets worked. Such popular subjects as astrology and alchemy were proven to be nonsensical, since people realised that the universe was mechanical and natural, rather than mystical and supernatural. Geological and paleontological findings also brought into question the accuracy and truth of religious scriptures. The decline in supernatural and religious belief caused a general sense of "a loss of meaning", since religious/spiritual belief-systems previously governed the way in which people lived their lives and understood their place in the greater scheme of things.

Adding philosophical insult to scientific injury was the spread of Nihilism in the 1890s and early twentieth century. This train of thought originated in Germany, with Friedrich Nietzsche as its most prominent "voice". In his notes (1883-1888) for *Will to Power*, Nietzsche wrote that "Every belief, every considering something-true, is necessarily false because there is simply no true world" (Pratt, *Nihilism).* Alan Pratt writes that, for Nietzsche, there is no objective order or structure in the world except what we give it; in fact, the goal of nihilist philosophers was to examine the façades of popular convictions, often to illustrate that all values are essentially meaningless and/or powerless (*Nihilism,* 2019).

According to Nietzsche, as he wrote in *Will to Power*, "the highest values devalue themselves, [whilst the] aim is lacking, and 'Why' finds no answer" (Pratt *Nihilism*). Pratt believes that the collapse of meaning and purpose, caused by nihilism, became one of the most destructive forces in history, "constituting a total assault on reality and nothing less than the greatest crisis of humanity". In fact, Nietzsche himself (as quoted by Pratt) predicted the catastrophe in which the new nihilistic tendencies would end:

> What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: *the advent of nihilism*… For some time now our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end.

Later on, in 1969, Helmut Thielicke also argued that "Nihilism literally has only one truth to declare, namely, that ultimately Nothingness prevails and the world is meaningless" (Pratt, *Nihilism).* From the nihilist perspective, life is completely amoral – a conclusion which Thielicke believes motivated such horrendous acts as the Nazi reign of terror (Pratt, *Nihilism*). There can be no doubt that nihilist philosophy cast a dark shadow over the twentieth century (especially if one considers Adolf Hitler's apparent admiration for Nietzsche's *Will to Power*).

Thus, it would seem that progress in the fields of science, as well as a rapid shift in philosophy and the general way of understanding the world and our place within it – a movement which started during the Enlightenment and eventually led to Relativity Theory – would eventually end in the perception of an uncertain and meaningless existence. Perhaps when previous systems of meaning (including our understanding of the universe and religion) are broken down, and the foundations of society start to crumble, individuals start to search for meaning elsewhere.

In times when culture, society and organised religion had lost their power to be meaningful, it seems inevitable that individuals would seek such "power" elsewhere. William Wordsworth found this power in nature and in "Tintern Abbey" writes that in nature he has experienced a "presence" and something "far more deeply interfused" which lives in all things, and essentially seems to connect all things in the world (lines 93-102). Percy Shelley, a self-proclaimed atheist, also found a sense of meaning and connectedness in natural surroundings. In the first few lines of "Mont Blanc", the speaker gains an awareness of "The everlasting universe of things" which flows through both the river Arve and the human mind. Shelley, like Wordsworth, finds in nature a sense of connectedness, which could help humans to understand their place in the world, or could create a new sense of meaning, since scientific findings had toppled old modes of thinking.

There is a similar sense of a more-than-human presence, and universal connectedness, in the Modernist poet, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (henceforth *TWL*), and *Four Quartets*. In *TWL*, the voice of a Thunder god is heard in the desert, while in "The Dry Salvages" the river is said to be a strong god, which also "is within us". It seems that, by means of natural phenomena, Eliot observes the existence of gods, but also a universal connectedness – much like the above mentioned Romantic poets. The view of a world in which all is connected (a common concept in Eastern religions, such as

Buddhism and Hinduism) could have made existence seem more significant in a time when meaning was uncertain or non-existent.

A sense of connection and meaningfulness found in nature is also illustrated in much of E.E. Cummings' poetry. For Cummings, like Wordsworth, Shelley and Eliot, nature is a space filled with meaning, and he found extraordinary experiences in seemingly ordinary things, such as leaves and snowflakes and even insects and mice. In his well-known "Hummingbird Poem" (*Collected Poems*, 872) the speaker finds a small hummingbird's nest, which, to him, is as grand and as perfect as the entire universe. This small nest is very different from the mountains, deserts and rolling rivers that Shelley and Eliot write about, yet Cummings recognizes the significance of something so small, yet so meaningful. It is as though the whole universe and all its mystery is contained within this tiny nest.

The perception of the loss of meaning, brought on by scientific discovery, shifts in philosophy, and a changing "mental" landscape throughout Western culture could have acted as a driving force behind both the Romantic and Modernist turns to nature. The general loss of meaning started with scientific discoveries of the eighteenth century, when the universe was demonstrated to function much like a machine, rather than by the intervention of a deity or other supernatural forces. This sent shock-waves through a culture and society which was largely organized around religious ideas, and led many individuals to question religious beliefs and their understanding of the meaning of existence. The gradual loss of meaning came to a point of crisis with Darwin's findings about evolution, German philosophers' Nihilistic suggestions and Einstein's Relativity Theory. In these cases it would seem that when the rug of meaning is suddenly pulled from under society's feet, people will search for meaningful experience elsewhere. This is apparent in the examples of the poems I have mentioned above, since these four poets turned towards nature (rather than culture) in search of meaningful experience. In these poems (and in many others that I will discuss in Chapter 4) the speakers of the poems perceive a sort of universal connectedness in nature, and through this "connection" find a source of meaning and understanding that exists outside of culture. Perhaps this explains the turn to nature that has taken place over the last two centuries.

However, the turn to nature is likely to have more than one cause, and the question of "why" most probably has more than one answer. During Romanticism and Modernism it was not only the mental landscape being altered by science, philosophy and religious scepticism, since the physical landscape of Europe was also being transformed due to industrialization, urbanisation, and the development of new technologies.

In *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, Claire Lamont (277) writes that, "Of the many social evils of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including the slave trade, the

treatment of the poor, and press-gangs, one was beginning to be recognized as a new and growing threat: industrialization". Indeed, the Romantic Age witnessed the dawn of what has become known as the first Industrial Revolution. The poet, William Blake, was disturbed by this and in his 1908 poem "Jerusalem" asked the now famous question – "And was Jerusalem builded here / Among these dark Satanic mills?" (lines 7-8). Blake undoubtedly had the factories in mind here, and he frequently used the word "mill" for the repetitive grinding and churning of an oppressive society (Lamont 277). Bloom and Trilling (8) Blake wasn't the only poet who lamented these changes. Oliver Goldsmith's 1770 poem, "The Deserted Villiage", was (according to Bloom and Trilling) a "sad celebration of an open, pastoral England vanishing into the isolated farm holdings, and wandering labourers, resulting from enclosure" (8). The enclosure of the countryside, as well as rapid urbanization caused by industrialization led to a "vast social dislocation" throughout Britain at the time (Bloom & Trilling 8).

However, the effects of the Industrial Revolution reached farther than economic production. They had a profound effect on the social circumstances in Britain, and in most cases this effect was not a good one. For instance, the Gilbert's Act of 1782 decreed that all infirm paupers be sent to workhouses, while able-bodied paupers were sent to work (Cook & Stevenson 165). The living conditions of so-called paupers hardly improved when they were forced into labour. Since the 1720's, vagrant children could also be apprenticed without the consent of their parents (Cook & Stevenson 165). The Industrial Revolution caused a rise in child labour, and children often worked in horrible, if not downright cruel, conditions. Bloom and Trilling (8) believe that "The real misery in England brought about through these economic and social developments was on a scale unparalleled since the Black Death in the fourteenth century".

The widespread misery and social unrest in Britain also led to what was called "frame-breaking". This was basically an attempt to end unemployment by the destruction of machines which replaced people in the workplace (Cook & Stevenson 193). The peak of popular agitation and government brutality came in August 1819, during the Peterloo Massacre at Manchester, where mounted troops charged a large, orderly group who met to demand parliamentary reform. The troops killed and maimed many of the unarmed protestors (Bloom & Trilling 8); all in all, eleven people were killed and nearly 200 were badly wounded (Cook & Stevenson 193). Receiving news of this event, Percy Shelley wrote one of his best known political poems, "The Mask of Anarchy", though no one would dare to publish such a radical poem until 1832 (Lamont 301-2).

Social issues resulting from the Industrial Revolution, such as "the slum conditions in many industrial towns" were not addressed until the 1840's, and it was only in the late 1860's that the government started to take measures to improve these conditions (Cook & Stevenson 170). This meant that in the

early nineteenth century large cities, and perhaps society as a whole, became almost unbearable. Lamont (276) states that, for the Romantics,

> … society had become an evil force, moulding and stunting its citizens. It was not merely that so many people were foolish, greedy, and vain […] it was that society itself came to be regarded as a dark, repressive cloud, limiting action and obscuring perception.

One of the consequences of these ideas regarding societal evils was the flight from the city (Lamont 276). Certain Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge indeed fled from the city, and Percy Shelley in *Peter Bell The Third* (Part Third) even wrote that "Hell is a city much like London / A populous and a smoky city" (lines 147-148). The common disgust with cities, and the dark underbelly of the Industrial Revolution, led to a new appreciation for the beauty of the countryside, and the seemingly uncorrupted nature of nature.

By the early twentieth century, industrialization and urbanization was thoroughly established and a part of everyday reality – though still deemed unpleasant by many. During this time there was a notable increase in mechanical inventions and developments. In 1876 Alexander Graham Bell developed and patented the telephone and within 20 years it became an example of the domestication of science (Williams 132). In 1901 the first transatlantic radio message was sent, and by 1922 national radio broadcasting by the British Broadcasting Company began (Cook & Stevenson 184). The societal shift caused by rapid technological advancements is, according to Bernard Bergonzi (406), well represented in E.M. Forster's 1910 novel, *Howards End*. The novel "presents a perceptive anatomy of late-Edwardian England, already suffering from traffic congestion and urban sprawl" (Bergonzi 406). The novel's motto is "Only Connect", which, according to Bergonzi, represented Forster's hopes for a union between two types of people – those who are sensitive and cultivated, and those who get things done in a world of "telegrams and anger" (406). Bergonzi reckons that this novel shows English society "in a state of anxious transition".

Individuals became increasingly weary of a world dominated by metropolitans and machines. At the turn of the century, a pessimistic type of fiction arose – one which envisioned an apocalyptic future (Bergonzi 389). The author, H.G. Wells, for instance, was all too aware of the power of science and technology to transform life, either for the better or for the worse, and he included such aspects in most of his novels (Bergonzi 399). It is unfortunate that many of these pessimistic authors' predictions about the dark side of science and machines came true, since mechanized warfare would cause unprecedented destruction and fatalities in the World Wars that would soon follow. Advances in science and technology led to weapons, such as the nuclear bomb, which could wipe out entire cities – as was the case in 1945, when atomic bombs were dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which led to the deaths of thousands of individuals.

The psychological effects of the urban lifestyle and mass-mechanization of the twentieth century finds its way into Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in which the speaker describes the "violet hour" when "the eyes and back / Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits / Like a taxi throbbing waiting" (lines 215-217). These lines indicate that machines are not simply part of society, but that society itself has become like a machine. In the same section of the poem, the blind seer Tiresias even witnesses a mechanical type of sex taking place between a typist and a clerk (lines 229-248). In this miserable and disturbing urban world of *The Waste Land*, even intimate experiences have become mechanical.

One may conclude that during the Romantic and Modernist epochs industrialization, urbanization and mechanization led to great misery. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the development of machines led to unemployment, poverty, slum-conditions in cities, and the abandonment of the countryside. During the Modernist era, the world was thoroughly mechanized with new machines and inventions flooding the market. If we are to believe Eliot, even people became machine-like, and urban sprawl meant that previously green areas, or parts of the countryside, were being taken over by factories and skyscrapers. To make matters worse, many of the machines of the twentieth century were used in warfare, which made war far more dangerous for civilians as well as soldiers. Machines and technology did, as H.G. Wells and his contemporaries predicted, change the world for the worse.

It seems almost inevitable that in a miserable world of machines, and cities enclosed by factories or skyscrapers, people might long for wide open spaces and meadows and trees and the chirping of birds. In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, machines and factories were perceived as an evil force, while nature became its antithesis, perhaps representing all that was still good in the world. However, the idea that nature is "good" or at least has a more positive effect on humans than the city is not just symbolic. In a study published in the *European Journal of Applied Physiology* in 2011, researchers used a study-group of 16 men and 16 women, and proved that a day's trip to the forest "significantly reduced blood pressure in all subjects, as well as urinary noradrenaline and dopamine levels" (Quing *et al*. 2845). In a similar study (published in the *Journal of Physiological Anthropology*) a team of researchers split up their test group into two groups – one group spent a day in the city and the other group in a nearby forest. The results of their study indicated that "the cerebral activity in the prefrontal area of the forest group was significantly lower than that of the group in the city" (Park *et al*. 123). The researchers also indicate that in their psychological evaluations, it was clear that spending time in the forest produced calmer, more comfortable feelings in the test-subjects (Park *et al*. 123). Finally, they come to the conclusion that their research indicates that "the forest is a restorative environment for human beings" (127).

This means that a space free of machines and skyscrapers quite literally improves the psychological and physical health of human beings. This "power" which nature has to restore the mind and body could well explain why an individual would turn to nature in times of great global and/or personal crisis. The research also indicates that people in urban areas are far more stressed than those who have spent time in natural surroundings. Thus, when the first factories, machines, metropolises and slums popped up during the Industrial Revolution, individuals at the time must have felt overwhelmed by this new and changing environment. Modernist poets (or any individuals living in the early twentieth century) must have felt equally, if not more, distressed by a world of skyscrapers, factories and war-machines. Cummings, like the Romantic poets, would often flee from the city and seek out a natural environment in times of political and personal crisis (Kennedy 258;395). Thus, nature became a refuge from cities, machines, and death, and offered a "restorative environment" that literally improved mental and physical health.

During both the Romantic and Modernist epochs it would seem that became the antithesis for a society or culture that was rapidly changing or even falling apart. These changes in society as a whole were quite possibly influenced by such factors as scientific progress, a decline in religious/spiritual belief, and industrialization, which led to a changing landscape and economic struggles. Yet, one must not lose sight of the most significant political and social events of these respective times, namely the French Revolution of the eighteenth century, and the World Wars of the twentieth century.

The eighteenth century saw quite a number of political upheavals and revolutions. According to Roberts, the first and most obvious of these revolutionary events was the dissolution of the first British Empire, which would later be known as the American Revolution (720). British parliament tried to impose taxes on Americans by means of duties on sugar and other goods imported to the colonies (Roberts 721). This brought on riots and boycotts in America, and in April 1775 British soldiers fought the first action of the American Revolution. The British lost the war which followed and in 1783 Britain officially recognized American independence (Cook & Stevenson 189). The American Revolution captured the imagination of the French, and many other Europeans, and quite possibly served as a catalyst for the ensuing political upheaval in Europe.

On the 14th of July, 1789, a mob of Parisians gathered in front of the Bastille prison (Williams 97). The restless crowd pushed their way across the draw-bridge to enter the courtyard, and by that same afternoon, with no further hope of defence, the Bastille had surrendered (Williams 97). The fall of the Bastille essentially started the French Revolution, which soon turned quite violent. A Parisian revolutionary journal, published 11 July 1791, captured the sentiments of the French Revolution by

writing that, “When the last king is hanged with the bowels of the last priest, the human race can hope for happiness” (Williams 97).

Lamont (275) states that the Romantic period in literature coincided with the French Revolution, which she believes was to some extent a political enactment of its ideas. Romanticism did, at least in its idealistic early stages, involve breaking out of the restrictive boundaries set by patterns of the past (Lamont 275). In the summer of 1790, around a year after the storming of the Bastille, William Wordsworth went on a walking tour of France and the Alps, and observed France at the height of its revolutionary hopefulness, which he shared at the time (Bloom & Trilling 124). Though he was forced to leave when Britain declared war on France, Wordsworth saw the French Revolution in its golden hours, and he was, no doubt, inspired by such a ground-breaking political and social event.

In the ensuing years of the Louis XVI was charged and condemned to death by guillotine in 1792 (Hayes 518). This was followed by the “Reign of Terror, which lasted from the summer of 1793 to the summer of 1794 (Hayes 522). France became “revolutionary with strokes of the guillotine” and it is estimated that around 5000 individuals were executed in Paris during the Reign of Terror (Hayes 522). In addition to the arbitrary slaughter of royalists and reactionaries, radical steps were taken to de-Christianize France, which included a revolutionary calendar which was partly designed to do away with Sunday observances (Hayes 525). This means that, along with Enlightenment scepticism, religion in Europe, or at least in France, was also damaged by the French Revolution.

Soon, other governments across Europe started to fear that their own countries would also move towards violent revolutions. In London, the traditional English liberties of free press, free speech and the rights of petition and assembly were frequently denied by the ever-fearful government and Britain was beginning to experience the same sort of social unrest that had overthrown the French social order (Bloom & Trilling 7). Britain was soon at war with France, which caused price inflation and food shortages for the masses and brought on economic depression, unemployment and class unrest (Bloom & Trilling 8), though the unrest in England did not lead to a revolution, as it did in France.

The failure of the French Revolution and the disenchantment that followed seemed to have an effect on the younger generation of Romantic poets. During this time, the young Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose radical religious and political views started early in life, already rebelled against the school system at Eton (Lamont 300). Shelley was also expelled from University College, Oxford, in March 1811, after less than six months in residence, during which he co-authored and published a pamphlet titled *The Necessity of Atheism* (Lamont 300). The disillusionment that accompanied the failure of the French Revolution often manifested in the even more radical political views of the younger generation of the Romantics, which included Shelley and his close friend, Lord Byron.

The failure of the French Revolution to establish a functioning democracy (along with the bloody Reign of Terror and the Anglo-French wars) easily caused cynicism among Europeans who initially supported the Revolution's ideals of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity", as suggested by Rousseau. Even after the war had ended, peace brought on economic collapse, which must have led to further distress among European individuals. Along with the violence and disillusionment of war, the cracks in a centuries-old societal structure started to show. Both the American and French Revolutions showed that it was possible to topple the authority of monarchies that had existed for many generations. This means that the world was not only changing due to the Industrial Revolution, but that the fabric of society was quickly unravelling, since the Romantic age saw the rise of the middle-class, as well as wide-spread rebellion against governments and authority figures. It is possible that disillusionment and violence brought on by the French Revolution, as well as the toppling of societal structures of power, prompted an appreciation for natural surroundings, simply because nature seemed stable and uncorrupted when opposed to Western society of the time. Nature could have acted as an antithesis to culture and society by becoming a refuge and a restorative environment in times of political crisis.

As violent as the French Revolution seemed at the time, and as significant as it still is to this date, the revolution that excited most of Europe in the eighteenth century is but a drop in the bucket compared to the World Wars of the twentieth century. "[I]n or about December 1910 human character changed" – this paradigm shift was observed by the author, Virginia Woolf in her 1924 essay, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown". The world in which Modernism developed was changing rapidly due to science, technology and urbanization. A mere four years after Woolf first observed the change in human behaviour the world would be changed forever by the First World War.

The First World War (1914-1919), or the Great War of as it used to be called, is thought of as bringing cataclysmic changes in the life and thought of the Western world (Bergonzi 414). The author, Henry James, who was around seventy years old at the time, was one of the few people who, in its early stages, sensed that the war would end in absolute disaster. On the 5th of August, 1914 he wrote the following in a letter to his friend, Howard Sturgis:

> The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness by the wanton feat of those two infamous autocrats is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and *meaning* is too tragic for any words.

James' predictions about the tragedy that lies ahead would unfortunately come true. Roberts writes that the First World War was "the most intensely fought struggle and the greatest in geographical extent" to have occurred up to that time (886). He continues that nations from every continent took part, and that whole societies were mobilized to fight, partly because it was also the first war in which machines played an overwhelmingly important role (886). According to Williams the first global war ended in the deaths of around 1.8 million Germans, 1.7 million Russians, 1.4 million French, 1.2 million Austrians and Hungarians, 900,000 British imperial subjects, 460,000 Italians, 325,000 Turks and 115,000 US citizens, while 20 million soldiers had also been maimed or wounded (148). It is unfortunate, as Williams (148) also suggests, that European politics over the next twenty years would prove that not one of these deaths and injuries had contributed to a resolution of the problems which had plunged the continent in a new and terrible darkness.

Roberts believes that The Great War caused unprecedented psychological damage, due to the spiritual havoc it left in its wake, along with "the destruction of ideals, confidence and goodwill" (Roberts 899). He notes that Europeans had looked at their massive cemeteries and were appalled at what they had done (899). On top of all this, the economic damage done by the war was immense, and across Europe people were literally starving to death (Roberts 899). During the First World War, E.E. Cummings was a volunteer for the Red Cross in France; during this time he was detained at La Ferté-Macé in 1917 (Kennedy 156). Food and sanitation were apparently inadequate, and between forty and fifty men were living in filth, often being diseased and stiff with cold (Kennedy 156). Cummings spent a few months in the prison and was only freed in December and sent to the American Embassy in Paris (156). Cummings had seen some of the worst conditions the war had to offer and he wrote about his experiences in The Enormous Room (1922). In 1918, Cummings was drafted into the army again (Kennedy 170) and he was only discharged in January 1919 (Kennedy 198). Though he wasn't as directly involved in the war as Cummings, T.S. Eliot (who was born in St Louis, Missouri) came to Oxford for postgraduate studies in 1914, during which time he composed some of the earliest fragments of *The Waste Land* (North 293).

On 28 June, 1919, a peace treaty between Germany and the Allied Powers was signed at Versailles. The treaty declared that Germany was responsible for the war, and it made the country liable for the payment of damages caused by the war (Cook & Stevenson 297). An unfortunate side-effect of the Versailles Treaty, as Williams (155) states, is that it later created Hitler's opportunity. The reparation clauses, which tried to force Germany to pay the bill for the war, created German resentment and aroused Western liberal sympathy for the country (Williams 155).

Bergonzi believes that, in much writing of the twenties, the Great War "exists as a pervasive memory, or as a deep fissure in recent historical experience" (428). 1922 was the "*annus mirabilis"* of

Modernism according to Bergonzi, since it was the year in which both Joyce's *Ulysses* and Eliot's *The Waste Land* were published – two texts "which had an incalculable effect on the writing that followed them" (425). Perhaps it was the fear and uncertainty that war left in its wake which had inspired two works that considered the estrangement and dislocation many people probably felt at the time.

Roberts continues that, though it is difficult to pinpoint intellectual and spiritual trends of any age, during the years between the wars the intellectual elite (but I suppose any thinking persons) realised that "the old foundations were no longer firm" (945). Though many "still clung to old shibboleths" and some people still attended religious services, "the masses of industrial cities lived in a post-Christian world in which the physical removal of the institutions and symbols of religion would have made little difference to their daily lives" (Roberts 946). Along with this decline in religion, Roberts believes (as previously noted) that during the late 1920's and the 1930's previous certainties about independence of the individual, objective moral criteria, rationality, authority, and an explicable mechanical universe all seemed to be "going under" (946).

Unfortunately, circumstances in Europe would eventually become even worse. The ambition to link East Prussia to Germany by a corridor of Polish territory led the infamous dictator, Adolf Hitler to lay claim to the mostly German inhabited city of Gdansk (Williams 156). The Poles obviously objected to Hitler's plan, and obtained a British guarantee against a German attack. In spite of the British guarantee, Hitler went on to attack Poland, and so began the Second World War on 1 September 1939 (Roberts 957).

It was during these early years of the Second World War that T.S. Eliot wrote three of the *Four Quartets*. "East Coker" was published in 1940, "The Dry Salvages" in 1941, and "Little Gidding" in 1942 (Dodsworth 454). The titles refer to places with special meaning for Eliot, but Dodsworth argues that this personal element is merely a starting-point for attempts to uncover matters of universal importance (454). The outbreak of World War II most certainly had a profound effect on *Four Quartets*. Dodsworth writes that Eliot takes into his poems "a little of the machinery of war", including the raiding plane, a warden at his post, and "the drift of the sea and the drifting wreckage" (455). Eliot himself served as an air raid warden in London during the worst of the air raids (or Blitzkrieg), and the destruction that he had witnessed is described in "Little Gidding" (Reynolds *Eliot's Little Gidding*). Ian Pindar writes that, according to Daniel Swift's *Bomber County,* Eliot later explained how the lines in "Little Gidding" beginning with "Ash on an old man's sleeve" refer to the debris of a bombing raid hanging in the air for hours afterwards, and that the falling dust would "cover one's sleeves and coat in a fine white ash".

In April 1945 Soviet soldiers reached Berlin, and many German cities were left in ruins by massive aerial attacks, and on the 30th of April (1945) Hitler committed suicide in a bunker under the ruins of Berlin (Roberts 963). After Hitler's suicide the war in Europe came to a halt, but the conflict between America and the Far East took a few months longer to be resolved (Roberts 963). On the sixth of August, 1945, an atomic bomb bizarrely dubbed "Little Boy" was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima by a US bomber plane at about 08:15 (Williams 162). The explosive energy and heat reduced almost the entire city to ash, and around 100,000 people were killed, while 70,000 were injured (Williams 162). Three days later "Fat Man" – a second atomic bomb – was dropped on the city of Nagasaki, with similar cataclysmic results (Williams 162). In September of 1945 the Japanese troops finally surrendered; this was the last formal surrender of a power involved in the global struggle and it therefore marked the end of World War II (Williams 164).

Among the military personnel who served during World War II, the USSR lost 7.5 million, Germany nearly 2.9 million, China lost 2.2 million, Japan 1.5 million, the UK 398 000, Italy 300 00, the USA 290 000, France 211 000, Canada 39 139, India 36 092, Australia 29 395, New Zealand 12 262, South Africa 8 681 and the remaining territories of the British Empire lost 30,776 soldiers (Williams 164). Williams writes that, for the first time in armed warfare, the combatant countries' civilian populations were attacked on a major scale and, though there is no precise figure for civilian deaths, the total is unlikely to be less than 40 million (164). Dodsworth believes that "The Second World War was safer for the military than for the civilian stay-at-homes", since it was highly mobile and thoroughly mechanized. Roberts concludes that, though it was possible to embrace the illusion that an old order might be restored after World War I, nobody could believe such a thing after 1945 (968).

Amidst this massive collapse of Western society in the early twentieth century, nature poetry had enjoyed a revival, according to Langbaum (as mentioned in the first chapter), and he points the reader to Modernist poets like Stevens and Moore who wrote nature poems, or poems containing natural imagery (102). Langbaum suggested that these particular poets looked at nature as an "unmeaning nullity" and as a world that is almost alien to humans. E.E. Cummings, as previously mentioned, also wrote nature poetry during this time, even if his nature poetry had peculiarly Romantic traits. During the Great Depression between the wars, Cummings had tried, and failed, to have his collection of poems, which he later called *No Thanks*, published (Kennedy 350). Interestingly, many of the poems in this collection dealt with nature. Kennedy writes that, "The poems celebrate an openly felt response to the beauties of the natural world – stars, snow, birds, flowers, and even such minor miracles as grasshoppers or mice. The poems optimistically express joy in the time of beginnings, spring, and they give first place to love among all the feelings…" (353). He continues that the two "star" poems which conclude *No Thanks* signalled a novelty in Cummings' oeuvre, namely a religious tone

(Kennedy 356). It is thought-provoking that in the difficult times faced by America in the wake of the Great War, Cummings chose to turn to nature, and to spirituality.

Kennedy continues that during times of personal/emotional crisis Cummings often fled from the city to seek refuge in natural surroundings – the very same thing Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley did. He chose to spend most of his time on Joy farm during WWII, and during his divorce from his first wife, Cummings spent time on a friend's estate, where he had, one night, slept outside under pine trees, and woke up to the murmur of a nearby brook (Kennedy 258). Years later he wrote the following about his experience that evening: "I've never forgotten & shall, I hope, never forget my dying night alone in your forest, with healing of fragrance under & around me; & my waking into a mystery of rebirth" (Kennedy 258). This indicates that, for Cummings, nature was a healing space, in which perhaps profound spiritual experiences were possible.

Eliot also acknowledged the profundity of nature's influence. As mentioned before, Eliot himself referred to "nature's spirit" and "its meaningful energy, which moves one", and he believed that the earth could have the power to influence almost everything, "including poetic thought" (Terblanche 57). This "agency" or power that nature has is apparent in the desert landscape of *The Waste Land* (Section V, "What the Thunder Said") in which the Thunder god speaks. In "Burnt Norton", the first of the *Four Quartets*, there are supernatural beings inhabiting the rose garden, and in the open field described in "East Coker", one may, on a summer midnight, hear the sound of a drum and perceive ancient dancers around the fire. Thus, along with an agency or "energy" that nature has, Eliot depicts nature as a supernatural space, in which mystical elements exist and may be perceived.

The examples above lead one to the question of *why* these poets turned to nature during and after the war. I would argue that, as society and culture started to collapse (much as in the eighteenth century), people once again started turning to nature, since it seemed like something that remains constant and "good", while the world of humans was corrupted, and changing rapidly. During the Romantic and Modernist periods, society and culture were no longer authoritative structures that created order and meaning in the world, but rather hung like a dark cloud over humanity. The violence during both the French Revolution and the World Wars caused disillusionment and a severe loss of meaning. Individuals might have questioned if culture and society had any meaning, and how humans could partake in such gratuitous violence. Society and the world of humans must have seemed ghastly and cruel, so it makes sense that during these times people would turn away from a crumbling culture and towards a steadfast nature. That is not to say that nature doesn't change. Ecosystems evolve over time, and landscapes change with the seasons. Yet nature always seems more fixed and certain than society does. Mountains erode, but do not move from where they have been for millennia, and a great forest or a large old tree (if not destroyed by humans) will remain in its place for decades or even centuries.

Perhaps, then, people turned to nature to make sense of the chaotic society that surrounded them. Also, if one considers the scientific findings that spending time in nature actually reduces stress and depression, the flight from cities to natural spaces makes even more sense, since such dark and violent times would inevitably cause trauma and anxiety.

Yet nature is more than a stress-relieving treatment. Nature has within it a power – a power that draws us toward it, and influences the human mind. E.E. Cummings found extraordinary experiences in ordinary things, while Eliot saw moments of eternity and enlightenment in the rose garden of "Burnt Norton" and a heard a deity's voice in the rumbling of thunder. Percy Shelley found the universe of all things rolling in the River Arve in his "Mont Blanc", and in the beauty of nature, described in "Tintern Abbey", William Wordsworth could, at least for a moment, observe a presence that is more-than human. Perhaps these poets are right, that there are supernatural powers residing in nature, or perhaps natural surroundings stimulate the mind in such a way that one becomes aware of a more-than-human presence, and a universal connectedness. I cannot say for sure what it is about nature that perpetually draws people toward it, but in light of the discussion above I would posit that tumultuous times of political upheaval, violence and uncertainty lead to an increase in the appreciation of nature, and the revival of nature poetry as Langbaum first observed.

The historical information that I have mentioned above suggests that there are historic similarities between the Romantic and Modernist epochs that influenced the general "turn to nature" in the art and poetry of these times. These socio-historical circumstances which seem to perpetuate the interest in nature and nature poetry could be summarised as follows: 1) mass-industrialization and urbanization; 2) political upheaval and the sudden subversion of authoritative systems; 3) terror and disillusionment caused by wide-spread violence and warfare; 4) scientific findings that change the way people understand the universe and their place within it; 5) a sharp decline in spirituality and religious belief; and finally 6) a general loss of meaning, since things that seemed significant before (government, religion, morality) were now rendered powerless.

In light of these findings, one could speculate that Ecocriticism *itself* may be such a revival of nature in literature (even if it is in literary criticism). It could hardly be a coincidence that Alicia Nitecki (mentioned in the previous chapter) founded *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* in 1989 – the very same year that the Berlin wall was torn down. In fact, as Cheryll Glotfelty (xvii) states, the beginnings of environmental literary studies can be traced back to the 1980's. This is particularly interesting, seeing as the early 80's was, according to Wallenfeldt, a period of renewed Cold War tensions, as America and Russia continued their massive arms and aerospace build-up, and competed for influence in the Third World (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Could ecocriticism be the latest "turn to

nature", that was initially spurred on by renewed political tensions on a global scale? Answering this question would probably constitute an entirely new study, but this is certainly food for thought.

In order to summarize my findings in this extensive chapter, I would remind the reader of two things. The first is that there are striking historical similarities between the Romantic and Modernist epochs, namely: mass-industrialization and urbanization, the subversion of authoritative/political systems, disillusionment caused by violence and warfare, scientific findings that changed people's understanding of the universe, a general decline in spirituality/religious belief, and the sense of a loss of meaning in society due to the aforementioned circumstances. These repeating circumstances most likely influenced the interest, or the revival of an interest, in nature. Secondly, the crumbling of culture (due to an overall loss of meaning) leads people back to nature, in search of meaningful experiences. When society becomes a dark cloud hanging over humanity, humans return to their roots in nature, and nature becomes a type of final refuge where meaning is still possible after it has become lost within the cultural context.

Now that I have discussed possible reasons *why* the Romantic and Modernist epochs saw a turn to nature, I wish to further examine how the particular poets I have selected (Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot and Cummings) portray nature in their various poetic projects. As mentioned before, these four poets seem to think of nature as a supernatural space in which significant experience is possible. Thus, the next chapter will aim to illustrate the continuities between Romantic and Modernist nature poetry by means of comparing the portrayal of nature in the poetry of Eliot and Cummings with that of Shelley and Wordsworth.

Chapter 4 – The Life of Things

Analysis of the depiction of nature, and continuities in Romantic and Modernist Poetry

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In the previous chapter I have illustrated that there is a link between the historical circumstances of the Romantic and Modernist paradigms and these respective movements' interest in nature or natural surroundings. In fact, the human interest in, or relationship with, nature plays such a large role in our understanding of history that, in *Literature and The Crime Against Nature*, Keith Sagar (143) writes that

> The history of our civilization can be written as the story of our idea of and attitude towards nature; that is, nature considered not just as landscape, flora and fauna, but as all the sciences, human nature, life and death. It is a short step to say nature is everything.

This is a profound statement, which highlights the importance of the relationship between human beings and the world around them. But the focus of this study is the relationship between poetry and nature itself, or observable natural phenomena (and not human nature or natural science and so forth). As seen in the previous chapter, the socio-historic similarities that perpetuated the artistic interest in nature during Romanticism and Modernism, were as follows: 1) mass-industrialization and rapid urbanization, 2) the sudden subversion of authoritative and/or political systems, 3) the disillusionment caused by violence and warfare, 4) scientific findings that changed people's understanding of the world, 5) a general decline in spirituality or religious belief, 6) and the general sense of a loss of meaning in society due to the aforementioned factors.

These recurrent circumstances indicate, at least to some extent, why individuals and artists turned to nature during the Romantic and Modernist periods. The final questions left to answer are *how the selected poets portray nature* in their respective poetic projects, and *what sort of continuities are present* in these particular Romantic and Modernist poets' portrayals of nature. It would be useful to keep the above-mentioned historical factors in mind, in order to understand how these historic aspects might have influenced the poets' portrayal of the natural world. I will be examining examples from the poetic oeuvre's of William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, T.S. Eliot, and E.E. Cummings to showcase the continuities which exist in the nature poetry of these particular Romantic and Modernist

poets. Since this dissertation is essentially ecocritical, with a particular focus on the relationship between poetry and nature, I will not examine the entire oeuvre of any of the above-mentioned poets. This chapter will focus on poems by Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot, and Cummings in which nature, or natural imagery, is particularly conspicuous.

In *The Nature of Modernism* (2017) Elizabeth Black states that nature often stands as an alternative model to modernity's homogenous drive, and that the interest in nature represents an act of protest against the reduction of nature to a human commodity. Black proposes that Modernist nature poetry (she specifically refers to Eliot's *The Waste Land*) is most often an "expression of acute anxiety in response to environmental change that recognises that the treatment of nature is inseparable from the physical, moral and cultural future of humanity" (*Nature of Modernism*).

The psychological effects of the modern separation from nature are not, at least from what I could gather, receiving the necessary attention in academic and even medical studies. Cheryl Glotfelty (2) also states that psychology has long ignored nature in its theories of the human mind, and that very few contemporary psychologists are exploring the link between the environment and mental health, though she does refer to some recent theories which suggest that the modern estrangement from nature is a cause of societal and mental ills. I must mention, however, that by May 2020, Glenn Albrecht's book *Earth Emotions* will be published, in which he ambitiously seeks to describe and name novel psychological reactions to the natural world, one of these apparently being "psychoterratica" which refers to the anxiety caused by the disconnection from nature.

As exciting as such new developments in ecocriticism and eco-psychology may be, the feeling of being disconnected from the natural world is hardly new. In the previous chapter it became clear that the Enlightenment of the seventeenth century and the Industrial Revolution which soon followed changed the physical and mental landscape of the Western world forever. Nature was now reduced to a machine, in which there was little place left for any supernatural forces. Rapid urbanization also took place, and people where physically separated from nature when they went to live in large, industrialized cities filled with large buildings and unsightly factories. In fact, the mental and physical separation from the natural world is already obvious in the following poem by Wordsworth, published in 1807:

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
> This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
> The winds that will be howling at all hours,
> And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
> For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

> It moves us not. – Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn. (*The Works of Wordsworth,* 259)

Keith Sagar argues that, in this poem at least, Wordsworth's sympathies with nature were not aesthetic, but rather even pagan, and that the poem is "a heartfelt plea for a recovery of the squandered blessing of a sacred natural environment" (145). The speaker reminds us that we have lost our harmonious relationship with earth and natural surroundings, and that humans have become blind to the splendour and beauty of nature, since it "moves us not." In this poem humans have become utterly, and perhaps irreparably, separated from the natural world. The speaker finds this disconnection from nature distressing to the point that he wishes rather to be a pagan, in order to connect with nature, to experience that which is mystical and perhaps even meaningful in his surroundings, in order to feel less "forlorn." I believe that these lines express a sense of the loss of meaning caused by the Enlightenment; since nature was a mere machine, there could be no sense of enchantment, and certainly very little belief in any meaningful supernatural experience.

Here, I would like to interrupt myself, because I realise that my reader might find it strange that I refer to the disconnection from nature, when I actually wish to prove that there was a deliberate turn to nature in the Romantic and Modernist periods. Yet, one must consider that, as Terblanche observes, the poetic portrayal of the "loss of meaningful connection with Earth points exactly into the meaningfulness of that connection" (2). This "loss of connection" with nature is particularly evident in the poetry of Eliot. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the speaker, when considering his natural surroundings for a moment, makes the following observation:

> I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
> I do not think they will sing to me. (*Selected Poems*, lines 124-125)

Much like the speaker in Wordsworth's sonnet, the speaker in this poem (supposedly Mr Prufrock) laments the fact that that which is supernatural or mythical in nature has suddenly become unavailable to him. This idea is later repeated in *The Waste Land*. In "The Fire Sermon," the speaker (looking at the Thames River) states the following:

> The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
> Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
> Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed. (*TWL*, lines 173-175)

Again in line 180 the speaker repeats that "The nymphs are departed." There is a definite sense of disenchantment and disconnection. The wind remains unheard, and the river is devoid of all supernatural associations. Note that in the three above-mentioned poems, the separation from nature is

indicated by the absence of mythological creatures (Triton, mermaids and nymphs). Again this absence of the supernatural is a comment on the effect of advances in science, since the universe was reduced to observable natural phenomena, with little to no place for intuitive or spiritual experience. The reduction of earth to only that which is immediately observable is also evident in the following Modernist poem by Cummings:

> now air is air and thing is thing:no bliss
>
> of heavenly earth beguiles our spirits,whose
> miraculously disenchanted eyes
>
> live the magnificent honesty of space.
>
> Mountains are mountains now;skies now are skies –
> and such a sharpening freedom lifts our blood
> as if whole supreme this complete doubtless
>
> universe we'd(and we alone had)made
>
> – yes;or as if our souls,awakened from
> summer's green trance,would not adventure soon
> a deeper magic:that white sleep wherein
> all human curiousity we'll spend
> (gladly,as lovers must)immortal and
>
> the courage to receive time's mightiest dream (*Collected Poems*, 675)

In this poem Cummings very clearly indicates our emotional and intuitive separation from nature, seen through "disenchanted eyes". The sky is only the sky, and things are merely things. There is no deeper meaning, no connection, and people no longer understand (or feel the need to understand) their place in the grand scheme of things.

I believe the roots of the disenchantment and disconnection with nature lies both in scientific progress and in rapid urbanization. Though science caused an emotional or spiritual disconnection from the natural world, urbanization caused a physical separation. The city, and its separation from the larger natural world, is an important motif in both Romantic poetry (especially the poetry of William Blake) and Modernist poetry. The city plays a significant role in the poetry of T.S. Eliot, perhaps because he lived in London for most of his adult life. Terblanche writes that Eliot's poetic cities are fragmented spaces, suspended in time, with no link to timelessness (54). (Timelessness, or rather the intersection of time and timelessness, is often the crux of Eliot's poetry; he indicates that these moments "in and out of time" are moments of true meaning or wholeness. This concept, however, constitutes its own study, and I will not delve into it any further at present). Terblanche continues that these city-spaces in Eliot's poetry seem to be dislocated from any sense of eternity, as well as coexistence with "Earth", in which case, all matter "turns dormant" (54). Like in Cummings' poem above, in Eliot's city, "thing is

thing," and nothing really holds meaning or significance. This meaningless city is prominent in "Prufrock", as seen in the lines stating: When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherised upon a table (lines 2-3). The sky is dormant, like an unconscious patient on a table; there is no meaning, and no sense of enchantment or admiration for the evening sky (which is usually quite beautiful if one actually bothers to look). I would argue that this disenchantment by no means indicates a fault with the sky, but rather with the speaker, who can no longer appreciate it.

There is a similar situation in Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", which is hardly a rhapsody at all. The speaker makes his way home during night-time in a city (supposedly London, but it could really be any modern city), and makes the following observation:

> Regard the moon,
> *La lune no garde aucune rancune*,
> She winks a feeble eye,
> She smiles into corners,
> She smooths the hair of the grass.
> The moon has lost her memory. (*Selected Poems*, lines 50-55)

The moon, though as bright and lovely as ever, goes unnoticed. Nobody cares for the moonlight, illuminating the night sky, or peeping through windows. The speaker states that the moon's memory is lost; however, in truth, the moon is just the same as it has been for billions of years. The fault does not lie with the moon, but with the humans who gaze upon her. I believe the city dwellers are at fault, since they have lost the capacity to appreciate the beauty of the moon and other natural phenomena.

Yet line 51 (*La lune no garde aucune rancune*) indicates that, in spite of human ignorance, the moon holds no grudge. The moon, holding (or not holding a grudge) indicates a somewhat supernatural element. In all likelihood, his is a reference to the fact that for millennia, the moon was regarded as a deity by several cultures around the world. The speaker in the poem indicates that there is some sort of secret life in natural phenomena, something beyond our everyday understanding. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the wind and fog blowing outside seem to be a living being:

> The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
> The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
> Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
> Lingered upon pools that stand in drains,
> Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
> Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
> And seeing that it was a soft October night,
> Curled once about the house and fell asleep. (*Selected Poems*, lines 15-22)

In other poems by Eliot, the wind also seems to have a supernatural aspect or a connection to the supernatural. In part II of "Ash Wednesday" (lines 62-64), the speaker states:

[…] And God said
Prophesy to the wind, to the wind only for only
The wind will listen.

There is no one to listen to God's prophesy, or at least nobody is willing to listen. Only the wind hears the voice of the deity. In the poem, "Gerontion," the old male speaker also mentions an empty church, which is only home to the wind. One must, given these extracts, consider the spiritual aspect of the wind in Eliot's poetry. The wind remains connected to religion and God, or in a broader sense spirituality and a deeper meaning, while humans seem to have abandoned such things. In fact, in *The Waste Land* ("A game of chess"), the wind becomes a disturbing reminder of things people have tried to forget, as is clear in the following conversation between a nervous woman and her seemingly irritable male companion:

"What is that noise?"
The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.
"Do
"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
"Nothing?"
I remember (*TWL*, lines 117-124)

The noise of the wind (or maybe noise carried by the wind) troubles the woman greatly. Again, this extract points to a disconnection from nature or natural phenomena which tends to occur in urban settings. Yet, the woman experiences far more than the simple movement of air, unlike her oblivious male partner. The wind, I suppose, could merely be a symbol for inspiration as it has been in many poems in the centuries leading up to the Modernist movement, but given Eliot's oeuvre, I would argue that it means more than that. The wind is a connection, I believe, to the realm of spirituality or God. The woman is disturbed by the wind, perhaps because it reminds her of something (or "Nothing") which she has somehow forgotten, or deliberately tried to forget. In fact, she confronts her ignorant partner for his inability to know, see, and remember (though one cannot be entirely sure what exactly the woman is referring to).

This "scene" from *The Waste Land* is a striking demonstration of the human disconnection from the world that surrounds us – be it the natural or spiritual world. It is also worth noting that nature, or a natural phenomenon, awakens some deeper sense or thought in at least one of the characters, causing her to know, see, and remember some half-forgotten thing.

The wind is not the only natural phenomenon with supernatural connotations in Eliot's poetry. There are many more examples throughout his poetry that I will discuss in the course of this chapter. Yet,

sticking to the theme of disconnection from the natural (and spiritual) realm, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the following extract from "The Dry Salvages", the third of Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

> I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
> Is a strong brown god – sullen, untamed and intractable,
> […]
> The only problem confronting the builder of bridges.
> The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten
> By the dwellers in cities – ever, however, implacable.
> Keeping his seasons, and rages, destroyer, reminder
> Of what men choose to forget. Unhonoured, unpropitiated
> By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting.
> His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,
> In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,
> In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
> And the evening circle in the winter gaslight.
>
> The river is within us, the sea is all about us
> […]
>
> The sea has many voices
> Many gods and many voices.

The speaker implies that the river is a god – a common belief in a variety of non-Western religions (such as Hinduism). Yet the river-god, or rather the sacredness of the river, has long been forgotten by humans who have built bridges over mighty streams. The river is no longer valued by "worshippers of the machine." This, I believe is a comment on industrialization and urbanization, and how society has, in itself, become a force that disconnects human beings from the natural world. Humans are, in a sense, blinded by culture, society and progress to the point that the sacredness and the strength of nature fades from memory. Yet the river, "keeping his seasons" acts as a "destroyer." Floods from the river destroy that which was built by humans, or can even prove to be fatal. The river reminds humans that they are vulnerable, and all they have made will come to an end. Thus, the river (or river god) is the "reminder / Of what men choose to forget." Perhaps this is what the woman in "A Game of Chess" (*TWL*) realises, or remembers, when she hears the noise of the wind. This idea is also present in Shelley's "Ozymandias," in which time and the desert destroys all things built by a once powerful king.

I would argue that these poems contain something of the Sublime experience, in which humans are reminded of their own vulnerability, or "smallness" and insignificance compared to the overwhelmingly large and powerful natural realm.

Yet, in spite of being somewhat forgotten, the river is present in the life of humans, who are perpetually connected to it. According to the speaker the rhythm of the river is with us in the nursery, its water gives life to trees on the courtyard, and fruits on the autumn table. Yet according to the speaker, this connection to the river isn't simply an outward connection. In fact, "The river is within us" and we are surrounded by the sea – filled with many gods and many voices. Again natural phenomena have a supernatural connection, but here Eliot's focus seems to shift from our disconnection with nature, to a deep and inherent connection to it. It is interesting that Eliot should use the symbol of the river to illustrate the connection between humans and the natural realm, since this exact symbol (if one may call it that) appears in poems by both Wordsworth and Shelley in the previous century.

In Book First of *The Prelude* (Childhood and School Time), first published in 1805, Wordsworth writes the following:

> Was it for this
> That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
> To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
> and from his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
> That flowed along my dreams? (*The Prelude*, lines 272-276)

In this particular extract of Wordsworth's monumental work, he implies that the river (or at least its murmur) was present in his life and mind since his days in the nursery – a sentiment repeated by Eliot in "The Dry Salvages." This begs the question, what do these references to the river mean? Perhaps the humming of a mother or nurse is much like the murmur of a river – a flowing, soft soothing noise. The poets could also be referring to real rivers in the places they had lived as children. This explanation could explain the "presence" of the river in a nursery; however I would argue that there is more to the symbol of the river than this literal understanding. The symbolic value of the river finds its most true expression in Shelley's "Mont Blanc." I the opening lines of this poem, the speaker states that:

> The everlasting universe of things
> Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
> Now dark – now glittering – now reflecting gloom –
> Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
> The source of human thought its tribute brings
> Of waters … (*Oxford Anthology*, lines 1-6)

Here the river is home to "the everlasting universe of things." Yet this "universe of things" flows both in the river and in the human mind. Firat Karadas who, in his thesis, writes extensively about the poetry of Shelley suggests that the poem illustrates an "elaborate scheme of reciprocity," in which the both the human mind and nature "exist in an unremitting interchange in which the life of one feeds the life of the other" (89). This excellent observation by Karadas also implies a deep-rooted connection between human beings and the natural world. I would even dare to say that the poem itself suggests a universal connection, in which all is connected to all. Is this perhaps also what Wordsworth and Eliot mean when they write that the river has been part of our lives since we were infants? I would like to suggest that this is exactly what these poets meant. The river, in its perpetual flow (which often seems to have no beginning or end) is a reminder of a universal connectedness, something more-than-human that permeates the universe and somehow connects everything to one another.

Karadas also believes that Shelley's "Mont Blanc" shows a natural scene which is eternal and unchanging, and seems to be unaffected by the destruction going on in society (89). This makes sense considering Shelley's disillusionment with the failure of the French Revolution, and the fact that he was a witness to the atrocities caused by the Industrial Revolution. Yet I find the presence of supernatural presences, and the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature to be the most powerful motif in the poem, as illustrated in the passage below:

> Thus thou, Ravine of Arve – dark, deep Ravine –
>
> […]
> Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
> From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne
> […]
> Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
> I seem in a trance sublime and strange
> To muse on my own separate fantasy,
> My own, human mind, which passively
> Now renders and receives fast influencings,
> Holding an unremitting interchange
> With the clear universe of things around (*Oxford Anthology*, lines 12-40)

The river here, like in Eliot's "Dry Salvages" is a power, or a force, which possesses a godlike vitality. In this poem, the river influences the very mind of the onlooker, who receives "fast influencings" from it, but also by means of (or at least with help from) this great river enjoys a constant "interchange" with what he calls "the clear universe of things." Yet I don't think this so-called universe of things is always so clear. The poem implies that these universal complexities only become clear when the mind is deeply connected to the natural world. It is as though nature possesses the ability to make one aware of things previously unknown or unrealized. But this poem also suggests, as I have mentioned, the existence of a universal connectedness, which somehow unites not

only humans and nature, but all things. This idea is supported, to some extent, by Karadas, who states that in Romantic poetry (especially that of Wordsworth and Shelley) nature is transformed into a "breathing soul", which is home to the "spirits of the supernatural" (67). Furthermore, one of the most common aspects of Romantic nature poetry is thought to be the mind's relation to, or connection with, nature (Karadas, 67).

Jonathan Bate also refers to this idea of connectedness in his Romantic Ecology. He refers specifically to Wordsworth's philosophy which entails that everything is somehow linked to everything else (66). Bate (67) also refers to the critic, Charles Lamb, who wrote the following about Wordsworth and his nature poetry:

> To a mind constituted like that of Mr. Wordsworth, the stream, the torrent, and the stirring leaf – seem not merely to suggest associations of deity, but to be a kind of communication with it … In his poetry nothing in nature is dead.

Lamb's statement is evident throughout Wordsworth's poetry, in which the poet aims to see into what he calls (in Tintern Abbey, line 63) the "life of things." In some of the first lines of his well-known poem, "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth not only writes about, but typographically emphasizes and illustrates the connection he observes in nature:

> Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> That on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky. (*The Works of Wordsworth*, lines 6-10)

The cliffs literally, on a visual level, seem to connect the landscape with the sky. But it is more than that. The placement of the word, "connect", at the end of line 9, emphasises the entire concept of connection throughout nature, and also the connection between the poet's mind and its immediate natural surroundings.

In Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (as in "Mont Blanc") there is another vision of universal connectedness. In this poem, there is an invisible power that exists among all things on earth, and so seems to connect all things, as seen in the following extract:

> The awful Shadow of some unseen Power
> Floats though unseen among us – visiting
> This various world with as inconstant wing
> As summer winds that creep from flower to flower –
> Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,
> It visits with inconstant glance
> Each human heart and countenance;
> Like hues and harmonies of evening –

Like clouds in starlight widely spread (*Oxford Anthology*, lines 1-9)

Do keep in mind that in the early nineteenth century, the word "intellectual" didn't refer to things that were strictly cerebral. Bloom and Trilling, in a note on the poem, remind the reader that intellectual here refers to "that which is beyond the senses" (408); thus it can be applied to that which is intuitive or even supernatural. This being said, the supernatural being or "unseen Power" in the poem is among us, and in its mysterious way connecting us. Shelley likens this power to natural phenomena like the wind, moonbeams, sunsets and clouds in the evening sky. I would, however, argue that Shelley doesn't simply compare the "unseen Power" to these things, and that this poem suggests that this power is present in these natural occurrences *or* that such natural occurrences are a way by which one becomes aware of the existence of this more-than-human being or force that exists in the world. Perhaps then (if I may make such a bold statement) nature is part-and-parcel of this invisible force that both surrounds and enters the mind of each human being.

I find support for my argument in the poetry of E.E. Cummings. Though Cummings often doesn't get the recognition he deserves as an important Modernist poet, it wouldn't be hard to argue that he is an exceptional nature poet. In the following poem, Cummings brilliantly illustrates not only the "smallness" of humans compared to the vastness of nature, but he also demonstrated the universal connectedness between all things:

little man
(in a hurry
full of an
important worry)
halt stop forget relax

wait

(little child
who have tried
who have failed
who have cried)
lie bravely down

sleep

big rain
big snow
big sun
big moon
(enter

us) (*Complete Poems*, 393)

This poem, simple as it seems, is a highly successful illustration of the connections between all things – much like one would find in Eastern religion and philosophy. Terblanche also explores the Taoist

aspect of Cummings' poetry, seeing as Taoism advocates an appreciation of the continuous flow of nature's way, as well as being "in sync" with the concrete and changing "hanging together" of nature (180). This poem reminds us that we are "little", while nature and the universe are "big." Yet this big universe enters us, and (I believe) connects us to something greater than ourselves. Terblanche also states that for Cummings an increased closeness to one's "earthiness" (here meaning one's connection to earth) brings about an increased sense of insight and wisdom (180). This explanation of Taoist aspects in Cummings supports the notion of connectedness, or at least the importance thereof. Yet I believe this poem illustrates not only the *idea* of connectedness, but rather argues that we *are* connected to the world around us, whether we realise it or not. Big rain, snow, sun and moon enter the minds and hearts of little humans, and through this we may gain perspective and understand our own place in the world. This understanding of one's place in the grand scheme of things might have been particularly helpful to most individuals living in the Modernist epoch, seeing as many people lost the sense of meaningful existence, due to such movements as Nihilism, as well as the emotional shock brought about by scientific progress and global violence.

So, in the poems above, nature either personifies a universal connectedness, or natural surroundings facilitate the idea/feeling/realization of connectedness and understanding one's place in the universe. Either way, this affords what New Materialists would call "agency" to nature, in that nature is not a passive backdrop to the lives of humans, but that it is "alive" in every sense of the word, and has the ability to influence human onlookers. In a meeting with my mentor, Professor Terblanche, in October, 2018, he brilliantly stated that "at least in the cases of Cummings and Eliot, nature is not just a space, but also a force, a dynamism, an energy, a motion, an unfolding, a becoming – something active." If one considers this insightful observation, along with New Materialist descriptions of nature as having agency, it is but a short step to thinking of nature as supernatural. What I mean by this is that nature seems to possess something (though it would be hard to say exactly what) which is beyond our common, day-to-day understanding of a simple, observable machine-like universe.

Terblanche's idea that for Cummings (and Eliot) nature is alive and dynamic is beautifully illustrated in the "mOOn" poem below:

> mOOn Over tOwns mOOn
> whisper
> less creature huge grO
> pingness
>
> whO perfectly whO
> float
> newly alone is
> dreamest
>
> oNLY THE MooN o

VER ToWNS
SLoWLY SPRoUTING SPIR
IT (*Complete Poems*, 383)

In this poem, the moon is very much alive, whispering, yet making no noise, slowly rising, floating and setting, as if by its own volition. The moon in this poem is dreamy to look at, but perhaps also dreaming itself, and in the final lines, it's described as a slowly sprouting spirit. In this poem the moon becomes undeniably alive. It is a groping, moving dreaming being, and, like in the "little man" poem, this "big moon" enters not only the town, but also the speaker's mind. In the end, the speaker recognizes the moon as a "SPIR/IT" and, if I may venture to say so, gains some insight into the aliveness of all things in nature.

The idea of nature being alive, or a dynamic force certainly isn't exclusive to the poetry of Cummings. It's an idea that stretches across millennia. And it is wonderfully expressed in the following, much-anthologized extract from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (Book I, 1850):

One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon's utmost boundary; for above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, and I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went having through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in the mooring-place I left my bark,
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense

> Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
> There hung a darkness, call it solitude
> Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
> Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
> Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
> But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
> Like living men, moved slowly through my mind
> By day, and were the trouble of my dreams. (*The Prelude*, lines 357-400)

In the first line, nature is personified as "her", and she leads the young poet on a small adventure that alters his view of the natural world forever. Karadas argues that, in Wordsworth's poetry, nature is often "mythologized as a 'mother' who 'mothers' its child/the poet about the ways of the world" (67). Karadas writes that, like Jean-Jacques Rosseau, Wordsworth suggests that nature is a teacher, which educated his young mind (and, I suppose the minds of many young lovers of nature). This idea is also evident a few lines on in Book I, where the poet writes:

> Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
> And on earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
> And Souls of lonely places!
> […]
> Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
> On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
> Impressed upon all forms the characters
> Of danger and desire; and thus did make
> The surface of the universal earth
> With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
> Work like a sea? (*The Prelude*, lines 464-475)

Again, nature is shown to have had a large influence on the mind of the poet during his childhood, teaching him about danger, desire, triumph, hope and fear. Thus many of life's greatest lessons were taught to the boy during his time in natural surroundings, perhaps by nature itself. In these extracts, nature gains an undeniable supernatural aspect. The speaker addresses the "Presences of Nature" and the "Souls of lonely places" which he feels deliberately influenced him during his boyhood. Nature has agency here, and a supernatural existence (or supernatural inhabitants) slightly beyond our understanding. The same is true in the first passage. Not only is nature personified as a she (or a mother, if one agrees with Karadas), but the entire landscape becomes alive. As the young boy rows along in a boat he borrowed (or rather stole for a little while), he sees the peak of a large, dark cliff appearing over the horizon. This peak frightens him, perhaps because it appears so suddenly or perhaps because he felt guilty for taking the boat and believes that the ancient cliff knows what he's doing. The young Wordsworth feels as though the dark cliff is following him "with a purpose of its own", as though it were a "living thing." The frightened boy rows back to the shore as quickly as he can, and heads home. Yet the experience doesn't leave him, and "for many days" afterward, he considers his frightful experience, and begins to consider the existence of "huge and mighty forms, that do not live / Like living men." This could easily be described as a child's experience of the

sublime, which simply frightened him. Yet in the case of Wordsworth, it was more than that. Perhaps this experience altered the way in which he perceived and portrayed nature throughout his entire life, truly believing in the idea that there was indeed a "secret life" in all natural things – a life that humans know nothing about.

This combination of the sublime experience and the supernatural aspect in nature is also present in Shelley's nature poetry. In "Ode to the West Wind" (1819), the speaker addresses the "wild West Wind", and describes how the action of the wind, blowing dead leaves and moving everything, including himself. The speaker's wish to be taken up by this strong wind and to share in the "impulse of thy [the wind's] strength" (line 46) is made clear. He continues and says, again to the personified West Wind:

> O uncontrollable! If even
> I were as in my boyhood, and could be
> The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
> As then, when to outstrip with skiey speed
> Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven
>
> As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
> Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud! (*Oxford Anthology*, lines 47-53)

The wind here is an energy or force, and the speaker addresses it as though it were a deity, praying or pleading with the wind to lift him up, or rather to lift his mind and spirit, as a leaf or a cloud. The speaker in this poem wishes to transcend his earthly boundaries, and he views the wind as a means of this "escape" from the drudgery of daily existence.

Shelley also depicts natural phenomena as deities in "Mont Blanc" (as I have mentioned before). Though Shelley called himself an atheist, in truth he was more of a pantheist, as seen in the following extract from "Mont Blanc":

> Is this the scene
> Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young
> Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
> Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
> None can reply – all seems eternal now.
> The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
> Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
> So solemn, so serene, that man may be,
> For such faith, with nature reconciled;
> Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
> Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
> By all, but which the wise, and great, and good

Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel. (*Oxford Anthology*, lines 71-83)

In this extract the crags and cliffs of the mountain are presented to be a result of an Earthquake daemon or spirit, who taught her craft to her young. Throughout the entire poem, the sublime and imposing landscape of Mont Blanc and the Arve seems to be inhabited by supernatural beings. Yet in the second part of the extract above, nature itself becomes a supernatural force, with a "mysterious tongue", and the mountain has a voice – in fact this voice can warn against or even reverse human vice. Yet it isn't understood by all; only those who are good and wise can understand nature's mysterious tongue. In these few lines, Shelley gives the reader a lot to consider. There seem to be supernatural beings that inhabit nature, and yet nature itself is supernatural, and engages in some form of supernatural communication with the human mind. To better understand this supernatural element in Shelley's poetry, Karadas (94) refers the reader to Shelley's surprisingly titled, "Essay on Christianity", in which Shelley (quoted by Karadas) states that "There is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended which visits with its breath our silent chords at will." This power is among us, connecting us, but also communicating with us in some silent way. Karadas believes that this "Power" is a pantheistic one, more specifically a connection between mind and nature, and that this connection is the root of what is sometimes referred to as the "Shelleyan Power" (94). This power remains present throughout "Mont Blanc", up until the very last lines, which state:

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high: – the power is there
The still and solemn power of many sights,
And many sounds, and much of life and death.
[…]
The secret Strength of things
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
Of Heaven is as a law, inhabits thee! (*Oxford Anthology*, lines 127-141)

Karadas argues that the speaker in the poem "mythologizes" the mountain as an "incorporeal Presence", and becomes lost in this landscape of myth, in which nature becomes "far greater than I" (92). What Karadas describes is essentially the Sublime experience, in which a human onlooker is reminded of their own smallness when confronted with the vastness of the natural landscape. Yet I do not agree that Shelley is "lost" in the myth he creates. I believe this poem portrays quite the opposite – that in greater-than-human nature, something is gained. This something being insight or meaning, or perhaps even spiritual experience, untethered from any organized religion or doctrine. In these mountains is the presence of a deity, identified throughout the poem as "Power" and "Strength." Shelley not only puts forward the idea of a massively powerful universal deity that is too large (for the lack of a better word) to be understood in terms of a single religious movement, but he also portrays the landscape as the home of this universal "Power."

In Shelley's nature poetry, the landscape is inhabited by supernatural powers, yet also possesses its own power to communicate with those who are wise. This is, to some extent, also true of Cummings' nature poetry, in which earth (and surrounding natural phenomena) is very much alive, and has the ability to influence humans. Nature's secret life, and agency is illustrated in the following poem:

O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting

fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and
poked

thee
,has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy

beauty .how
often have religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and

buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive
gods
(but
true

to the incomparable
couch of death thy
rhythmic
lover

thou answerest

them only with

spring) (*Complete Poems*, 58)

Nature in this poem is alive, and being prodded and poked by humans who all want answers from it – whether from a scientific or religious perspective. Yet nature, who has agency, keeps its secrets and answers the questions of these inquisitive and pesky humans only with spring. Spring hardly seems like an answer, and yet it is. Spring is an important motif in Cummings' oeuvre, signalling a "newness" and even a sort or rebirth. The poem does not imply that nature gives no answer to human questions, but rather that (as Shelley also implies) not everyone understands nature's communication. In another of Cummings' well-known Spring-poems, not earth, but spring itself is alive, and doing things:

Spring is like a perhaps hand
(which comes carefully

out of Nowhere)arranging
a window,into which people look(while
people stare
arranging and changing placing
carefully there a strange
thing and a known thing here)and

changing everything carefully

spring is like a perhaps
Hand in a window
(carefully to
and fro moving New and
Old things,while
people stare carefully
moving a perhaps
fraction of flower here placing
an inch of air there)and

without breaking anything. (*Complete Poems*, 197)

Spring has agency, yet remains a mysterious "perhaps hand" not quite understood by the humans who watch it. Nonetheless, Spring rearranges and changes the world, moving "New and / Old" things. This change Spring brings about in nature, in keeping with the Taoist notion of connectedness, also brings about a change in the minds of humans – or at least those individuals who "stare carefully". Despite Spring's power to move and renew things, it does so "without breaking anything." Spring's carefulness points to a type of humility, an understanding that it has no right to misuse its power. This could be a comment on the way humans, though insignificant when compared to earth, use the little power they have to destroy whatever they want for their own gain.

In the above poem by Cummings, as in the poetry of Wordsworth, nature acts as a sort of teacher, teaching humans to be careful and humble. I mention Wordsworth here, not only because of his portrayal of nature as a teacher, but because in his poem, "Nutting", the careful treatment of the natural world is also prioritised. The poem's speaker recalls a day during boyhood, "one of those heavenly days that cannot die" (line 3) when he collected nuts in the forest. He comes across a beautiful scene where hazelnut trees grow next to a small brook, and under the trees are many flowers. After spending some time there he rips the nuts from the branches and suddenly beholds the "mutilated bower" he left behind (line 70). Regretting what he has done, the speaker says the following:

I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky –
Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand

Touch – for there is a spirit in the woods. *(The Works of Wordsworth,* lines 52-56)

Keith Sagar writes that in "Nutting" there seems to be "an unforced testimony to the sacredness of nature and our sacrilegious dealings with it" (146). This is also true of Cummings' Spring poems above. Both these poets portray nature as a sacred space, either inhabited by a spirit or being a spirit in and of itself. Wordsworth and Cummings also comment on the way human beings "mutilate" and misuse the natural world. It is interesting to note environmental criticism in poetry that was written before the global environmental movement came to light. Perhaps this is the special gift that poets possess – being able to realize things long before the rest of us. Or maybe it was nature's own communication, understood by those who are good and wise (as Shelley suggests) that made them aware of things to come. Whatever the case might be, these poets portray nature as the realm of the supernatural, or that which is more-than-human.

Finally, I must draw the reader's attention to Eliot's portrayal of supernatural elements in nature. In "East Coker" (the second of the four quartets) the speaker observes a large field, and he tells the reader that,

In that open field
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close,
On a summer midnight, you can hear the music
Of the weak pipe and the little drum
And see them dancing around the bonfire
The association of man and woman
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie–
A dignified and commodious sacrament. ("East Coker", *FQ)*

The ghosts of a far distant past inhabit that field, dancing still around a fire. In *Four Quartets* the fire is an important symbol – signifying both earthly suffering and a rebirth through Pentecostal fire. Dancing also forms part of Eliot's "still point of the turning world", or the moments in which time and timelessness cross, in which meaning is made or understood. Thus, not only is this natural landscape inhabited by the ghosts or souls of ancient people, but this small field also contains (at least for a period of time) the meaningful centre that Eliot's poetry so desperately seeks. This implies that nature, for Eliot isn't simply the home of supernatural spirits, but also a sacred space where time and timelessness may cross, and great meaning may be found.

It isn't only in *Four Quartets* where nature is portrayed as a sacred and meaningful space. In "What the Thunder Said" (part of *The Waste Land*) Eliot shows the reader a desert scene, or a dry wasteland, where there "is no water but only rock / Rock and no water and the sandy road" (lines 331-332). Terblanche argues that Eliot's desertscapes have not been discussed to the extent that they deserve, and he believes that these deserts in Eliot's poetry act as a "distinct, vivid, and disturbing icon of

isolation and dislocation" (56). Perhaps this is Eliot's way of depicting the meaninglessness of daily existence – as a barren, inhospitable landscape in which there is no relief. Yet, in this barren landscape, there seems to be a presence, something more-than-human, of which the speaker becomes aware in the following passage:

> Who is the third who walks always beside you?
> When I count, there are only you and I together
> But when I look ahead up the white road
> There is always another one walking beside you
> Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
> I do not know whether a man or a woman
> – But who is that on the other side of you? (*TWL,* lines 359-365)

In his notes on the poem, Michael North (17) writes that this passage resembles Luke 24, in which two men on the road to Emmaus do not recognize the risen Christ. With this Biblical theme in mind, I am reminded of the fact that Christ also went to the desert to fast and pray in a time of crisis. This might imply that the desert, at least in this passage, is a sacred and religious space. Terblanche also believes that the third person seen [and not seen] in this desert scene is something quite beyond "the simple you and I" and that this half-seen being is "something significant beyond our usual understanding" (77). This third person disturbs the speaker, quite like the wind under the door in "A Game of Chess" disturbs the woman who hears it. Again, in nature, the speaker comes to some sort of realization, or becomes aware of something half-forgotten which unsettles them. Perhaps they are disturbed by these things, and such thoughts since humans cannot handle too much reality, as the thrush in "Burnt Norton" tells us. In any event, what I find interesting here is that Eliot portrays nature not only as a supernatural space inhabited by spirits and unknown presences, but as a sacred and religious space in which the Biblical Christ dwells.

Led by this extract from *The Waste Land*, I will consider the link between nature and religion, or nature as not only a supernatural space, but as a religious space as well. Cheryl Glotfelty states that there have been several religious movements advocating that God is immanent in nature, which "makes the earth itself sacred" (2). The editors of *The Greening of Faith* (5) add that in ecocritical studies, there has been a "dramatic turn" towards a deepened interest in the relationship between ecology and religion, arguing that this movement may help humans to become "re-enchanted" with the natural world, thereby learning or understanding their "place within the whole." This argument bears a striking resemblance to the arguments made by other critics and myself (as mentioned above). Could it be that the tie between religion and nature, as well as nature's power to help humans understand their place in the grand scheme of things is the most prominent reason why these poets turned to nature? I may well be, seeing as religion throughout Europe was declining due to scientific progress and widespread violence? Perhaps poets were searching for God (or some other deity) in nature when religion started to vanish from society. John Ruskin certainly thought so. According to

Bate, Ruskin put forward that the pathetic fallacy was a substitute for religious belief that had been destroyed by the Enlightenment (76). Yet Ruskin himself (as quoted by Bate) also states that "it [nature] becomes the channel of sacred truths which by no other means can be conveyed" (80). These statements imply that religion, or rather the lack thereof, was the strongest driving force behind the turn to nature in the poetry of the Romantic and Modernist epochs. Robert Ryan, who also believes that religion was the "most significant stimuli" for social change during Romanticism, argues that the Romantic poets "adopted as a goal the spiritual and moral rehabilitation of their society, a renovation that presupposes an alteration in the national religious consciousness" (3). Keep in mind, though, that I will not only be exploring these poets' references to traditional Christian or Biblical religion. I will rather consider instances in which nature is linked with spirituality and the existence of *any* deity, since there are an infinite number of ways to think about (or understand) the existence of a Higher Being.

Thirty lines on from its evocation of a Biblical tale, "What the Thunder Said" features the presence of yet another deity from a completely different religion:

> Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
> Waited for rain, while the black clouds
> Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
> […]
> Then spoke the thunder
> DA
> Datta
> […]
> DA
> Dayadhvam
> […]
> DA
> Damyata (*TWL*, 395-418)

In his notes on the poem, Michael North (18) explains that "Ganga" refers to the Ganges river, which is of course the sacred river of India (or rather the Hindu religion), while "Himavant" is a common personification of the Himalaya mountains as the father of the Ganges. Eliot clearly evokes Hindu religion here. Eliot's own note on the poem (referred to by North) explains that this section of the poem is based on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* in which God presents three principles, *damyata* (control), *datta* (give), and *dayadhvam* (compassion). It is fascinating how seamlessly Eliot blends different religions in this section, but what is important (at least for this study) is that it is through nature, or natural phenomena, that God speaks, and in a natural space – devoid of all things man-made – where the voice of God is heard. Terblanche, as I have mentioned, suggests that the desert in Eliot's poetry is a symbol of dislocation and meaninglessness. Yet, the desert also seems to be a place where the existence of gods is experienced. Also, the voice of God (or a god) is heard in the thunder, during

a rainstorm. To my mind this establishes nature in Eliot's poetry as a sacred space, even if the symbolism of the desert may be debateable.

Jewel Spears Brooker supports the notion that nature (including the desert) is sacred in Eliot's poetry. Spears Brooker argues that Eliot has what she calls an "Edenic Imagination" (of course referring to the Biblical Garden of Eden). She argues that "Burnt Norton" begins in a garden in time which transforms into a lost garden that only exists as a distant memory in the speaker's mind (153). Spears Brooker believes that this resonates with the Garden of Eden, which was "our first world" (153). The speaker's experience in the rose garden is, according to Spears Brooker, "the moment in and out of time" and, having experienced this timeless moment, humans are reminded of a reality before the Fall, during which they realise that they are "homeless" and begin to "imagine the possibility of return" (153).

However I do not necessarily disagree with Brooker's observation, there is certainly more than just Biblical notions present in "Burt Norton" (and the entire *Four Quartets* for that matter). During his time in the garden, the speaker observes yet another moment of timelessness when sunlight illuminates the empty pool:

> Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
> And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
> And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
> The surface glittered out of heart of light,
> And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
> Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty. ("Burnt Norton")

When the pool is seems filled with the reflection of the sunlight, a lotos [sic] rises from the water. The lotus flower is sacred in Eastern spirituality, and again there is a synthesis of Western and Eastern religion. Though I don't really want to refer to Eliot's poetry as religious, but rather spiritual, seeing as there is a broad understanding of sacredness and the existence of God (and other more-than-human elements) that doesn't seem to be tied to only one type of organized religion. Whatever the case, this momentary experience of timelessness, which is a sacred experience in Eliot's oeuvre, takes place in natural surroundings and by means of natural phenomena. Again, nature seems to be the dwelling of sacred things and supernatural beings, but in both *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, nature seems to connect humans to the spiritual realm, by facilitating one's understanding of the greater-than-human world. It is as though nature allows the speaker, at least momentarily, to peer into a world that he normally cannot see – something like Wordsworth's statement in "Tintern Abbey", where the speaker believes that nature allows one to see into the "secret life of things."

In a discussion of nature's connection to the spiritual realm, one must not forget to mention the poetry of Shelley. As noted in the first chapter, Robert Ryan believes that Shelley, a so-called atheist, wrote

some of the greatest religious poetry of the time. Though Shelley wasn't Christian or Catholic, he might be described as a deist, and the "unseen Power" in "Mont Blanc" which lives in the mountains, and rolls in the river, and enters the mind of mankind could prove the poet's belief (rather than disbelief) in the existence of some form of higher power. Again, in this poem, nature is sacred – the home of a higher being and a means of connecting to a spiritual world.

The spiritual aspect of nature is equally important in the poetry of E.E. Cummings. Throughout his poetic oeuvre Cummings also mixes Western and Eastern spirituality – most notably Christian and Buddhist/Taoist inclinations. In an early poem, listed under *Uncollected Poems*, the religious inclinations of his nature poetry is already clear:

> Music is sweet from the thrush's throat!
> Oh little thrush
> With the holy note,
> Like a footstep of God in a sick-room's hush
> My soul you crush.
>
> Unstopped organ, from earth you break
> To knock at the skies,
> And I can but shake
> My fragile fetters and with you rise
> Into Paradise
>
> But Love, your music requires not wings.
> To the common breed
> It clings, and sings:
> "Heaven on earth is Heaven indeed.
> This is my creed." (*Complete Poems* 857)

This is certainly not one of Cummings' best poems, but it undoubtedly illustrates his belief in a higher power, and the idea that nature is in itself a part of the heavenly/spiritual realm. Terblanche writes that Cummings has a Taoist view of nature, in which there is a "sense of the heavenliness of the earth and the earthiness of heaven" (180). This is very clear in the final lines where the speaker's creed is "Heaven on earth is Heaven indeed." Terblanche continues that, in Taoism as in Cummings' poetry, Heaven and earth must meet for transcendence to occur (180). But the poem also includes imagery that is traditionally Christian. The small thrush sings a "holy note" that affects the speaker the same way as hearing "a footstep of God" would. The bird also breaks its earthly bounds, rising "Into Paradise" – paradise both referring to Eden and to the afterlife promised to loyal believers. This earlier poem already contains ideas regarding nature and the human relationship with it that would permeate Cummings' oeuvre. I think the poem which best portrays Cummings' idea regarding nature and its link to spirituality and a higher being is the sonnet "i thank You God for most this amazing", as seen below:

> i thank You God for most this amazing
> day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
> and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything

which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any–lifted from the no
of all nothing–human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened) (*Collected Poems*, 663)

In this poem nature is very much alive, with trees being "greenly spirits" and the sky is a dream. Nature is "infinite" and illimitable and nature is "yes" (yes, I think, conveys the idea or rather the emotion that nature contains everything good and worth knowing in the world). When seeing the beauty and vastness of nature, the speaker becomes "alive again," being re-enchanted by nature which opens his inner eye and ear, thus granting him an intense awareness of the presence of "unimaginable You." This "You" is, as in the first line, God. Nature makes the speaker newly aware of God's existence, quite possibly because God is present in nature itself. Thus nature, being both the expression of and home to God, is absolutely sacred (at least according to this poem). In this Pantheist-Christian poem, nature is inhabited by a greater power, but nature in itself also possesses the power to make one aware of the existence of that which is greater-than-human.

A similar idea (though he doesn't refer to any specific deity) is also present in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" – which is one of the most important poems to study if one wishes to understand his ideas regarding nature. The following lines are, at least in my opinion, one of the most beautiful portrayals of a higher power or deity's presence in nature:

And I have felt
A presence which disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought
And rolls through all things. (*The Works of Wordsworth*, lines 121-131)

The speaker becomes aware of a presence that exists in the universe and "rolls through all things." This description is much like the Power that Shelley describes in "Mont Blanc" and "Hymn to

Intellectual Beauty." This greater-than-human power or deity isn't tied to any specific religion; it simply *is*. It is both the secret life of all things, and the power which "impels" all things. Again the awareness of this "unimaginable You" as Cummings would describe it, is facilitated by nature and natural phenomena. This presence lives in and through the beauty of setting suns, and the vast ocean and the "mind of man," thus connecting all things and making all things meaningful or even sacred. When the cracks in Western society, culture and religion became apparent, Wordsworth found meaning through nature. Natarajan includes an extract Geoffrey Hartman's 1964 essay, "Wordsworth's Poetry" in which he states:

> …Wordsworth thought nature itself led him beyond nature; and, since this movement of transcendence, related to what mystics have called the negative way, is inherent in life and achieved without violent or ascetic discipline, one can think of it as the progress of a soul which is *naturaliter negativa* (73).

In his search for meaning, Wordsworth inadvertently followed the path usually suggested by Eastern belief, namely understanding that all things are connected to one another through a universal power. Like Cummings, who delved into Taoism and Buddhism, Wordsworth (without being aware of Eastern modes of thought) found that transcendence of self, and a greater understanding of the universe occurs when the spiritual and natural realms meet. This is also true of Shelley and Eliot. Shelley's pantheistic view of nature puts forward that "Power" resides in and is expressed through nature. Eliot finds in nature glimpses of a greater meaning, when time and timelessness meet. For these poets, nature is a sacred space because it is animated by the spirit of a higher being which is the secret life of all things, and which unites all things. Nature is where God (or whatever one wants to call this higher power) can be found when culture and organized religion fails, and nature is a final refuge for meaning, when meaning in society seems to be lost.

From the above discussion it is clear that these poets somehow experienced the presence of a power or deity in nature, and in a sense view nature as an expression of God. But I have found that in much of their poetry, nature itself is a power – not just an expression of some higher power. So what inherent power does nature have according to these poets? Nature's power, I think, lies in its ability to facilitate *transcendence* (a concept often mentioned in the discussion above).

Bate, in *Romantic Ecology*, also refers to the idea of transcendence. Bate, however, argues that it was through the "Imagination" that Romantic Poets where able to transcend the circumstances in which they found themselves, and discover that which is "exalted and divine" (3). I do not entirely agree with Bate's statement. I do not mean that he is wrong, but rather that he may have overlooked the role nature itself plays in the process of transcendence. Romantic poets did view nature in an imaginative

way, but it was still *nature* which spurred on the process. Consider, for example, the following extract from Book VIII of Wordsworth's *Prelude:*

> With deep devotion, Nature, did I feel
> In that great city what I owed to thee:
> High thoughts of God and man, and love of man,
> Triumphant over all those loathsome sights
> Of wretchedness and vice, a watchful eye,
> Which, with the outside of our human life
> Not satisfied, must read the inner mind.
> For already I had been taught to love
> My fellow-beings, to such habits trained
> Among the woods and mountains, where I found
> In thee a gracious guide to lead me forth
> Beyond the bosom of my family,
> My friends and youthful playmates. 'Twas thy power
> That raised the first complacency in me,
> And noticeable kindliness of heart… (lines 62-76)

Wordsworth states that he owes his "High thoughts of God and man", which triumphs over the evils he experienced in the city to "Nature". For Wordsworth, nature was a "gracious guide", leading him beyond everyday experience, and teaching him kindness and love for his fellow beings. Even if the poet's imagination did play a role in helping him to see beyond "loathsome sights / Of wretchedness and vice", Wordsworth clearly locates the way to transcendence in nature.

Long before composing Book VIII of The Prelude, Wordsworth (or at least the speaker in "Tintern Abbey") the "beauteous forms" of nature pass into the "purer mind" and have "no slight or trivial influence / On that best portion of a good man's life / His little unremembered acts / Of kindness and love" (lines 37-46). Again in this poem it is *nature* that greatly influences the mind, and brings forth the qualities of love and kindness in man. A few lines on, the speaker states that being in nature affects a person to the point that

> … the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul :
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. (lines 56-63)

What the speaker describes sounds like a form of meditation, but in this poem, this tranquil state of mind is not gained through the actions of the onlooker, but rather the "eye [is] made quiet by the / power" of nature's influence. In natural surroundings there is "harmony" and "joy" which promotes such a mental state that one can see that which is normally hidden to one's eyes, and understand that

which is usually beyond one's reach. This "life of things", as I have mentioned, is the sense that all things are alive and connected, and that everything is sacred and meaningful in its own way.

Shelley also described nature's own ability to influence the human mind. Again, I refer to "Mont Blanc" in which the speaker addresses the river itself –

> Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
> I seem in a trance sublime and strange
> To muse on my own separate fantasy,
> My own, human mind, which passively
> Now renders and receives fast influencings,
> Holding an unremitting interchange
> With the clear universe of things around (*Oxford Anthology*, lines 12-18)

In these lines there seems to be a reciprocal relationship between the speaker's mind and the natural surroundings in which he finds himself. Yet it is nature's influence that started this exchange, since gazing upon the river is what brought on the "sublime and strange" state of mind. This state of mind is similar to what Wordsworth describes in "Tintern Abbey," and when faced with the vastness of the mountains and river, the speaker may glimpse at a realm that is more-than-human, or as he calls it "the clear universe of things."

Shelley records a similar experience in his poem "To a Skylark," in which he describes the bird as follows:

> Hail to thee, Blithe Spirit!
> Bird thou never wert,
> That from heaven, or near it,
> Pourest thy full heart
> In profuse strains of unpremeditated art. (*Oxford Anthology*, lines 1-5)

Karadas writes that in Shelley's "To a Skylark" the bird is mythologized as a transcendental being that can cause self-transcendence in the speaker through its song (105). The speaker wants to learn true happiness from the skylark – a quality seemingly absent from the transient world (Karadas 106). Karadas reasons that by becoming "united with the transphenomenal realm of the bird" the speaker may break free from "the suffering of the human world" (107). Throughout the poem, all that is good in the world seems to be personified in this bird, or communicated in its song. The speaker wishes to know the secret of the bird's joy, and wonders,

> What objects are the fountain
> Of thy happy strain?
> What fields, or waves, or mountains?
> What shapes of sky or plain?
> What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain? (lines 71-75)

Though he can't know for sure, the speaker guesses that the source of the bird's goodness and joy may be found in nature itself, in fields or plains, sky or mountains. These questions seem to awaken some realisation in line 75, where the speaker concludes the skylark's innocent joy comes from love of his own kind, and "ignorance of pain." This might not be the most objective view of the bird, or the natural world in general, since animals go through their fair share of hardships and pain. However, I believe Shelley views the bird and its song as something pure, and untainted by human vice. In this poem, nature (in the form of a small bird) offers an ideal toward which humans ought to strive.

Cummings also found such perfection and significance in the actions of a small bird. In fact, as Webster (referred to by Terblanche) observes, most of the animals in Cummings' poetry are small (171). The speaker in Cummings' poetry is also always aware of his own smallness, or insignificance, as seen in the use of the small "i" when referring to himself:

> i
> never
> guessed any
> thing(even a
> universe)might be
> so not quite believab
> ly smallest as perfect this
> (almost invisible where of a there of a)here of a
> rubythroat's home with its still
> ness which really's herself
> (and to think that she's
> warming three worlds)
> who's ama
> zingly
> Eye (*Complete Poems*, 827)

Webster (116) believes that Cummings' lower-case persona (as seen in the first line of this poem) and his poetry about small plants and animals – in this case an incredibly small hummingbird's nest – function as a kind of "counter-sublime." This counter-sublime emphasises the importance of the small protagonist, and reduces the pretensions of the human ego (Webster 116). Terblanche also asserts that one of the keys to Cummings' ecology lies in his humility (171). In this tiny nest described in the poem lie not only eggs, but a small, perfect little world, and through a profound appreciation for the rubythroat's nest, the poet to becomes a seeing "Eye," gaining insight into (dare I say) the mysteries of the entire universe.

In another of his "counter sublime" animal poems, Cummings describes a small mouse:

mouse)Won
derfully is
anyone else entirely who doesn't
move(Moved more suddenly than)whose

tiniest smile?may Be
bigger than the fear of all
hearts … (*Collected Poems*, 397)

This tiny mouse's "tiniest smile" (if it is indeed a smile) would be greater or more meaningful that the fear that exists in all human hearts. This is the same sentiment as in Cummings' "little man" poem, in which the worries and fears of humans seem all but insignificant when compared to nature ("big moon," "big snow"). What the speaker in such poems realises and tries to communicate is his own smallness, and the smallness of all humans. Ironically, by realising one's own insignificance in the grand scheme of things, one begins to understand one's own place in a big and mysterious universe. Terblanche also suggests that in Cummings' poetry, with its Taoist sensibilities, awareness of one's littleness is the potential gateway into renewed connectivity with the vastness of one's natural being (173).

In Cummings' nature poems, and poetry about small animals, a deep understanding and connection with nature and the universe is gained by what I would like to call a moment of humility. Humility becomes the way to self-transcendence, because when one realises how small one actually is, one can begin to appreciate the "bigness" of the surrounding world. Perhaps the ability to teach humans to be humble is nature's greatest power, since, as Eliot writes,

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless. ("East Coker" part II)

In Eliot's nature poetry, transcendence occurs during moments when time and timelessness cross. When one experiences such a moment, one may for a short while glimpse at universal mysteries and truths. Throughout *Four Quartets*, such moments of profound significance mostly tend to occur in nature. In "Burnt Norton's" rose garden, the speaker experiences such a moment –

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
Even while the dust moves
There rises the hidden laughter
Of children in the foliage
Quick now, here, now, always –

The shaft of sunlight encapsulates the presence of supernatural beings, and becomes in itself a point of significance. This idea is repeated in "The Dry Salvages," in which the speaker states that

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in shaft of sunlight,
> The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
> Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While it lasts. These are only hints and guesses…

Again these "moment[s] in and out of time" in which we receive inklings (or hints and guesses) of a world beyond our own, or a great truth beyond our usual understanding, seem to be most prevalent in nature. Though such instances often go unnoticed, they are ever present in shafts of sunlight, in wild herbs, in a bolt of lightning, and in the crashing of a waterfall.

Finally, in "Little Gidding," the speaker implies that all that is left to discover is that which was there from the beginning, but which we have overlooked, as seen in this extract:

> When the last of earth left to discover
> Is that which was the beginning;
> At the source of the longest river
> The voice of the hidden waterfall
> And the children in the apple-tree
> Not known, because not looked for
> But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
> Between two waves of the sea.
> Quick now, here, now, always –

The significance, meaning or higher truth humans so desperately search for seems to be hidden in nature, again in the voice of the waterfall, and in the river, and in the moment of "stillness" between the crashing of two waves. We simply miss such meaningful moments, because we don't know where to look, or perhaps our ignorance is due to a lack of inner "stillness" and humility. Though often lost to our eyes and ears, nature offers glimpses of a world beyond what we know. Thus, in *Four Quartets* nature is the space in which time and timelessness most often meet. This is no coincidence, and I would argue that Eliot (although his poetry doesn't state it as explicitly as that of the other poets) also experienced nature's power to influence the mind to see into "the life of things" or the "clear universe of things." Nature teaches humility and "stillness" which facilitates self-transcendence, and allows human beings to become aware of the connectedness between all things, and the existence of that which is greater-than-human.

As I end this chapter, I refer the reader back to the beginning. My initial goal was to determine how Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot, and Cummings depicted nature in their poetry, with a view to demonstrating that there are indeed continuities between Romantic and Modernist nature poetry that have been overlooked by many scholars and critics. Langbaum showed the reader that nature poetry enjoyed a revival in the early twentieth century, but he believed that the Modernist view of nature was wholly different from that of the Romantics. In many cases, Langbaum's statement is valid, but it is not ultimately true for *all* Modernist nature poetry.

I have found that, at least in the poetic oeuvre's of T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings, there are striking continuities with Romantic nature poetry in terms of their depiction of nature. These continuities include: 1) A sense of disconnection with nature due to urban sprawl, as well as a desire or longing to be reconnected with it. 2) The idea that, in a world of cities and machines, humans have lost the ability to appreciate the splendour if natural surroundings, which has led to disenchantment with the world. 3) Natural phenomena, especially the image or the river, are a reminder of a universal connectedness, which flows through both nature and the human mind and, with an invisible tie, binds all things. 4) Nature is dwelling of supernatural or more-than-human elements, making it a sacred place, permeated by some "Power" – whether it is many gods, God, or an entirely different, unnamed deity. 5) It is mostly in, or through, nature where the speakers of the different poems become aware of the existence of the spiritual realm or the presence of a higher power. Nature influences the mind in such a way (what Wordsworth calls a "blessed mood") that one can gain an awareness of a world of meaning beyond everyday perception. 6) Nature itself has a power – it is a teacher of virtues, such as love and kindness, but most of all nature teaches us humility, and the wisdom of humility is endless (as Eliot states). It is by means of teaching humans humility that nature allows one to transcend oneself and one's usual boundaries, and find a universal meaning or connectedness by seeing into the secret life of things. 7) Nature is a final refuge, where meaning and even spiritual connectedness remain possible, after it has become lost in a chaotic society.

This chapter clearly demonstrates that there are indeed continuities in Romantic and Modernist nature poetry, and that critics should not necessarily think of the Modernist depiction of nature as something entirely different from that of the Romantics. All Modernists did not depict nature was an alien space, an unmeaning nullity, or world that will always be alien to any human onlooker. At the very least, this is not the case in the poetic oeuvre's of T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings, and it may well be that other Modernists' depictions of nature's emotional and spiritual significance still remain largely undetected.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

What ever happened to nature poetry? This question, posed by Robert Langbaum, first sparked my interest in Modernist nature poetry, and became the starting point from which this dissertation developed. In "The New Nature Poetry" Langbaum sought to convince the reader that nature poetry of any substance was not written immediately after the Romantic period, but instead enjoyed a revival during the Modernist period. Yet he also argued that the character of nature poetry had completely changed, and used examples from the poetic oeuvres of Moore and Stevens to show that in Modernist poetry, nature became "unalterably alien" and an "unmeaning nullity". Webster agreed that by portraying nature as something totally different from and alien to the realm of human existence, Modernist nature poetry forced its reader to empathise with nature on a more advanced level.

Yet, as mentioned in the first chapter, Webster protested the fact that Langbaum and other critics often overlook the poetry of E.E. Cummings. In terms of nature poetry, one would certainly expect that a Modernist poet who produced more than 90 poems about nature, natural phenomena, or animals would be worth considering in a study of modern nature poetry. Also, as Terblanche mentions, the natural imagery (specifically the use of desertscapes) in the poetic oeuvre of T.S. Eliot hardly ever receives the attention it deserves. Why exactly these particular poets' nature poetry is so often overlooked or ignored is unclear, but what has become clear from the onset of this dissertation is that both these Modernist poets made use of striking natural imagery, and, most importantly, that within their poetry nature is not an "other" from which humans are completely alienated, but rather a meaningful, restorative, and even supernatural space. In fact, their nature poetry (at times) even seems Romantic – especially when it is compared to the nature poetry of Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Shelley.

Thus, the premise of this dissertation was that there are certain Romantic continuities present in the nature poetry and natural imagery of Eliot and Cummings, which are especially apparent when compared to the nature poetry of Wordsworth and Shelley. Throughout this dissertation I sought to highlight the intriguing, albeit neglected, continuities that exist between Romantic and Modernist poetry in terms of the poetry's approach to, and relationship with, the natural world. This was done with a view to contradicting modern criticism's idea that Modernist nature poetry *always* seems to illustrate the disconnection between humans and the natural world, and that any meaning found in

nature is simply a delusion. The goals of this dissertation involved: 1) analysing the ways in which the selected Romantic and Modernist poets portray nature, and the relationship between human beings and nature, in their poetry; 2) examining possible continuities that exist between the portrayal of nature in the selected Romantic and Modernist poets' poetry; 3) considering an historical explanation as to why such unexpected continuities exist between the selected Romantic and Modernist portrayals of nature.

This type of nature-centred research necessitated the use of an ecocritical approach, since ecocriticism is essentially the study of the relationship between nature and literature. Thus, in Chapter 2, I explored what ecocriticism, as well as the term "nature" entails. After some consideration, I developed my own hybridized approach to ecocriticsm, borrowing Deep Ecology's idea that nature has inherent value and ought to be respected, merged with the New Materialist notion that nature is conscious, and has agency or power, along with Heideggerian Ecocriticism's argument that humans are inextricably tied to nature through a reciprocal relationship between the natural and the human world. Through my own ecocritical lens, I focused on the following aspects of nature poetry: 1) that nature has intrinsic value, 2) that nature has some form of power (be it as agency or influence), and 3) that humans and nature are inherently connected. This personalised form of ecocriticism later applied to the nature poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot and Cummings (Chapter 4) to illustrate how these poets portrayed nature in their respective poetic projects.

In order to support the premise that continuities exist between modern and Romantic nature poetry, I turned my attention to the historical aspects of the Romantic and Modernist eras that might have led these poets to turn to nature in their respective times. As I have mentioned in the introduction to this study, continuities in literature are essentially historical in nature, and I believe that poetic continuities also point to continuities or similarities in historical circumstances. In short, my goal was to understand why these poets (both Romantic and Modernist) turned to nature in their respective epochs.

In the course of my historical and socio-political study of the Romantic and Modernist paradigms, I uncovered striking historical similarities. Both periods were preceded by decades of massive scientific developments, which affected the ways in which people understood the universe and their own place within it. During both the Romantic and Modernist periods, these scientific findings were disturbing to many individuals, since they were incompatible with literal understandings of the Bible, and brought in to question the miracles recorded in it. This brought on religious scepticism that shook Western society to the core, since much of Western culture was based on religious ideals. Another important similarity was the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation. The Romantic period saw the dawn of the first Industrial Revolution, in which enormous factories were set up, and machines started to replace manual labour. People left the poverty-stricken countryside to find work in cities,

which, for the first time, led to mass-urbanisation. Cities, especially the areas around factories, couldn't handle the sudden influx of people and soon fell into slum-conditions. Europeans started to despise cities and machines – two things they believed were the cause of their misery. During the Modernist period, though people had become more used to machines and cities, industrialization started to take place at a very rapid pace by means of mass-production and the development of even larger and more advanced factories. Cities also became larger and more populated, and if I may again refer to E.M. Forster, England became a world of "telegrams and anger". With these factors in mind, it is hardly surprising that during the periods of Romanticism and Modernism, people turned to nature, which was the "natural" antithesis to the disagreeable circumstances in large cities and factories. Finally, perhaps the most striking historical similarity was violence and war. During the Romantic era, the French Revolution became violent and many were shocked by the gruesome executions that took place in France during the Reign of Terror. As violent as the Romantic period seemed at the time, the twentieth century became the scene of the most violent wars of recent human history. Different phases of Modernism coincided with both the First and Second World Wars, in which *millions* of soldiers and civilians died in gruesome battles and attacks on cities. In the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people were shocked and disillusioned by the violence that erupted within societies. In these dark times, the cracks in the foundation of Western culture and societal structures started to show, and there was the perception that meaning was lost, and balanced social functioning would come to an end. Again, this violence and disillusionment led individuals to nature, which seemed more constant and far more peaceful than culture and society at the time.

My research and discussion in Chapter 3 (summarised above) illustrated what I would call a perpetual historic pattern that leads to the development and revival of nature poetry. This historical pattern includes the following factors: 1) mass-industrialization and urbanization, 2) the subversion of authoritative/political systems, 3) disillusionment caused by violence and warfare, 4) scientific findings that changed people's understanding of the universe, 5) a general decline in spirituality/religious belief, and finally 6) the sense of a loss of meaning in society due to the aforementioned circumstances. The collapse of culture and society leads people (and poets) back to nature, in search of meaningful experiences. In times when society becomes a dark cloud hanging over humanity, humans return to their roots in nature, and nature becomes a refuge where meaning is still possible after it has become lost within the cultural context.

In light of the suggested pattern that perpetuates nature poetry, one may even speculate the possibility that ecocriticism *itself* may be such a revival of a return to nature in literature (even if it is in literary criticism). The reason I say this is because the start of ecocriticism as a field or critical inquiry coincided with increased Cold War tensions in the 1980's, as well as rapid technological developments (especially in terms of space travel). This speculation, along with the suggested

historical pattern, could be the starting point of an entirely new study, focussing on how nature has again become more prominent in twenty-first century criticism and writing.

In the third chapter, I uncovered reasons why the Romantic and Modernist poets turned to nature. In Chapter four, I sought to analyse how these poets portrayed nature in their poetic projects, with a view to emphasizing the continuities and similarities between Romantic and Modernist nature poetry. By referring to several examples, I found that in the poetic oeuvres of T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings, there are striking continuities with the Romantic nature poetry of Wordsworth and Shelley in terms of their depiction of nature. These continuities include: 1) a sense of disconnection with nature due to urban sprawl, as well as a desire or longing to be reconnected with it. 2) The idea that, in a world of cities and machines, humans have lost the ability to appreciate the splendour of natural surroundings, which has led to disenchantment with the world. 3) Natural phenomena, especially images of the river, are reminders of a universal connectedness, which flows through both nature and the human mind and, with an invisible tie, binds all things. 4) Nature is the dwelling of supernatural or more-than-human elements, making it a sacred place, permeated by some "Power" – whether it is many gods, God, or an entirely different, unnamed deity. 5) It is mostly in, or through, nature where the speakers of the different poems become aware of the existence of the spiritual realm or the presence of a higher power. It seems that nature influences the mind in such a way (what Wordsworth calls a "blessed mood") that one can gain an awareness of a world of meaning beyond everyday perception. 6) Nature itself has a power – it is a teacher of virtues, such as love and kindness, but most of all nature teaches us humility, and the wisdom of humility is endless (as Eliot states). It is by means of teaching humans humility that nature allows one to transcend oneself and one's usual boundaries, and find a universal meaning or connectedness by seeing into the secret life of things. 7) All in all, nature is a final refuge, where meaning and even spiritual connectedness remain possible, after they have become lost in a chaotic society.

Thus, throughout Chapter 4, my analyses of the poems made it clear that there are indeed continuities between Romantic and Modernist nature poetry, and that the nature poetry of Eliot and Cummings does not portray nature as an alien "other" or an unmeaning nullity. At least in the case of these two Modernist poets, nature is a space that allows intense and meaningful experiences, and a space in which one becomes aware of a universal connectedness, and the presence/existence of a deity or more-than-human power. In the poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, Eliot and Cummings, nature has a sort of innate power that shows or teaches humans humility (be it through a sublime or counter-sublime experience). This humility, taught by the natural world, facilitates the process of self-transcendence, and allows one (at least momentarily) to perceive a greater pattern of meaning.

My findings challenge the statements made by Langbaum who put forward the idea that Modernist nature poetry necessarily depicts nature as a meaningless space, totally detached from the life of

humans. Although there are certainly many cases in which Langbaum's statements are valid, this research has shown that these ideas are not *always* valid for all Modernist nature poetry. This research also supports the notions of recent ecocritics such as Black and Terblanche who suggest that nature is significant and meaningful in Modernist poetry.

In light the information and findings contained in this dissertation, I would suggest that future ecocritical researchers analyse the nature poetry of a number of Modernist poets, with a view to comparing their respective approaches to nature, and gaining a better understanding of the variety of Modernist approaches to nature. Another possibility for further study would be to apply the historical pattern I have suggested (Chapter 3) to different paradigms in which nature poetry, or nature appreciation in general, was prominent, with a view to testing my suggested historical pattern, and to understand why society seems to be in a perpetual ebb and flow of moving away from and back towards nature.

Finally, I will conclude stating my sincere hope that the reader will reconsider nature, and look at the natural world with revived appreciation. My most sincere wish is that my findings will not only be intriguing on an academic level, but that the reader will truly reconsider the significance of nature as suggested by the selected poets. Perhaps the reader might learn to find the secrets of the universe in a bird's nest, or in a shaft of sunlight or, like Wordsworth, become aware of a universal Presence whose dwelling is in the setting of the sun, and the round ocean, and in the mind of man.

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