Ecocritism and Women Writers

Environmentalist Poetics of Virginia Woolf, Jeanette Winterson, and Ali Smith

JUSTYNA KOSTKOWSKA

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Also by Justyna Kostkowska

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S EXPERIMENT IN GENRE AND POLITICS 1926–1931:
Visioning and Versioning *The Waves*

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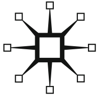

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Introduction

M. Jimmie Killingsworth writes in "Discourse Communities": "In addition to changing language and changing minds, the enterprise of rhetoric suggests that speakers and writers have the power to transform the site of discourse, the community itself" (1992: 110). Modern humanities and sciences agree that language lies at the heart of the transformation towards a more ecologically sound society, a transformation that we must undergo if we are to survive as a civilization. Val Plumwood has pointed out that the rationalist, androcentric master narrative that had served to support patriarchy must now give way to multicentric pluralism. The way we use language must be carefully scrutinized and reformed to eliminate old hegemonic patterns and to promote modes of linguistic expression that foster connectivity instead of separation, equality instead of hierarchy, diversity instead of homogeny. Such ecologically progressive modes of narrative, ones that model healthier ecological relationships, already exist and are continuously being written. These narratives are not always explicitly or primarily environmental in theme, but carry out the ecological work at the narrative level. Often their very form does the fundamental work of destabilizing the binary thought patterns that lie at the core of Western rationalism and its master narrative. This book is an addition to the branch of ecocritical studies that looks beyond the so-called nature writing to explore such transformative literary narratives and consider their ecological value.

Lawrence Buell has argued that "ecocritism becomes most interesting and useful … when it aims to recover the environmental character or orientation of works whose conscious or foregrounded interests lie elsewhere" (2005: 26). Nature writing "combin[es] the objective description of natural history with the personal insight of autobiography, to give its

reader a model of how, individually and collectively, we should relate to the nonhuman world" (Herndl & Brown 1996: 13). However, as has been noted by several critics, even nature writing in the canonized tradition of Thoreau is not impervious to (eco)ethical problems. Marilyn M. Copper has pointed out that "narratives of retreat into unspoiled nature … are … grounded in a mechanistic view in which nature is seen as separate from human culture and as an object to be contemplated or saved by a controlling, dominated subject" (Dobrin & Weisser 2001: xvi). Nature writing belongs to the category of the well-meaning ecological discourses that "strive for a position of totalizing narrative," which Dobrin and Weisser identify as one of the pitfalls of explicitly environmental narratives (2001: 9). Texts that do not foreground nature or purport to describe what we should be doing for the environment avoid such a proselytizing, hegemonic position. Buell advocates a more constructive ecocritical practice that approaches the world as "an intrinsically dynamic, interconnected web of relations" with "no absolute dividing lines between the living and the nonliving, the animate and the inanimate" (2005: 137). In the hope of moving beyond that pervasive dichotomy, I follow in the footsteps of Timothy Morton, M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Jonathan Bate, and Robert Kern to explore how texts with little or no obvious environmental themes can also be ecological in their politics, and in effect do the same value- and consciousness-raising work as strict nature writing performs. Diverging from some of these critics' interest in poetic texts, I focus on fictional prose, a genre that, as Jonathan Levin observes, has received relatively little ecocritical attention since "it foregrounds human drama at the expense of the inherent drama of organic nature, and … rarely allows for a close and detailed account of the particulars of natural phenomena" (1998: 182). Patrick Murphy also notes that "Fiction writing is probably the terrain in which the least codification of a nature writing canon or mode of representation has occurred" (Gaard and Murphy 1998: 32). My project aims to diffuse the perception of fiction as a genre less suited to ecocritical analysis, and to encourage other studies to offer evidence that the ecological, world-changing potential of fictional texts in fact equals and in some ways exceeds that of nature writing.

In my experience of reading modernist and contemporary experimental fiction by women, which is the focus of this book, I have been struck by the extent to which these texts echo contemporary ecological philosophy without purporting to be ecologically conscious. To address Jonathan Levin's first claim about fiction's ecocritical "deficiencies," I have found that "human drama" in this fiction does not occur "at

the expense" of the nonhuman; the two often exist side by side and are mutually embedded. As has been noted, this configuration of feedback and dialogue mirrors the reciprocal relationship that Maurice Merleau-Ponty defined in his philosophy:

> Our most immediate experience of things ... is necessarily an experience of reciprocal encounter—of tension, communication, and commingling. From within the depths of this encounter, we know the thing or phenomenon only as our interlocutor—as a dynamic presence that confronts us and draws us into relation. We conceptually immobilize or objectify the phenomenon only by mentally absenting ourselves from this relation, by forgetting or repressing our sensuous involvement. (Abram 1997: 56)

The human and nonhuman dramas in this fiction reflect the mutual phenomenological interrelation because they are presented as interdependent and analogous, as in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, where geranium and human lives alike get "ruined by the war." Moreover, these texts often critique the concept of "environment" per se by blurring the line where the human ends and the "environment" begins. In Ali Smith's novels, for example, humans often appear more remote from each other than from the natural "others," and flakes of human skin are literally mixed with the remnants of other natural beings to form dust. (This last detail is a case in point in respect to Levin's second observation. The texts I am exploring testify that experimental fiction, conceived of as a flexible and ever-accommodating medium, is fully capable of allowing room for even microscopic natural detail.) This fiction tends to show nature as particular and active, intervening in striking bursts, disrupting the human infrastructure, underscoring the vibrant reality and persistence of the nonhuman world. The nonhuman presence does not need to predominate in a text to be effective for the ecological "cause"; on the contrary, it is often more conspicuous when occurring briefly, sharply asserting itself within the human context.

Contemporary philosophy and literary criticism increasingly support the position that "language and discourse shape our social and (for some) physical environments" (Levin 2002: 176). In *What's Nature Worth*, Satterfield and Slovic have queried authors of the so-called nature writing about the role of narrative in creating environmental values. The emerging conclusion is that "cultural values are a necessary basis for environmental action, even if they may not be sufficient by themselves" (2004: 1). This book joins the investigation of what makes

a text ecological, of how progressive fictional narratives model desirable ecological relationships and values indispensable to environmental change. Ecocriticism's important contribution to creating an ecologically sound world lies in pointing out that not only what we write but *how* we write serves as a site for environmental values.

The Writers and the Texts

The three authors under my investigation are bound by multiple interconnections. Woolf, Winterson, and Smith share an ecological consciousness that is evident in their themes; the innovative character of their prose, which puts language in the foreground to pose alternatives to mimetic representation and realism; and an essentially modernist confidence in the redemptive, transformative value of art. In ecological terms, this last shared conviction supports a belief in fiction's ability to transform the world into an environment that respects and protects all beings and entities. Woolf's influence has been repeatedly acknowledged by Winterson and Smith, and externally validated by Winterson serving as editor of the recent editions of Woolf's novels. Winterson's affinities with Woolf's modernist aesthetics have also been consistently noticed by literary critics (Burns 1998; Harris 2000). The two living writers have expressed appreciation and support for each other's work. Together with Jackie Kay and A.M. Homes, Smith and Winterson are co-authors of a serial novel, *52*, published weekly in *The Guardian*. For all these reasons, these three writers are tied together by many visible threads.

Virginia Woolf evidences an obvious interest in the environment, even if it is not usually her foremost focus. Using our contemporary definitions, we can label Woolf an environmentalist because of her philosophy and her textual praxis. Despite a plethora of scholarship the theme of nature/the environment in her writing has been largely unexplored from the ecocritical perspective. Elizabeth Waller's article studies Woolf's "process of environmental awakening," and her development of "an entirely different form of narrative that linguistically suggests an ecology beyond the backyard—a pulsing rhythm within an ecology of language" in *Orlando* and *The Waves* (2000: 138). Carol Cantrell (2003) and Louise Westling (1999) join a number of ecocritics who find Merleau-Ponty's concepts of the "flesh of the world" and the dialogic embeddedness of the perceiver and the perceived meaningful for an explanation of the modernists' interests in more flexible narrative structures, more capable of conveying the complexity of relationships

in the real world. Charlotte Zoe Walker (2000) delineates Woolf's relationship to nature as a conversation, which she locates at the core of Woolf's search for a language better suited to render the relationship to the real. In a preview to her book on *Virginia Woolf and the Uses of Nature*, Bonnie Kime Scott traces Woolf's relationship to "others in nature" from her early diaries to the garden in *To The Lighthouse* and nature in *The Waves*, and *The Death of the Moth*, concluding that Woolf "questions abuses of the living things" and "constructs solidarity across distant species" (Scott 2007: 114). With the exception of the above, few in-depth connections have been made ecocritically between Woolf's narrative practice and her relationship with the nonhuman. While my work is indebted to this recent work on Woolf and ecofeminism, it takes Woolf studies in two new directions: that of the ecological reading of her form, and that of her influence on contemporary British women writers, such as Winterson and Smith.

Although growing and quite voluminous, scholarship to date on Winterson neither addresses her ecofeminism nor links it to her literary experimentation. Many studies interpret her adventurous formal choices in political terms, however, which is methodologically close to my approach to form as ecopolitical. Critics address her use of ungendered narrator (Kauer 1998; Stowers 1998), her integration of fantasy and magical realism (Palmer 1997; Muller 2001), and her fondness for metafiction (Palmer 2001; Hardin 2002). Feminist readings considering political implications of Winterson's techniques are highly significant in the ecological context, since ecofeminism teaches that the oppression of women must be seen as interwoven with the oppression of nature. As for Ali Smith, her popularity in the United States is only just beginning. Even though her novels and several collections of short stories have met with laudatory reviews on publication, very few article-length scholarly studies of her work exist to date.[1]

By identifying Woolf as an ecofeminist foremother, showing the ecofeminist significance of Winterson's postmodernist form, and emphasizing ecopoetic value in Ali Smith's writing, I present these three writers' work as examples of ecofeminist praxis. Beginning with Woolf, these writers abandon the hegemonic master narrative and instead practice pluralistic, democratic, and nonauthoritarian forms that are consistent with feminist ecology and erode patriarchal domination. Centrally, I argue that their texts have world-transforming potential, as they offer formal models that overcome dualistic thinking and unsettle traditional binaries. Such a value transformation is indispensable groundwork for the new environmental philosophy and a prerequisite

to progressive action and change. In that regard, and also in connection with how they feature nature, these texts have an ecological significance in fostering respect for and understanding of difference, human and nonhuman.

Narrative Experiment and Ecopolitics

As Lawrence Buell and other ecocritics have noted in their "concentration on rhetoric as a means of refiguring the world," "language is the instrument through which we acquire knowledge about the environment and through which we acquire or change attitudes towards it" (2005: 45). Buell writes that "genres and texts are themselves arguably 'ecosystems' as discursive environments, and as helping to reproduce sociohistorical environments in stylized form" (2005: 44). My interest is precisely in how texts as discursive environments can constitute models for a symbiotic rather than ecologically competitive coexistence, where cooperation replaces hierarchy and value dualisms. As Timothy Morton describes it, such texts do not strive to create "a copy," but "to render, to create an illusion" (2007: 56) of a better ecological system, as "ecology is about collapsing the distance between human and animal, society and natural environment, subject and object" (2007: 154).

My project's focus is on this category of texts. The works I have chosen can broadly be termed experimental, and it is specifically their experiment that I identify as the site of their ecological dimension. Their subject matter is hardly ever explicitly environmentalist, although the way they feature nature conveys an ecological awareness, inviting an ecocritical investigation into their form all the more. The writers I feature make significant changes to the traditional nineteenth-century narrative conventions. Centrally to my argument, these changes demand the reader's increased attention and involvement. (An illustrative example from the poetic genre would be a change in the expected pattern of, say, a fixed form like the villanelle. The reader's attention is drawn directly to the place of that change, inspiring an investigation into why it had been introduced and what particular semantic value has been added because of it.) Similarly, the use of narrative innovations by a fiction writer heightens the reader's attention to the sites of narrative difference, encouraging reflection and questions about our habitual responses to reality. Experimentation is the site of ecological potential because it inspires new perception of the narrative and, consequently, the world. It is a famous feminist mantra that if we change the story, we change the world.[2] The values that these texts promote are inherently

ecological since they question the status quo and encourage new ways of perceiving and relating to "the others," human or nonhuman. As Jonathan Bate argues,

> we cannot do without thought-experiments and language-experiments which imagine a return to nature, a reintegration of the human and the Other. The dream of deep ecology will never be realized upon the earth, but our survival as a species may be dependent on our capacity to dream it in the work of our imagination. (quoted in Buell 2005: 107)

Timothy Morton suggests in his book *Ecology without Nature* that formal experimentation has an ecological aspect: metafictional elements create an awareness of a space between the text and the reader that is an awareness of the environment (Morton 2007: 126–7). Narrative subversions of the single master voice and linear time are at the same time ecological gestures of returning to the original, pre-alphabetic oral language tradition embedded in the body and the earth. Basing on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodied language (*Phenomenology of Perception, The Visible and the Invisible*), David Abram points out that alphabetic writing had contributed to the disrupting of the human relationship to the land and replaced it as, hitherto, the only referent of human expression:

> Each image now came to have a strictly *human* referent: each letter was now associated purely with a gesture or sound of the human mouth. Such images could no longer function as windows opening on to a more-than-human field of powers, but solely as mirrors reflecting the human form back onto itself. The senses that engaged or participated with this new writing found themselves locked within a discourse that had become exclusively human. … the rest of nature beg[a]n to lose its voice. (1997: 138)

Abram argues that

> the "I," the speaking self, was hermetically sealed within this new interior. Today the speaking self looks out at a purely "exterior" nature from a purely "interior" zone, presumably located somewhere inside the physical body or brain. Within alphabetic civilization, virtually *every* human psyche construes itself as just an individual "interior," a private "mind" or "consciousness" unrelated to the other "minds" that surround it, or to the environing earth. (1997: 257)

Woolf, for example, takes a stand against this state of locked-in consciousness through her use of multiple speakers reaching out to the outside in monologues, not internal but spoken, to reconnect with other humans and the nonhuman nature. Her free indirect style introduces a narrator who permeates the boundary between the outside and the inside of the mind, and between one mind and another. Through her changes to the traditional narrative, she is speaking for a reuniting of language and the world, of nature and civilization. Smith's multiple narrators invite the world inside their chapters, reliving the same events, surrounded by the same elements of the outside world. In her ungendered or multigendered narrators, Winterson opens up the speaking subject to include multiple possibilities of gender and sexual identity, and all other kinds of otherness by extension.

It can be said that in its experimentation, the featured women's writing marks an attempt to return to the natural original oral storytelling rooted in the nonhuman earth. As Abram explains, stories were originally told by specific people in a specific place; they were rooted in the location, the landscape. Similarly, the indigenous concept of cyclical time, tied to the seasons and cycles of animal death and rebirth, was also lost with the linearity of the written line, the concept of beginning and end displacing the view of temporal events as part of the larger cyclical life of the earth (Abram 1997: 183–4).[3] In this light, the three writers' consistent subverting of linear time and creating of specific physical place rather than abstract space emerge as deeply ecological. They represent an attempt to reestablish the unity of humanity and the land, and to heal the split between culture and nature.

Another philosophical angle useful for my discussion is Sandra Harding's concept of "Strong reflexivity," where "objects of inquiry [are] gazing back in all their cultural particularity and .... the researcher, through theory and methods, stand[s] behind them, gazing back at his own socially situated research project" (Jordan 2006: 175). As Jill Gatlin explains, "Strong reflexivity requires seeing nature as an agent, seeing oneself and by extension, one's values as an object of inquiry, and contextualizing and critiquing one's own positionality and practices" (Jordan 2006: 175). N. Katherine Hayles finds interconnection and reflexivity to be prerequisites to ethical relationships:

> Interactivity points toward our connection with the world ... positionality refers to our location as humans living in certain times, cultures, and historical positions ... together, interactivity and positionality pose a strong challenge to traditional objectivity, which for

> our purposes can be defined as a belief that we know reality because we are separated from it. What happens if we begin from the opposite premise: that we know the world because we are connected with it? (Jordan 2006: 175)

By decentralizing and dispersing the master narrative of a single "objective" point of view, these texts encourage stepping out of the traditional attitudes and belief systems and serve as models of ecological diversity in relationship.

On closer examination, several of the ecopolitically laden experimental strategies seem to recur most frequently in these texts. They include innovations to the narrative point of view, including gender and subject/object construction, chronology, character creation, genre blending and poetic language, and metafictionality. I argue that while these narrative techniques have many wide political repercussions that are not overtly ecopolitical, they gain an ecopolitical dimension if we consider that all systems of oppression are interwined, as Greta Gaard and other ecofeminists have explained. Domination of women, domination of nature, sexism, heterosexism, classism, racism, and speciesism alike take root in the master narrative of the supremacy of the rational culture of the Western male over anyone associated with the emotional, sensual natural being (Gaard 1997: 114). Therefore, a narrative point of view that undermines the division between the subject and the object encourages a perception of the nonhuman other as our intercorporal partner. The use of an ungendered narrator that opens up possibilities for multiple sexual identities promotes an acceptance of sexual otherness and otherness in general, including the otherness of the nonhuman. Refusal of an ending emphasizes the process and cyclicity of life experience, for all life forms. Metafiction, like intertextuality, undermines the reader/author and reality/fiction binary and reveals the connections between the text and its environment. Poetic language (especially cognitive metaphor) makes us question the boundary between the human and the nonhuman by imaginatively rediscovering the relationship between them.

While these authors may not be the first to use such innovative narrative strategies, their consistent employment of these techniques calls attention to itself and generates political significance. An ecopolitical interpretation of these texts may also be particularly justified because of the specific combination of these strategies with the way in which nature is present there, as well as because of the ecological consciousness expressed by the writer elsewhere.

Narrative and Ecofeminist Praxis

Irene Diamond and Gloria F. Orenstein explain the value of praxis in ecofeminist theory:

> Ecofeminist politics does not stop short at the place of dismantling the androcentric and anthropocentric biases of Western civilization. Once the critique of such dualities as culture and nature, reason and emotion, human and animal has been posed, ecofeminism seeks to *reweave new stories that acknowledge and value the biological and cultural diversity that sustains life*. (Gaard & Murphy 1998: 2, my italics)

The texts in question present just such a reweaving of stories that affirm ecofeminist principles of diversity. In other words, these texts embody ecofeminist praxis in two ways: first, in themselves, as a narrative implementation of ecofeminist principles; and second, in their impact on increasing readers' ecological consciousness. "Production of literary works" is one of the forms of ecofeminist praxis that Patrick Murphy names next to "acts of civil disobedience and behavioral changes. … Readers need to be asking themselves constantly what the texts they are holding in their hands can offer to enhance the theories that shape their lives" (Gaard & Murphy 1998: 24). Winterson, Smith, and Woolf offer narratives that perform a critique of and act as a challenge to our habitual views and truths, proposing new ways of looking at the world, as well as creating communities of readers who share and implement these new attitudes.

In their discussion of discourse communities, scholars distinguish place communities and focus communities: "Focus discourse communities are not defined by mutual engagement, but consist of individuals who coparticipate in discursive practices with some purposeful focus even when they are separated by time, language, geography, and so on" (Prior 2003: 2). The authors in question have accumulated communities of readers with whom they have communicated throughout their careers. During her life, Woolf was emphatic about her attention to readers, expressed in her essays, reviews, and correspondence with her readers/friends. Up to the present, she gathers scholars and "common readers" from all over the world at annual international conferences on Virginia Woolf that take place in the United States and Britain. Outside of their textual practice, personal contact and influence on their audiences form another aspect of Winterson and Smith's ecofeminist praxis. They both meet readers regularly at various literary festivals and guest

lectures. Smith maintains a relationship with her audience through newspaper and online interviews, where she answers questions interactively. Winterson communicates with her readers through interviews and most notably her highly interactive website, which includes her monthly personal column. There she shares her reading and writing process, voices her political opinions, and encourages conservation and an ecologically conscious lifestyle, including energy efficiency and local farming initiatives. Of course, the texts are fundamentally discourse community sites in themselves, as they draw their readers into participation, the same text in many physical copies shared by a community of people.[4] These author/reader interactions and the environmental practices they encourage amount to the scale of community activism and are a practical consequence of the ecofemnist critique that these texts perform.

1

The Narrative Ecology of "Kew Gardens": Virginia Woolf's Ecofeminist Imagination and the Narrative Discovery of *Jacob's Room*

My discussion of the ecological implications of fictional forms starts in 1917, with what is regarded as the beginnings of Virginia Woolf's modernist innovation. This chapter identifies Woolf's experiment with narrative perspective and organic form in *Jacob's Room* as a consequence of her writings of the period 1917–22, centrally her short story "Kew Gardens." Basing on Woolf's diary entries and letters, I frame her experiment in ecological terms, and propose a connection between the decentered, situated feminist narrative method of *Jacob's Room* and what I call her ecological imagination, which is evident in her earlier writings. I first examine Woolf's diaries and the unusual narrative perspective of "Kew Gardens," and then outline what I see as their influence on *Jacob's Room*. Underlying all these considerations is the ecocritical premise that a text is never separate from its environment:

> Genres and texts are themselves arguably "ecosystems," not only in the narrow sense of the text as a discursive "environment," but also in the broader sense that "texts help reproduce sociohistorical environments" in stylized form (Barwashi 2001: 73). Indeed, an individual text must be thought of as environmentally embedded from its germination to its reception. (Buell 2005: 44)

Asheham: Developing a Microscopic Vision

On August 3, 1917, Virginia Woolf resumed her diary entries after a two-year silence following a return of her illness in 1915. While she continued her social communication through letter writing, the diary—her more private, introspective medium—remained significantly quiet. It only resumed when she arrived at Asheham, the country house she

rented from 1911 to 1919. Asheham provided an environment very different from the Hogarth House in Richmond, where the Woolfs were busy printing and socializing. It was a country retreat where visitors rarely just dropped by, and where Woolf was often alone when Leonard was absent on business. The resumed diary entries show a person who is less gregarious, quieter, and more observant of the outside environment. The entries of that summer comprise little more than ornithological and botanical records of life at Asheham, including lists of specific species of butterflies (1977–84, I: 40–43). A typical entry reads:

> Sat in the hollow; & found the carterpillar, now becoming a Chrysalis, wh. I saw the other day. A horrid sight: head turning from side to side, tail paralysed; brown colour, purple spots just visible; like a snake in movement. No mushrooms. Walked over the down with L.S. B. [Lytton Strachey] & Mr [Bunny] Garnett for dinner. (1977–84, I: 43)

A reader familiar with the intellectually charged, simultaneously social and introspective voice of Woolf's earlier diaries finds entries like this one stunning in their contrast. The discussion of ideas that must have been exchanged during the social interactions is conspicuously missing. In its place, events of nonhuman life are reported in great detail and given unprecedented attention. The definite article and the verb "found," for example, suggest that Woolf went back to the same place, purposefully looking for the caterpillar she had seen before. The narrative, similar in structure to many of that period, shifts between the nonhuman and the human subjects, a method that will later be replicated in both "Kew Gardens" and *Jacob's Room*. Whether we view Woolf's focus on nature as an attempt to quiet her mind or as motivated by sheer interest and pleasure, its results may have surpassed the original intention. Her immersion in nature seems to have influenced her perspective; the secluded, self-contained world of Asheham has retrained her vision to become microscopic, to pay attention to what she may not have noticed before.

During this time, Woolf visits Kew Gardens frequently, and never fails to record the new plants or bird life observed. She describes with excitement the appearance of crocuses and new plantings in the flowerbeds in the spring. When she goes to Kew Gardens in May 1918, she notes:

> To the general loveliness & freshness was added a sense of being out when we should have been at home; this always turns things into

> a kind of spectacle. It seems to be going on without you. We sat under a tree, & became a centre for sparrows & robins, & pestered by the attentions of a gigantic aeroplane. (1977–84, I: 148)

She observes, half with surprise, half with incredulity, the richness and energy of the outside world, flourishing without human presence. There is a sense that she wants to change her pattern and be outside instead of inside more often. What is also interesting in this brief description is how she configures the human and natural elements: the humans serving as a center for animal life, being "used" by it, as opposed to themselves using nature to their advantage as they have traditionally done. Interestingly, she describes the approach of the birds as welcome, and the appearance of the man-made airplane as annoying through words such as "pestered," "gigantic." Subtle observations like this indicate, in my opinion, a shift of vision vital to the creative breakthrough that was brewing in Woolf's mind. The anthropocentric worldview was being dislodged; it was making room for something else.

As early as August 1917, according to Hermione Lee's dating, and in late November of that year according to mine, but definitely before July 1, 1918, Woolf writes "Kew Gardens" and "An Unwritten Novel," two short stories unlike anything she had written before.[1] Later, as she starts conceptualizing *Jacob's Room* in January 1920, she notes in her diary that the short stories of 1917–19, published separately and then together in 1921, have opened new, "immense possibilities in the form" (1977–84, II: 14). Contemporary critics unanimously agree that the *Monday or Tuesday* short stories were germinal to Woolf's new fictional method, taking it into the unchartered territory of modernist and even postmodern experiment.[2] Writing about "Kew Gardens," Edward Bishop notes: "Woolf is gently forcing the reader out of his [her] established perceptual habits, raising questions about the nature of discourse and the conventions used to render it" (1982: 273). Alice Staveley points out Woolf's story's "defiance of former (literary, cultural, political) exclusions … that deny cultural authority to women" (2004: 47). To this list of exclusions "defied" by Woolf's experiment in "Kew Gardens," I will add "ecological," expanding the scope of Woolf's feminist vision to include a reform of the androcentric and anthropocentric view of the world.[3]

My approach, which focuses on Woolf's constructing connections rather than oppositions, diverges from Julia Briggs' analysis of "Kew Gardens" as a "highly formal design constructed from the alternation of binary opposites" (2005: 101) and is closer to John Oakland and Edward Bishop in its stress on unities. While pursuing a more formalist

argument, Oakland shares my ecological terminology, praising the cohesion of "Kew Gardens" as "the gradual fusion of the human and the non-human into an organic whole" (1987: 267). Bishop analyzes the unifying effect of the "Kew" experiment as incorporating the world of the reader:

> Woolf displays what would become the defining characteristic of her later prose: a flexible narrative style which allows her to move without obvious transition from an external point of view to one within the mind of a character, and back again, thus *fusing the physical setting with the perceiving consciousness*. Further, it is a mode which invites the reader's participation in the process, so that the reality Woolf conveys is apprehended through the experience of reading. .... the reader becomes conscious of moving among words, just as the characters do. (1982: 272, my italics)

Importantly, Bishop shows here that Woolf's narrative method is inherently ecological, as it deconstructs the boundary between the outside world and the characters' mind. Woolf's famous "indirect" stream of consciousness performs an important function of unifying the character and the environment in a way that contemporary ecocriticism is increasingly appreciating.[4] That seamless inclusion extends to the reader her/himself. Ultimately, the unity of the text, and of the text and the reader, models the inherent unity of the "real" world.

The ecocritical ecofeminist approach enables us to draw a connection between Woolf's attention to the natural world in this period and her revision of the traditional nineteenth-century narrative. Woolf can be seen as thinking about writing the way modern ecocomposition does, studying relationships between writing and writing environments.[5] Throughout the period 1917–21, her diary records the impact that the immersion in nature at Asheham has had on her creative being. In January 1918, she writes that she responds differently to the environments of Asheham and London:

> But what I like most about Asheham is that I read books there; so divine it is, coming in from a walk to have tea by the fire & then read & read. … one's faculties are so oddly clarified that the page detaches itself in its true meaning & lies as if illuminated, before one's eyes; seen whole & truly not in jerks & spasms so as often in London. (1977–84, I: 94–5)

Woolf notices that the natural environment of the outside walk enhances her creative and analytical thinking. She describes her experience of reading in Asheham in the absolute, almost extreme terms of

"true meaning," "page seen whole and truly," and contrasts it to the distracting effect of London. In May 1918, she notes that "to take up the pen directly upon coming back from Asheham shows I hope that this book is now a natural growth of mine—a rather dishevelled, rambling plant, running a yard of green stalk for every flower. The metaphor comes from Asheham" (1977–84, I: 150). Again she makes a connection between the environment of the country and her creative process, forming an organic metaphor for her diary writing: "a natural growth of mine." She continues in the same entry:

> Last night at Charleston I lay with my window open listening to a nightingale, which beginning in the distance came very near the garden. Fishes splashed in the pond. May in England is all they say—so teeming, amorous, & creative. (1977–84, I: 151)

Here she binds together nature's creativity with her own, in the description of the month of May as "teeming" and "creative." She contextualizes her writing process in nature. In September 1918, she recalls one of her recent walks:

> I remember lying on the side of a hollow, waiting for L. to come & mushroom, & seeing a red hare loping up the side & thinking suddenly "This is Earth life." I seemed to see how earthly it all was, & I myself an evolved kind of hare; as if a moon visitor saw me. A good life it is, at such moments; but I can't recapture the queer impression I had of its being earth life seen from the moon. (1977–84, I: 190–1)

Woolf shows a capacity to abandon traditional, habitual perspectives, starting with the androcentric one: she is able to identify herself as another, albeit evolved, animal, and to imagine herself and the earth from an extraterrestrial being's perspective. She is aware of the world as a multisystem, of all life forms' simultaneous diversity and interconnectedness. This view is a continuation of her famous childhood observation of a flower being one with the earth that she records in *Moments of Being*: '"That is the whole,' I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth" (1978b: 71). She describes this concept of connectedness as a life-long "philosophy" and "a constant idea of mine" (1978b: 72):

> It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole … it gives me … a great delight to put the severed parts together. … It is the

> rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what. … We—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. (1978b: 72)

Again, the natural unity becomes an inspiration for creating artistic unities; again, one is an extension of the other. All in all, it may not have been a coincidence that Woolf felt the creative pressure to develop alternatives to the single, centralized narrative authority (male and all-knowing) after spending months observing nature: watching life at the microscopic level of other beings, entertaining other perspectives and other centers of consciousness.

This chapter puts forward the hypothesis that the experiment of *Jacob's Room* had an ecological/environmental genesis. I suggest that Virginia Woolf's 1917 immersion in nature at Asheham focused her eye on minute natural events and resulted in the creation of the nature-centered point of view in "Kew Gardens." I see her unusual decision to place the narrative perspective at the ground level of the flowerbed (making the snail's world equal in subjectivity to the human) as the first formulation of her idea of multiple centers of consciousness, each offering a point of view on the "central" character of Jacob. Woolf's imaginative, ecocentric view of the world that prompted her to give narrative subjectivity to a nonhuman was the origin of the decentered, dispersed, and subjective narrative perspective of her next novel.

The Narrative Ecology of "Kew Gardens"

The striking innovation of "Kew Gardens" lies in Woolf's disposing of the primacy of the perspective of the human eye. Instead, she places the narrative center of the story at the eye level of a snail, and at the ground level of the flowerbed. This is where the observation point remains, the life of the snail being interrupted whenever "there came past the bed the feet of human beings" (1997: 41). When the people can no longer be seen from the vantage point of the flowerbed, they dissolve "in the green-blue atmosphere" (1997: 45). Instead of humans looking down on small natural others, we have a validation of a "reversed," ecocentric perspective, which is maintained throughout the story as an equally "natural" and functional way of seeing the world.

The flowerbed is not merely an accidental, convenient location, but a significant parallel microcosm with its own inhabitants (the flowers, the

butterflies, and the snail) with their respective problems and dilemmas, such as how to conquer obstacles in one's path:

> The snail had now considered every possible method of reaching his goal without going round the dead leaf or climbing over it. Let alone the effort needed for climbing a leaf, he was doubtful whether the thin texture which vibrated with such alarming crackle when touched even by the tip of his horns would bear his weight. … He had just inserted his head in the opening … and was getting used to the cool brown light when two other people came past outside on the turf. (1997: 43)

The narrator shows a remarkable empathic ability to convey the snail's perspective, with microscopic observational power including anticipation of the leaf's durability as well as the specific environmental sounds and sights that the snail experiences. The anthropomorphic tint of these observations makes them no less remarkable, since anthropomorphic language is the only medium readily available to the narrator in which to describe the snail. Moreover, anthropomorphism helps to achieve the portrayal of the minute snail's sensibility as equally complex and significant as a human's.

The parallels and equivalence between the world of the humans and the world of the flowerbed are maintained consistently throughout the story. The comparison of the people's "irregular" movement to that of the white and blue butterflies is made in reference to the approaching men and women, and repeated as a frame at the end after the last couple departs. Elements of nature (the dragonfly, the red water lilies, the forests of Uruguay, the dirt of the flowerbed) are always present within the human stories, connecting what would traditionally be seen as two separate worlds. Woolf's technique creates one integrated universe in which the very dichotomy disappears. Her metaphors criss-cross the traditional realms, injecting human attributes into the natural description ("heart-shaped," "mouth," "throats," "tongue-shaped," "flesh of the leaf") and vice versa ("words with short wings for the heavy body of meaning"). The interchangeability of the terms and qualities underscores the unity and equality of the human and the nonhuman. The world is presented as a cosmos in which snails and people go about their equally important lives. Interestingly, the story's main critical praise focused on its unified atmosphere, its portrait of "the essence of the human and the natural world of the garden," and on "immers[ing] the reader in the atmosphere of the garden" (Bishop 1982: 269). Stated in

ecological terms, this is a portrait of the world as one well-functioning ecosystem, in which humans do not dominate but coexist with the other universal participants. What Woolf is effectively doing here is presenting an ecological vision that contemporary ecophilosophers such as Anthony Weston have termed "multicentrism":

> Around us are not merely a multitude of humans or of conscious centers and not merely a multitude of other midsized and discrete "force-fields" like rocks and trees, but a multitude of other *kinds* of "force-fields" like tectonic plates, bacteria, nebulae. … Instead, in place of the notion of "universe" itself, it is high time to speak instead, following William James, of the "Multiverse." To speak of multicenteredness, then, is to invoke *a world thick with many sorts of presence* [my italics], in which we move amidst and within other or larger force-fields or centers of gravity. (2004: 30)

Seeing the "world [as] thick with many sorts of presence," which is exactly what Woolf presents in "Kew Gardens," demands a decentralization of the traditional androcentric perspective. Such a view carries with it consequences of a feminist and, I argue, aesthetic nature. If one is capable, as Woolf was in "Kew Gardens," of seeing the world as a multiverse—that is, as comprised of equal natural entities, human and more-than-human—writing about this world from one central position of dominance becomes impossible. In narrative terms, the multicentric perspective has a bearing on both who the narrative centers are and what they know. Specifically, there exists no single position that provides absolute knowledge, since all knowledge is situated in the eyes of the observer, and there are no absolutes or totalities. The concept of "situated knowledge," the foundation of twentieth-century feminist science, is crucial to Woolf's narrative experiment in both "Kew Gardens" and *Jacob's Room*. Situated knowledge is an ecological concept, since it is defined by a relationship between a perceiver and his/her/its environment. I will come back to this point later in my discussion.

Woolf realized early on the breakthrough importance of the *Monday or Tuesday* short stories. Sending "Kew Gardens" to Vanessa Bell, Woolf describes the story's difference from her previous writings as "a case of atmosphere" (1975–80, II: 257). She may mean by this the singular effect the story has on the reader as it presents to us a complete, interconnected system. "Atmosphere" overtly refers to the enclosed character of the setting, which, as in a Greek tragedy, remains in one place, which organizes all the other elements of the work, such as plot, time,

and characters.[6] However, "atmosphere" is also an ecocritical term, signifying a network of relationships within an environment. Throughout the writing of *Jacob's Room*, Woolf reminds herself of the achievement of "Kew Gardens" and her desire to "enclose everything, everything":

> Suppose one thing should open out of another—as in An Unwritten Novel—only not for 10 pages but for 200 or so—doesn't that give the looseness and lightness I want: doesn't that get closer & yet keep form & speed, & enclose everything, everything? … no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen. … Whether I'm sufficiently mistress of things—thats the doubt; but conceive mark on the wall, K[ew]. G[ardens]. & unwritten novel taking hands and dancing in unity. (1977–84, II: pp. 13–14)

Instead of recreating "reality" through mimesis, Woolf aims for her text to create an inclusive organic system in which "one thing should open out of another" (1975–80, II: 588; IV: 231). In ecocritical terms, her desire is for the text to become a model of an interconnected ecosystem.

Like Woolf herself, the first readers and reviewers of *Jacob's Room* also saw its experiment as a continuation of the new project that she undertook in the preceding short stories. T.S. Eliot writes in a letter to Woolf that "you have bridged a certain gap which existed between your other novels and the experimental prose of *Monday or Tuesday* and … have made a remarkable success" (Raitt 2007: 221). In one of the first reviews, A.S. McDowall states: "One might describe Mrs. Woolf's new novel as the opposite of *Night and Day*, her last; for one might say that it is rather like the method of *Monday or Tuesday* applied to a continuous story. But this novel is limpid and definite" (Raitt 2007: 211). Lytton Strachey calls it "a wonderful achievement, more like poetry" (Raitt 2007: 209); and Rebecca West sees it as "authentic poetry" (Raitt 2007: 216). All of these early opinions underscore one common point: in this new novel Woolf is continuing a significantly different fictional venture, whose beginning was marked by "Kew Gardens" and the other contemporaneous short stories. As I have noted, its genesis can be taken even further back, to the changes of perspective occasioned by the natural environment at Asheham.

Jacob's Room's Organic Multiverse

Jacob's Room continues "Kew Gardens"' project of dislodging the centralized, androcentric view of the world/text in several ways: by direct

narrative comment; by frequent featuring of nonhumans as subjects; by the dispersal of the single narrative point of view to reflect situated knowledge; and by building a microcosmic, organic structure for the book through significant repetition. I will discuss each of these elements in turn.

In the most direct way, Woolf's narrator's comments in the novel often juxtapose the world of nature with that of the humans to the detriment of the latter, as in this example: "Though the opinion is unpopular it seems likely enough that bare places, fields too thick with stones to be ploughed, tossing sea-meadows half way between England and America, suit us better than cities" (1978a: 144).[7] In another narrative comment, nature is seen as balanced, self-sufficient, and a source of peace and retreat for Mrs. Flanders and Mrs. Jarvis (1978a: 132–3), while the world of commerce and business "scheme" and exploit it as a commodity:

> So when the wind roams through a forest innumerable twigs stir; hives are brushed; insects sway on grass blades; the spider runs rapidly up a crease in the bark; and the whole air is tremulous with breathing; elastic with filaments. Only here–in Lombard Street and Fetter Lane and Bedford Square–each insect carries a globe of the world in his head, and the webs of the forest are schemes evolved for the smooth conduct of business; and honey is treasure of one sort or another; and the stir in the air is the indescribable agitation of life. (1978a: 163)

The passage shows the striking microscopic attention to detail that we saw in "Kew Gardens," featuring the effect of the wind not simply on fields and trees but on single blades of grass and creases in the bark, insects precariously balanced, and a spider seeking shelter.

Throughout the novel, as in the earlier diaries and "Kew Gardens," the nonhuman environment is featured as a constant presence alongside the human characters, far transcending mere "setting." The passage quoted above exemplifies Woolf's positioning of the nonhuman animal, plant, and nonliving environment as subjects in their own right, equal to and interrelated with the human. She does this remarkably and consistently throughout the span of the novel. Louise Westling points to Woolf's "exploration of the living world outside human structures and cultural constructions … [when] at the end of the first chapter the narrative gaze travels along a beam of light from a house out into a storm and eventually fixes on a crab weakly trying again and again

to climb out of a bucket half-full of rainwater" (1999: 859). Westling is referring to the passage that is a tour de force, impressionist study of light/perspective, and a miniature model of the novel's method:

> The harsh light fell on the garden; cut straight across the lawn; lit up a child's bucket and a purple aster and reached the hedge. Mrs. Flanders had left her sawing on the table. … There were the bulrushes and the *Strand* magazines; and the linoleum sandy from the boy's boots. A daddy-long-legs shot from corner to corner and hit the lamp globe. The wind blew straight dashes of rain across the window, which flashed silver as they passed through the light. A single leaf tapped hurriedly, persistently, upon the glass. (Woolf 1978a: 12)

This passage does not constitute "background" to a description of human action; it is a self-standing paragraph separated by a full line space at each end. A human presence is not the reason for its existence. The light of the lamp spotlights the parts of the environment related to humans equally with those belonging to nature, integrating the traditionally human realm of the inside and the traditionally natural realm of the outside: the light shows the child's bucket and a purple aster next to each other, the bulrushes next to the magazines, sand on the linoleum floor, the wind and the rain on the window, the daddy longlegs hitting the lamp, and the leaf tapping on the window. Moreover, Woolf underscores the relatedness and equality of the human and the natural by using the anthropomorphic epithets "hurriedly, persistently." The light's power to select each subject is symbolic of the perceivers'/narrator's perspective.[8] The passage can be seen as a miniature model of the novel's method of positioning the nonhuman as equally significant, with prototypes in the Asheham diary entries and in "Kew Gardens." Additionally, as a very early passage, it provides unity to the book by foreshadowing the closing chapter describing the room without Jacob, having its own life that is not dependent on his.

Consistent featuring of nonhumans as valid, equal subject centers is an important ecological aspect of Woolf's project in *Jacob's Room*. The following passage is another example of this method: "A garnet brooch has dropped into its grass. A fox pads stealthily. A leaf turns on its edge. Mrs. Jarvis, who is fifty years of age, reposes in the camp in the hazy moonlight" (Woolf 1978a: 133–4). Woolf gives subjectivity to the brooch, leaf, and fox, moving from one to another, featuring them side by side and in equal importance to the human subject, who is listed last. The garnet brooch drops into *its* grass, as if this human artifact always

belonged with nature; "dropped" is used as an active verb, giving the brooch even more agency. The sentence length and syntax also parallel each other, marking the equal value of the subjects described. In another example, we smoothly transition from Jacob and Fanny's thoughts to the activities of other beings, featured as equally noteworthy:

> For, he said, there is nothing so detestable as London in May. He would forget her. A sparrow flew past the window trailing a straw—a straw from a stack stood by a barn in a farmyard. The old brown spaniel snuffs at the base for a rat. Already the upper branches of the elms are blotted with nests. The chestnuts have flirted their fans. And the butterflies are flaunting across the rides in the Forest. Perhaps the Purple Emperor is feasting, as Morris says, upon a mass of putrid carrion at the base of an oak tree. Fanny thought it all came from *Tom Jones*. (Woolf 1978a: 123)

As with the snail of "Kew Gardens" carrying on with its life next to the passing humans, the nonhuman subjects in this passage are featured as performing actions side by side with the humans—actions that are meticulously noted and described in human terms ("flaunted," "feasting") to mark their equal status.

Woolf gives narrative focus and subjectivity not only to plants and animals but to the rest of the environment such as objects and air itself, as in the famous passage occurring twice in the novel: "Listless is the air in the empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fiber in the wicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there" (1978a: 176). Like Mrs. Flanders' brooch earlier, inanimate objects are featured here as narrative subjects. Moreover, they are given animate characteristics and a command of active, strong verbs: the air swells the curtain, the flowers move in the vase. Again, Woolf presents their subjectivity as equal to the animate and even human subjects, who are often backgrounded or absent. The nonhumans lead their existence independently of the humans, and often outlast them, as do Jacob's room and his shoes and armchair.

In the following passage, the shift of point of view is reminiscent of the original narrative perspective shift of "Kew Gardens" from down–up to up–down:

> Mr. Pearce had extinguished the lamp. The garden went out. It was but a dark patch. Every inch was rained upon. Every blade of grass was bent by rain. Eyelids would have been fastened down by the

> rain. Lying on one's back one would have seen nothing but muddle and confusion—clouds turning and turning, and something yellow-tinted and sulphurous in the darkness. (Woolf 1978a: 13–14)

The human eye is placed on the level of the blade of grass and shares its experience of the rain, seeing the world from ground up, confusing and overwhelming, as it must seem to small natural beings. Again, the narrative shift of position represents an acknowledgment of the other's viewpoint, and of its equal validity.

Woolf's multicentric project reaches further into the narrative structure of the whole novel. After dislodging the customary way of seeing the world from the human "above" by using the down–up perspective of the snail and the flowerbed in "Kew Gardens," she disperses the single, centralized point of view into multiple perspectives of individual observers in *Jacob's Room*.[9] The observer characters, such as Mrs. Norman, Mrs. Jarvis, Mrs. Pascoe, Mr. Steele, and over a hundred others, are obscure (Caughie 1991: 65), seemingly insignificant, subjective, and preliminary to what we expect to come as the final, authoritative account, which never materializes. Instead, their coincidental, personal portraits of Jacob turn out to be all we have to rely on in the end. They are not merely "background" any more than the snail's perspective was background; they stand their ground and each contributes a glimpse of Jacob complete in itself and equal to any other.

A good manifestation of this decentralized narrative (e)quality is the episode when Captain Barfoot, on his way to pay a visit to Betty Flanders, runs into Mrs. Jarvis. After exchanging greetings and walking together for a while, the two part, but the narrative focus follows Mrs. Jarvis and her walk on the moors for a page longer, rather than staying with the Captain as we might expect (1978a: 26–7). Woolf features this seemingly episodic, secondary character's story as equally important, and lets it interrupt the narrative focus of the archetypal male journey to visit a female. In contemporary ecofeminist philosophy the distribution of multiple perspectives is termed "situated knowledge." As Kathleen Lennon explains:

> Feminist epistemologists, in common with many other strands of contemporary epistemology, no longer regard knowledge as a neutral transparent reflection of an independently existing reality, with truth and falsity established by transcendent procedures of rational assessment. Rather, most accept that all knowledge is situated knowledge, reflecting the position of the knowledge producer at a

> certain historical moment in a given material and cultural context. (1997: 36)

"Situated knowledge" is an ecological concept, since the "material context" includes the dynamic between a subject and its environment. The "where" something is perceived is inextricably connected to the "how." Feminist epistemologist Sandra Harding's standpoint theory stresses the importance of the voices situated outside of the dominant power centers:

> Starting thought from the lives of those people upon whose exploitation the legitimacy of the dominant system depends can bring into focus questions and issues that were not visible, "important," or legitimate within the dominant institutions, their conceptual frameworks, structures, and practices. (Harding 1998: 17)

Shotter and Logan note that "In contrast to the binary-based, single epistemological system, feminist science proposes 'a practical, particular, contexted, open, and nonsystematic knowledge of the social circumstances in which one has one's being, concerned with achieving a heterarchy of times and places for a plurality of otherwise conflicting voices'" (1988: 76). This characterization of contemporary feminist epistemology as heterogeneous and environmentally conditioned is at the same time a strikingly fitting description of the ecofeminist, multicentric character of Woolf's narrative. Woolf decenters the position of single central narrative authority, traditionally human, male, and omniscient. She replaces the male all-knower with a female "inquirer," who relies on reports from multiple, diversely situated observers, all equally subjective. The female narrator's knowledge of Jacob, like a modern feminist scientist's, is "practical, particular, contexted, open, and nonsystematic." In yet another respect, the narrative diversity of *Jacob's Room* models the biodiversity existing within natural ecosystems.

The female narrator's inclusive voice, repetition, and recurrent symbol constitute the glue that holds the observers together and reminds us of the interrelatedness of all the elements of this textual ecosystem. Woolf stresses the observers' "situatedness" by making them immobile, embedded in the environment that constitutes their point of reference. Several times in the book their seemingly "peripheral" location is elevated in importance by being described as the whole world: "No words can exaggerate the importance of Dods Hill. It was the earth; the world against the sky; the horizon of how many glances can best

be computed by those who have lived all their lives in the same village" (Woolf 1978a: 17). The observer characters' function is for each to contribute one view particular to them, their "glances" later to be computed by us readers. Importantly, a significant majority of these individual observers are women, situated alone at a vantage point from which they can view their surroundings and offer their perspective, undistracted by the men from whom they are separated. In subversion of the gender stereotype of women belonging inside, most often that vantage point is located in the outside natural environment, such as orchards, moors, and hillsides. Invariably, Woolf endows the women with an ability to observe: they "stare," "gaze," "look." By being active observing agents and not simply objects portrayed, they actively reverse the male "gaze"—just as Mrs. Flanders' desire to "see" Jacob frustrates Mr. Steele's painting session in the first scene of the book (Woolf 1978a: 8). The observer characters see Jacob not as he is, but as and where they are; that is, shaped by their location and their emotional state of the moment.

It is separate women "solitary in the open fields … gleaning a few golden straws" of observed detail that compile Jacob's portrait (Woolf 1978a: 8). This large group of female observers includes the narrator, who differs from the others only by speaking in the first person. Her view is no less (and perhaps even more) consciously situated and subjective, and she makes her bias the center of her narrative "case":

> It seems that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow-creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold, or we are sentimental. … Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love. (1978a: 71–2)

What is more, her view is no less fragmentary or environmentally conditioned; for instance, she has to stay out of Jacob's bedroom as well as his mind, and can only speculate about what is going on inside. Her narrative is peppered with "maybe," "perhaps," "surely," and many other phrases consistently injecting doubt and reminding us of the relative, subjective, and incomplete "manner of our seeing." Through the figure of the narrator, Woolf underscores the necessity to acknowledge the situated and limited character of all knowledge: "Her use of multiple voices through free indirect discourse acknowledges the variety, fragmentation, and situatedness of subjectivity: it cannot be totalized or contained" (Snaith 2000: 82). It is vital to this feminist ecotext that Woolf's dismantling of the centralized, all-knowing worldview is

performed by a woman. Anna Snaith argues that Woolf's critique of omniscience was a feminist gesture:

> Woolf is exposing the artificiality of the objective, omniscient narrator. … She chose a female narrator .– because in realist fiction narrative authority has traditionally been coded as male. – The female narrator is denied access to the misogynist world of Jacob. She defamiliarizes patriarchal institutions and assumptions, her gender offering her "the modernist stance of alienation and plurality rather than dogmatic unity." The novel is about seeing from an outsider's position. (2000: 80–81)

Importantly for my argument, the outsider's position, recalling Harding's standpoint theory, is defined by one's placement in reference to others, and is therefore environmentally determined. By foregrounding nonhuman subjects and decentering the omniscient male narrator into multiple female observers situated in their (often natural) environment, Woolf connects the position and oppression of women with the position and oppression of nature. Her narrative experiment intersects significantly with the ecofeminist anti-androcentric project.[10]

One more ecological aspect of the novel is its organic unity. Despite the multiplicity of characters and character vignettes, *Jacob's Room* is not a "disconnected rhapsody" (1977–85, II: 179), as Woolf herself was, in her modesty, afraid. It is kept together by a precise network of conspicuous formal elements such as frame structure, time manipulation, repetition, and symbol. As noted earlier, the novel starts and ends with Betty Flanders looking for an absent Jacob, and the light passage opens the frame later closed by the description of the empty room. Other significant imagery connecting the beginning and the end sections includes the ram's skull carved on the door frame, which recalls the sheep's jaw that little Jacob picks up at the beach. Most flagrantly, the passage describing the "listless air in an empty room" on the final page is repeated verbatim from page 39, closing another frame. In an early time lapse, Reverend Floyd reports meeting adult Jacob in Piccadilly long before Jacob leaves home (Woolf 1978a: 22). All these deliberate structural connections deconstruct linear chronology and point to the book's central truth: that even after we have reached the nominal "end" of the book, we are in the same place as we started; we have not learned more about his character. The crab trying to escape the confines of its bucket, and the emptiness of Jacob's chair, are environmental parallels to the nature of our knowledge of him. Caughie classifies

Woolf's text as an organic ecotext when she comments on the author's formal technique: "Flagrant repetition, by highlighting the narrative elements as parts in a composition, shows that these elements derive their significance from their context, not from their correspondence to a world apart" (1991: 71). In ecological terms, Woolf's novel forms an ecosystem, and in those terms she has succeeded in what she desired to achieve: freedom from realist, merely mimetic representation.

Conclusion

Evidence of Woolf's ecological consciousness is present throughout *Jacob's Room*. Jinny Carslake's poignant comment about separate pebbles blending together, "Multiplicity becomes unity, which is somehow the secret of life" (1978a: 131), can be taken as a definition of the multicentered worldview that the text is conceptualizing. It presents humans as deeply and inseparably embedded in their natural, animate, and nonanimate environment. It shows this interrelatedness through frequent shifts from human to nonhuman narrative subjects, consistently assigning them equal status. Woolf's decentralization of the traditionally masculine omniscient narrator and its replacement with multiple, situated observers are practical manifestations of the anti-anthropocentric multicentrism. The novel is structured as one cohesive, organic system through significant repetition. As I have shown, all these formal gestures are consistent with Woolf's ecological imagination and shaped by her feminism. Whether we are comfortable with assigning Woolf the ecofeminist label or not, her text shows undeniable affinities with that area of thought.[11] The world of *Jacob's Room* is a textual equivalent of a world where, in Karen J. Warren's words, "difference does not breed domination" (1990: 145). Woolf's new experimental form emerges as closely tied to her ecological awareness. It has its prototype in the journey of a snail across a flowerbed, and is rooted in her close observation of the interlaced multiverse of the natural world.

2
"All Taken Together": Ecological Form in *Mrs. Dalloway*[1]

In a passage from "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia Woolf recalls a memory of nature that led to a breakthrough creative insight:

> I was looking at the flower bed by the front door: "That is the whole," I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower. It was a thought I put away as being likely to be very useful to me later. (1978b: 71)

A few paragraphs later she writes about the pleasure of making connections in writing as "the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what. … From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art" (1978b: 72). Woolf elevates the idea of universal unity to the level of her philosophy, "a constant idea." She believes that the environmental wholeness she has felt in nature also encompasses the human sphere, and that works of art inherently transmit the hidden patterns of the rest of the world. I examine *Mrs. Dalloway* in the light of that philosophy.

Woolf's early vision of the world as one whole finds its expression through characters desiring universal empathy and unity, which includes the nonhuman beings. This chapter proposes a reading of the highly interconnected form of *Mrs. Dalloway* as a model of a larger ecological interconnectedness to which Woolf referred. Not only this theme, but also the form of the novel supports an ecological reading.

"The pattern behind the cotton wool" is a concept that can be said to diagram the structure of the novel. Woolf uses free indirect discourse to create a revolutionary narrator who remains in an active relationship with her various textual, intertextual, and extratextual environments. *Mrs. Dalloway* is one of the texts that, as Lawrence Buell contends, can contribute to transforming environmental values through their "power of story, image … and aesthetics" (2005: vi).[2] Seen from an ecological perspective, Woolf's novel models a web of relationships of beings in a diverse ecosystem.

Woolf's early vision of the flower in the garden at St. Ives was formative of what I call her ecological imagination. While conceiving *Mrs. Dalloway*, she writes in her *Diary* of the new book as an inclusive environment: "[to] get closer & yet keep form and speed and enclose everything, everything" (1977–84, II: 13); "I feel I had loosed the bonds pretty completely and could pour everything in" (II: 302); "I feel I can use up everything I have ever thought" (II: 272). The characters have behind them "caves that shall connect" (II: 263) by "tunneling" (II: 272). She imagines the new work as a space that has been opened and is now capable of enclosing all things. In the finished novel, her two main characters and their stories remain overtly unrelated until the end of the book, yet Woolf draws a net of thematic and formal connections that brings them together. The text functions as an ecosystem that binds overtly dissimilar beings in an inherently interdependent relationship. As in nature, their interdependence is not immediately obvious, but gradually discovered and appreciated by the observer.

"Transcendental theory" and "a new religion": The Characters' Vision of Unity with the World and Each Other

The two protagonists of *Mrs. Dalloway,* Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith, are visionary characters who proclaim a belief in the world's deeply imbedded interconnectedness. Septimus' socially dysfunctional, yet environmentally harmonious madness allows him a unique perspective, whereby he perceives trees as "alive" and connected to him:

> leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibers with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern. … Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child

> cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion. (Woolf 1981: 22–3)[3]

Septimus feels the leaves' fibers in his body and moves when they move. He is acutely aware of his environment, including sparrows and sounds interspersed with silence. The description of sparrows "falling in … fountains" underscores the world's unity, integrating the natural realms of air and water that are traditionally conceived of as separate. Importantly, Septimus notes that silences are equally significant to sounds, and relishes the harmony they create. Woolf's ecologically laden word "spaces" to describe breaks between sounds (instead of "pauses" or "silences") calls attention to the environment in which sounds travel, and brings in air as their vehicle. The human child and the cars' horns complete this environmental system, adding their voices to the sparrows'. Septimus concludes that "all [that] taken together" has a significance of a "new religion." This grand term signifies a new attitude that would treat all the world's beings as equal and connected, with no hierarchy that privileges humans above nonhumans.

Clarissa Dalloway has her own version of universal unity, which she calls her "transcendental theory":

> she felt herself everywhere; not 'here here here' … but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter—even trees, or barns. It ended in a transcendental theory which … allowed her to believe … that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death. (Woolf 1981: 152–3)

Clarissa feels physically connected to and present in other people and places, experiencing empathy and identifying with their experience. She believes that all beings and environments share that transcendental unity on a deep level, where the "unseen part … spreads wide." Clarissa expresses this vision several times during the novel, first very early, thinking of Bourton: "she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there … part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on

their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself" (Woolf 1981: 9). Here she does not simply feel "an affinity," but specifically a *part* of other humans, nonhumans, and other physical environments. Appropriately for Clarissa's vision, Woolf uses metaphors and similes portraying humans as trees and mist, as part of the nonhuman environment. Later, Clarissa explains a similar sentiment in her need to throw her party as a desire to "combine":

> Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering: to combine, to create. (Woolf 1981: 122)

To connect and combine is also Septimus' dream; both are willing to make an offering in the name of unity, hers being the party, his being the ultimate: his life. Here Clarissa also draws a sketch of the whole novel: the narrator connecting the characters in various parts of the city, relating one continuous day in their lives. Importantly, she calls their separation and lack of connection "a waste," "a pity," and she tries to remedy it with her party and her sympathy for Septimus.

However, Clarissa's sympathetic reaction to Septimus is an exception in the novel. Most of the time, the characters do not have a deeper knowledge of one another; they walk around, observing each other from the outside as strangers do. We as readers see them as related only because of how Woolf's narrator—the connecting thread—presents them. She extends the connections she places between the characters to other texts, and ultimately to the reader, to enclose them together in a meaningful web of relationships, creating "the pattern behind the cotton wool."

The Narrator's Connectedness to the Characters

Septimus' "new religion" and Clarissa's "transcendental theory" of connectedness find their embodiment in the novel's narrative form, fulfilling the characters' vision on the textual level. *Mrs. Dalloway*'s narrator is a revolutionary presence hitherto unprecedented in the history of the novel. The narrator is an expression of Woolf's project of decentering the patriarchal "I," the omniscient speaking subject.[4] Woolf replaces the single master perspective with an inclusive voice that frequently "steps aside" to allow multiple character voices through: "Instead of

the narrator delivering impressions of Clarissa, we receive the 'support of innumerable other characters' (Woolf 2003: 61)" (Mezei 1996: 84–6).

Christopher Herbert notes that in creating such a narrative, Woolf takes a stand against absolutism and for relativity: "no one point of view prevails," they interact and communicate (Herbert 2001: 121). I argue that "The general axiom of relativity: that nothing is one thing just by itself and that a thing cut off from communication with other things … would simply cease to exist" (Herbert 2001: 120) is also an axiom of progressive ecology. The narrator's voice serves as an environmental link that reveals the underlying connections between the characters.

The elaborate multiplicity of perspectives that the free indirect discourse narrator creates is one of the qualities that prompt a reading of the novel as a dialogic, polyphonic, and therefore ecological text: one that presents multiple entities in relationship. Free indirect discourse is a complex method in which "the narrator substitutes his words for a character's speech, thought, or sensory perception" (Hernadi 1972: 35). Such a narrator is an underlying presence shared by all characters' voices, no matter how diverse. Although some critics argue that she dominates and "interrupts" the others, in my ecological reading this quality emphasizes the relatedness of the characters as their common DNA, the cellular base all natural beings share.[5] A myriad of personas, named and surnamed with utmost diligence, often appear once only to offer a glimpse of Clarissa or others in their environment, as in this early instance:

> She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall's van to pass. A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster); a touch of the bird about her. … There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright. (Woolf 1981: 4)

Woolf's method here disperses the singleness of vision and portrays a multiplicity of perspectives. In one short paragraph, we experience two viewpoints on the same moment of Clarissa's walk: first the narrator's, placing Clarissa in a specific place and an exact moment of car passing, then the neighbor's, catching a glimpse of her from a different direction. As Clarissa looks, she is looked at. Hers is not the only gaze, "life; London; this moment in June" (Woolf 1981: 4) has many participants, and we are made aware of them because Scrope Purvis's presence intimates the existence of others like him. By quickly shifting to Scrope's

viewpoint and back, the narrator makes us aware of a complete environmental ecosystem surrounding Clarissa.

Another particularly ecological quality of Woolf's narrator is that she establishes connections between characters through the physical environment. The environment functions as the glue that connects the characters who don't even know each other, such as Clarissa and Septimus (who both look at the passing car), and Peter and Rezia (who see each other in the park). It is the physical environment that makes them part of one system. All of the participants "live" within the larger space of the city of London, and their different locations are traversed by the famous method of the walk; most centrally Clarissa's, Peter's, Hugh's, and Richard's.[6] The narrator also connects the different persons by her manipulation of their surroundings, including other characters as common reference points (the nurse, the beggar woman, the little girl running into Rezia), airplanes writing in the sky, cars passing by (the Prime Minister's and the ambulance carrying Septimus), and buses (connecting Elizabeth and Septimus). In the following instance, by placing an airplane in the sky the narrator creates a common space between two complete strangers, Mrs. Dempster and Mr. Bentley, whose thoughts are revealed to us:

> There is a fine young feller aboard of it [the plane], Mrs. Dempster wagered, and away and away it went … over the little island of grey churches … on either side of London, fields spread out and dark brown woods where adventurous thrushes hopping boldly, glancing quickly, snatched the snail and tapped him on a stone, once, twice, thrice.
>
> Away and away the airplane shot … an aspiration, a concentration, a symbol (so it seemed to Mr. Bentley, vigorously rolling his strip of turf at Greenwich) of a man's soul; of his determination, thought Mr. Bentley, sweeping around the cedar tree, to get outside of his body. (Woolf 1981: 28)

As a characteristic of free indirect discourse (FID), it is unclear where the thoughts of the characters end and the narrator's comments begin. The narrator's voice creates a space that ties together two very different human figures that would otherwise appear unrelated. What is also important from the ecological point of view is that this inclusive space contains, in its sweep of points of view, the nonhuman subjects as well. The thrushes are the third subject perspective inhabiting the space of the plane's flight. The birds are shown in surprising detail, busy getting their meal in far-away woods, complete with personality traits ("adventurous," "boldly"). They express themselves through discrete

taps, their body language resembling the vigorous body language of the sweeping man. Through the eyes of the FID narrator, diverse human and nonhuman perspectives are shown as similar, equal, and coexisting within one ecosystem.[7]

Of the environmental elements that the narrator uses as "connectors," sounds, especially that of the chiming clocks, assume a prominent place. The narrator describes their sound as a living thing, permeating the environment:

> It was precisely twelve o'clock; twelve by Big Ben; whose stroke was wafted over the northern part of London; blent with that of other clocks, mixed in a thin ethereal way with the clouds and wisps of smoke, and died up there among the seagulls—twelve o'clock struck as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on her bed, and the Warren Smiths walked down Harley Street. (Woolf 1981: 94)

Sounds imply the presence of space, since they require air to travel through. The sound of the bells connects the Smiths to Clarissa in her room and back to the Smiths, who are walking from Dr. Bradshaw's office. The verb "mixed" in this passage amplifies the meaning of "blent" to underscore the sound's active merging with its surroundings, which include other clocks, clouds, smoke, and the seagulls, becoming part of a diverse ecosystem. As Septimus stresses, the sounds and spaces through which they travel are parts of the environment as much as visible entities are. In fact, they have a political significance of destabilizing the primacy of vision, of the masterly, traditionally male "gaze." Sound has a unifying quality: it creates a community of listeners rather than objectifying the perceived and isolating the perceiver, which are the attributes of vision, as Angela Frattarola observes (2009: 136). Melba Kuddy-Keane sees "acts of listening [as] the bridge between the individual and the world; and the fragmented, discontinuous, polytextual music conveys a wholeness, a comprehensiveness, that embraces the communal life of the universe. Though sounds are never completely harmonized for Woolf, they do connect her characters to the world" (quoted in Frattarola 2009: 139). The reliance on sound rather than vision is important in terms of ecofeminist theory, as it has the potential to change the way we perceive ourselves and the surrounding world: "because the ear does not as easily perceive the world as 'separate things, commodities,' auditory perception may allow for a different way of being in the world as well as a novel conception of the self" (Frattarola 2009: 136). Woolf's narrator uses sound, and the rest of the physical environment, to alter

the traditional view of individual beings as separate. She creates a common space that unites diverse listeners within its reach, and points to their invisible but undeniable connection.

The Narrator's Connectedness to Her Own Text: Self-refentiality

Stuart Rosenberg's early analysis calls Woolf's technique, specifically her "interest in language as language," "an obtrusive art": "Virginia Woolf continually calls attention to what she is doing" (1967: 219). Through her awareness of the reality of the text, the narrator points to the existence of its outside. In my argument, this consciousness is what makes this narrative figure ecological. If the narrator were a living human being, she would qualify as "environmentally aware," someone who makes a point to look outside of her own reality and is aware of the realities of others.

The narrator shows her awareness of the space outside of her text through multiple allusions to artistic or literary creativity, and to the form of the book itself. Through Peter's thoughts, she points to the book's intricate design: "there was design, art everywhere; a change of some sort had undoubtedly taken place" (Woolf 1981: 71). And later: "Odd unexpected people turned up; an artist sometimes; sometimes a writer; queer fish in that atmosphere. And behind it all was that network of visiting … running about with bunches of flowers" (Woolf 1981: 77). (Peter is here naming some characteristic elements of the novel.) The narrator alludes to the text's connecting "thread" on several occasions: "the invincible thread of sound" (Woolf 1981: 82–93), the "thread" extending between Lady Bruton and her lunch guests (1981: 112), Richard's mind like a "spider's thread" (1981: 115); sound is described as "that string" (1981: 127). Septimus' writings, which are fragmented and incoherent, call to mind the overt fragmentation of the novel's own plot in the chasm between Septimus and Clarissa. However, the book is so masterfully interwoven that even the comments about chaos testify to the narrator's awareness and her integrating function in this system. By being aware that she is part of a text, the narrator intimates the existence of a larger reality beyond it.

The Narrator's Connectedness to Other Texts: Intertext

The narrator extends her relationship with the extratextual environment to other texts through numerous literary allusions. Shakespeare's

plays are a haunting presence, especially *Cymbeline* in the recurring quote "Fear no more the heat o' the sun/ Nor the furious winter's rages (Woolf 1981: 9, 139); *Richard II* is present in Lady Bruton's celebration of England's past (Wyatt 1973: 441); and *The Tempest* is brought in through the references to the "drowned sailor" (Woolf 1981: 104). As Joan Wyatt points out, the drowned sailor reference (Woolf 1981: p93) also brings to mind Eliot's *The Wasteland*, spanning four centuries in a whirlwind motion (Wyatt 1973: 444). The imagery of Dante's *Inferno* is present in Septimus' description of Rezia as a "flowering tree" (Woolf 1981: 148); and the myth of Ishtar and Aphrodite reverberates in the beggar's song (Wyatt 1973: 440). Peter's musings about his vision of the girl in the street "smashed to atoms" (Woolf 1981: 81) can be related to Eliot's fragments and ruins in the wasteland, and to Yeats' imagery of chaos (Garvey 1991: 61).

Some elements of the novel's structural form can be taken back to literary history as well as to some contemporary works that Woolf had read. Molly Hoff notices the similarity of Woolf's "labyrinthine" method to that of Homer and Plato: "The labyrinthine structure in the dialogues, constructed as playlets, a structure that we also see in the *Odyssey*, is continued in the textual labyrinths of Virgil (*The Aeneid*), Ovid (*The Metamorphoses*), Dante (*The Inferno*), Proust (*À la recherche du temps perdu*), Joyce (*Ulysses*)." (2009: 2).[8] Hoff also notes, "As in the *Odyssey* where female characters contribute to a portrait of Penelope, the female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* contribute to the portrait of Clarissa" (2009: 248). Closer to excessive emotion-wary modernity, Peter refrains from imagining the people inside the passing ambulance, commenting that sentimentality is "fatal to art, fatal to friendship," echoing Woolf's own opinion on the subject recorded in her diary: "I go in dread of 'sentimentality'" (1977–84, III: 110).

The Narrator's Connectedness to the Reader: "Common Ground"

In her reaching out to the outside environment, *Mrs. Dalloway*'s narrator personifies Woolf's own philosophy of the reader–author relationship: one of equality, communication, and cooperation. All of these are vital qualities of a member of an ecosystem, who is aware of the existence of others around her, others she is equal to and interdependent with. Woolf writes about her effort to find a new narrative voice to suit the modern times in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" a year before *Mrs. Dalloway* is published. She visualizes finding "common ground"

between the writer and the reader, "a convention which would not seem to you too old, unreal, and farfetched to believe in" (1967, I: 332). When we read *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is evident that she imagines this space: the narrator seems aware of the reader's presence and trusts in his/her ability to create meaning. For example, at one point the narrator poses the question: "So they crossed, Mr. and Mrs. Septimus Warren Smith, and was there, after all, anything to draw attention to them, anything to make a passer-by suspect here is a young man who carries in him the greatest message of the world … and the most miserable?" (Woolf 1981: 83). There is no evident addressee of the question other than the reader, someone who is on the outside of the fictional world that is being described. Only the reader is privy to Septimus' "greatest" and "most miserable message"—neither his wife nor passers-by like Peter have insight into his mind. As Johanna Garvey puts it, "In a sense, the whole novel partakes in gossip between the narrator and the reader, quoting not only characters' spoken words but their inner thoughts as well as depicting sensations and emotions with vivid images" (1991: 73).[9]

As mentioned before, the free indirect discourse narrator engages the reader not by identifying relationships between characters, but by constructing them as overtly isolated individuals. Irena Ksiezopolska notes that the figure of the nurse connects Peter, Rezia, Septimus, and Carissa "though they remain unaware of the connection. … Neither of them realizes that they form one plot; this knowledge is only shared by the narrator and the reader" (2004: 23–4). During his walk, Richard runs into the beggar woman, whom we have met before independently of his perspective. Similarly, Peter observes Rezia and Septimus. We get his thoughts about them, a clean slate of someone who sees them for the first time, from a different angle:

> And that is being young, Peter Walsh thought as he passed them. To be having an awful scene—the poor girl looked absolutely desperate—in the middle of the morning. But what was it about, he wondered, what had the young man in the overcoat been saying to her to make her look like that; what awful fix had they got themselves into, both to look so desperate as that on a fine summer morning? (Woolf 1981: 70–71)

Woolf's characters function to each other as observing strangers; the narrator leaves it to the reader to make the connections between them from "the outside." Through passages like the above, she sends "winks" to the reader, who is privy to the information she has hidden from the

characters. She shows an awareness of the reader's existence, of the physical space that extends beyond the book. Thankfully, she stops short of addressing us as "dear reader," but throws us ball after ball, confident that we will catch them. As Donna Reed observes, "By allowing an insider's view of overlapping minds … [Woolf] involve[s] the reader in a communion of understanding but without labeling it as such. This narrative style tacitly embraces the reader" (1995: 127).[10]

Another important way in which the narrator communicates with the reader is through significant repetition. Characters repeat each other's thoughts, often using similar wording. Richard foreshadows Sally's view that "it is a thousand pities never to say what one feels" (Woolf 1981: 116, 112). Clarissa's thought about "friends attached to one's body" resonates in Lady Bruton's mind (1981: 112). Richard and Lady Bruton both ponder the concept of the (spider's) thread that creates ties between people (1981: 112). Recurring phrases are also easily noticeable structural ties: Peter's twice-repeated "There she was," "The leaden circles dissolved in the air" connecting Rezia and Clarissa (1981: 94, 186), and the Shakespearean "Fear no more" shared by Clarissa and Septimus.

Even within paragraphs themselves, repetition creates unity and coherence, as Woolf often builds paragraphs in a frame structure, starting with an image or action that is later completed or returned to towards the paragraph's end. Lady Bruton picking up carnations to lay them back down on the table at the end of her musings about her lunch guests is an example in point (Woolf 1981: 105). Similarly, a Spanish necklace punctuates Richard's thoughts at the jeweler's (1981: 113). Only someone on the outside of the fictional world can notice and appreciate this method.

Recurring images foreshadow events to the reader and integrate the plot, haunting our reading and keeping us on the lookout for possible connections. These include Clarissa standing at the top of the stairs, Clarissa and Septimus in their respective open windows, and an old woman seen in the house opposite, recreated in Septimus' life in the old man "coming down the staircase opposite" (Woolf 1981: 149). Images of birds are used repeatedly for Clarissa and Rezia, and those of hyacinths for Clarissa and Elizabeth. All these significant recurrences make the reader alert to the text's unity and design; through them the narrator establishes communication with the reader, leaving it for him/her to discover her method. She is therefore reaching outside of her environment with messages that she trusts readers will not miss. Equality, communication, and cooperation are ecological principles that the narrator implements in her ecosystem. Donna Reed insightfully describes this

method as fulfilling "the 'boundless' wishes of their protagonists to find realization through the narrative that embraces characters and readers together" (1995: 125).

Conclusion

Mrs. Dalloway continues to be the subject of critical discussion because of its intricate formal complexity, which remains difficult to match. I see the highly interconnected character of the novel as an expression of a larger ecological interconnectedness that Woolf was aware of and expressed as her philosophy. Seen from an ecological perspective, Woolf's book models a web of relationships in a diverse ecosystem that includes the characters' minds and their physical environment, the text itself through metafictional allusion, other texts through literary allusion, as well as an elaborate net of connections establishing communication with the reader's world.

When planning *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf wanted it to be a different book, conceiving it as a space to be filled with "everything." While writing, she stressed the need for all the elements to be closely knit, "screwed … tighter" (1977–84, II: 210) than in the preceding *Jacob's Room*. In a letter to C.P. Sanger written after the novel's publication, she confessed: "the reason I inflict these experiments upon you is that I can't lie down in peace until I have found some way of liberating my sympathies, instead of giving effect to my analytic brain" (1975–80, III: 184). She states that she wanted to do more than boast a cerebral structure; she saw the new form as an outlet for her "sympathies." I have argued that these sympathies are of an environmentalist, ecological nature, and that the book's elaborate structure provides the reader with a model of environmental interconnectedness. Woolf creates a complex narrative voice that interacts with the characters and connects them through their physical environment. The narrator's awareness extends beyond her text to other texts, and to the reader. The novel's theme of universal empathy and unity is embodied in this elaborate net of connections. *Mrs. Dalloway* transforms the hegemonic narrative space that it had historically inherited into a democratic, multivoiced, interconnected environment. Woolf's book is an ecosystem functioning in accordance with the main tenets of modern ecology: equality and interdependence, the principles that we must embrace to transform our own environmental values.

3

Singing the World in *The Waves*: The Ecopoetics of Woolf's Play-Poem

In *The Waves*, Woolf takes up the ecofeminist critique of the divide between the body and the mind, the human and the nonhuman, "me" and "not me." She is aware that the world is "one thing," and seeks to portray it as such:

> what I call "reality": a thing I see before me; something abstract; but residing in the downs or sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me: that which I seek. But who knows—once one takes a pen & writes? How difficult not to go making "reality" this & that, whereas it is one thing. (1977–84, III: 196)

Woolf focuses especially on human language and dreams of returning it to the original "song" of the world, as Merleau-Ponty termed it. She muses with Bernard about the world where the modern state of locked-in consciousness is reversed and the original, visceral connection of humans to each other and to the world is recovered:

> The sound of the chorus came across the water and I felt leap up that old impulse, which has moved me all my life, to be thrown up and down on the roar of other people's voices, singing the same song; to be tossed up and down on the roar of almost senseless merriment, sentiment, triumph, desire. (Woolf 1978c: 278–9)

Woolf creates a model of such an interconnected world in her text by replacing the rigid master narrative with poetic and dramatic structures. Her choice of narrative delivery is central to what I call her

environmentalist poetics. She disperses the disembodied, single omniscient worldview that enforced human separation from nature into multiple embodied voices that reach out to it. Even though the speakers perceive themselves as isolated, they continuously voice out to others in hope to be heard, and emerge as connected through shared basic insecurities and emotions. By speaking out rather than privately *thinking* their stream of consciousness, the six subjects show their awareness of a larger world around them. Moreover, Woolf interweaves the theme of the waves and the nonhuman nature of the interludes throughout the monologues to show the human speakers as one with the nonhumans. She consistently destabilizes the artificial boundary between the human and the nonhuman through her particular use of simile and metaphor.

The Genesis in the Rhythm of Nature

The Waves had its genesis in the natural world: in the images of the moths and of the fin in the waste of the waters.[1] The desire to express feelings associated with those images lay at the basis of Woolf's new project. She writes about the new genre expressing the mind's response and relationship to the nonhuman world:

> It [the new genre] will resemble poetry in this it will give not only or mainly people's relations to each other … as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to the general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude. For under the dominion of the novel we have scrutinized one part of the mind closely and left another unexplored. We have come to forget that a large and important part of life consists in our emotions toward such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset, life, death, and fate. (Woolf 1967, II: 225)

Woolf's sensibility here is environmentalist: she stresses the necessity to explore what the novel has ignored, our relationship to the rest of the world. Similarly, in "A Letter to a Young Poet" she advises him to "let your rhythmical sense wind itself in and out among men and women, omnibuses, sparrows—whatever comes along the street—until it has strung them together in one harmonious whole" (Woolf 1967, II: 191). "That perhaps is your task—," she continues, "to find the relation between things that seem perhaps incompatible yet have a mysterious affinity, to absorb every experience that comes your way fearlessly and saturate it completely so that your poem is a whole" (Woolf 1967, II: 191). The phrase "to find the relation between things that seem perhaps

incompatible" is nothing less than a formulation of the central ecofeminist tenet of all entities being interconnected while preserving their differences and diversity.

Woolf thinks about her new novel in real-life terms, as opposed to literary-theoretical ones: "I can make up situations, but I cannot make up plots" (1977–84, III: 160). In a letter to Ethel Smith, Woolf writes that she is aware she is stepping out of the boundaries of the fictional tradition: "I am writing to a rhythm and not to a plot. … And thus though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction" (1975–80, IV: 204). She notes in her diary in June 1929: "Could one not get the waves to be heard all through?" (1977–84, III: 236), and a year later, in *The Waves' Notebook*: "The rhythm of the waves must be kept going all the time" (Graham 1976: 749). *The Waves* eventually replaces the original *Moths* and *Moments of Being* as the title and as the new novel's metaphor for life. In the second draft of the text, Bernard frames life into the pattern of the waves most explicitly: "There is no story. all stories about life are false … Life is like the sea; one wave & then another & then another“ (Graham 1976: 656).

Woolf consistently thinks in expansive, holistic terms, in terms of integrating into the work more than just the fictional and more than just the human: "the play-poem idea: the idea of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night &c, all flowing together" (1977–84, III: 139). She seeks a complex, multifarious form that would extend beyond merely one paradigm. Formal experiment and environmental philosophy find common ground in her practice.

Rhythm not Plot: The Search for Embodied Language

Describing Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied language, David Levin comments:

> Merleau-Ponty argues in *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language* that men must have sung their feelings before they began to communicate their thought. … Merleau-Ponty sees the origin of language as the end of a reflexive and phenomenological process rather than as a historical beginning. (1998: 319)

I would argue that *The Waves'* characters' original chorus of voices can be seen as approximating such a primeval, emotional reaction to the surrounding world. The monologue sections (human sections) start

as short responses to the outside environment; the characters are still children, and their expressions are close to Merleau-Ponty's embodied language of sensual, bodily perception: "I see a globe …"; "I hear something stamping …"; "the stalks are covered with harsh, short hairs" (Woolf 1978c: 9). The children are at their most communal at this point: they participate in the environmental community through their spontaneous responses to the world.

Their emotive, reactive connection to the world is progressively diminished as the characters grow and develop.[2] Susan feels deserted because of the others' focus on language: "Now you trail away … making phrases" (Woolf 1978c: 18). Strictly verbal language takes them over; their reactions gradually become cerebral, their experience processed rather than instinctual. Their process of language sophistication is accompanied by a shift of focus from the outside world to themselves. Having assimilated the ethics of individuation and isolation, the characters begin to espouse the me—not me dichotomy. They say that they need language as a defense against reality, a layer of protection against its emotional impact. Going to school, Bernard uses language to cover his fears: "I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids … or I shall cry" (Woolf 1978c: 30). Louis says: "I shall assemble a few words and forge round us a hammered ring of beaten steel" (Woolf 1978c: 169). Bernard thinks that he needs language to order his reality, instead of letting spontaneous experience take over: "Each … tense means differently. There is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world, upon whose verge I step" (Woolf 1978c: 21). Bernard separates "this world," the realm of words, from the nonverbal experience, isolating himself from what is outside of it. His need for "Order," which he shares with Louis, carries an ominous underlying tone: it suggests the need for hierarchy, prioritizing, and, consequently, discrimination of those perceived as less important.

As they grow, the speakers' isolation from the others and from the world increases in proportion to their vocabulary. They form centers of (self)-consciousness, creating their own cerebral reality that takes priority over their communal, childhood one.[3] Bernard and Neville, who are writers and champions of language, are especially self-absorbed, as is Louis, who dislikes spontaneity and chaos and repeats: "I will reduce you to order" (Woolf 1978c: 94, 95). Interestingly, the characters whose identity is comparatively less tied to verbal language (especially Susan, Jinny, and Percival) seem less internally focused. They express

themselves through their physicality and form closer relationships with the nonhuman. Susan feels one with the natural world:

> I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps … and the faint red in the sky, and the green when the red fades; the silence and the bell; the call of the man fetching cart-horses from the fields—all are mine. I cannot be divided, or kept apart. (Woolf 1978c: 97)

In this pronounced statement against the "me" vs. "not me" mentality, Susan embraces all around her: the human and the nonhuman, the continually changing, diverse world.

Jinny, who exists in separate moments of intense sensual experience, challenges another hierarchical order, that of the cause and effect of the narrative sequence:

> "How strange," said Jinny, "that people should sleep, that people should put out the lights and go upstairs. … Yet night is beginning. I feel myself shining in the dark. Silk is on my knee. My silk legs rub smoothly together. The stones of a necklace lie cold on my throat." (Woolf 1978c: 100–101)

Jinny has reversed the normal order of day and night. She lives intensely in the here and the now, rather than agonizing, as her male friends do, about what she is afraid of (the future) or what has hurt her (the past). Bernard eventually comes to envy his women friends, and says about Jinny: "She made the willows dance, but not with illusion; for she saw nothing that was not there" (Woolf 1978c: 52). He seems to allude to making up realities with words, as opposed to her "language" of the body that does not aspire to alter (distort) the real world. Woolf portrays verbal language and its conventions as creating false isolation and division, and its inherent ordering and prioritizing powers as hurtful. This statement from Neville can be said to address this dilemma:

> "In a world which contains the present moment," said Neville, "why discriminate? Nothing should be named lest by doing so we change it. Let it exist, this bank, this beauty, and I, for one instant, steeped in pleasure. The sun is hot. I see the river. I see trees specked and burnt in the autumn sunlight. Boats float past, through the red, through the green" (Woolf 1978c: 81)

He talks about the world existing in its own right, multifariously, as opposed to being filtered through language, which necessarily "discriminates." What is more, he feels that imposing language on the world alters it, creates something different. Neville says explicitly that this should not be done: "Nothing should be named lest by doing so we change it." Therefore he implies that true interaction with the world cannot happen through language, at least not the verbal language we know, but exists in another realm: that of more direct, physical communication.

Of all the characters, Bernard voices the most dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of the linguistic sign/word to express his response to the world. He longs to find expression that is emotional not cerebral, wants it to be cries of emotion, not words, which are mere signs:

> how I distrust the neat designs of life that are drawn upon half-sheets of notepaper. I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement. I begin to seek some design more in accordance with those moments of humiliation and triumph that come now and then undeniably. (Woolf 1978c: 238–9)

Bernard's opposition to the "neat designs … on paper," to a single master voice and a linear time/plot, is an ecological gesture of returning to the oral, pre-alphabetic language tradition embedded in the body and the earth. He discards the written narrative in favor of a spontaneous, lived language rising from bodily responses and emotional reactions to the world. He repeats later: "What is the phrase for the moon? And the phrase for love? … I do not know. I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak … I need a howl, a cry. … I have done with phrases" (Woolf 1978c: 295). He wants to recover the childhood language of direct, rationally uncensored responses to the world. Eventually, Bernard throws away the alphabetically organized phrasebook he was so proud of in his youth. He feels like Percival, who rode against death instead of merely writing about it: "I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back" (Woolf 1978c: 297). The "life's wave" rises in him.

Bernard's evolution from wanting to write the world to a desire to "sing" it parallels Woolf's own project of rewriting the master narrative

to portray reality as "one thing" rather than a hierarchical paradigm. Woolf's germinal image of the fin returns in Bernard's vision:

> A fin turns. This bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon. Visual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time come to uncover and coax into words. (Woolf 1978c: 189)

Like modern phenomenologists, Bernard sees language as springing from the relationship to the world. He reiterates Woolf's own goal, expressed in her early thoughts about the book: to find language that would be a more direct response to the world, and to capture more than the human. That last idea is also expressed through the structure of the book (descriptive nature interludes interwoven with human soliloquies), as well as through its poetic language. Woolf's formal experiment engages ecophilosophical thinking.

Speaking Out to the World: The Soliloquy

Even in their grown-up linguistic sequestering that I have described, *The Waves*' characters occupy a less isolated position than most contemporary modernist characters because of the specific soliloquy form of their monologues. Through their speeches, they make a constant effort to reestablish their relationship to the world and others around them.

In what I see as an ecopoetic move, *The Waves*' characters chorus of voices disperses the single omniscient and detached perspective to feature a multiplicity of equally important points of view. The six friends can be said to represent a diverse community: different genders, sexual orientations, social strata, as well as nationalities (most are English, but Louis is Australian). He provides the perspective of an outsider, as do the three women, who do not participate in the educational system as the boys do. Rhoda, the most insecure of the six, is an outsider and a misfit in her own right, constantly positioning herself as different and lacking in comparison to her female friends. Each of the characters perceives himself/herself as distinct and unique and focuses on his/her particular desires and insecurities. Jinny is sensual; Susan feels at home in nature; Rhoda finds her identity constantly escaping; Bernard is after writing his friends' story; Neville is a poet and an intellectual who, because he is homosexual, feels ostracized by

the very people he loves; Louis is constantly trying to prove himself equal to his male colleagues. But despite their specific personalities, the six also create the impression of being very alike. Woolf achieves this effect by making their speeches quite uniform in their general emotional tone, vocabulary, and style, with identifying differences of imagery associated with each one. The constant undertow of the novel is to configure the speakers, organically, as parts of one whole or organism: the seven-sided flower (Woolf 1978c: 127), drops of water (1978c: p225), six fish (1978c: 256), the waves in the sea (1978c: 278), six instruments in an orchestra (1978c: 256), and parts of a symphony (1978c: 256). In a metaphorical configuration, they model diverse, unique, and connected parts of one ecosystem.

The Waves' characters' differences are consistently counterbalanced by their desire to connect. They long for community and, despite the inadequacy of words to express how they feel, they continue speaking out loud in the hope of being heard. Despite their increasing separation from the community and spontaneity of their childhood, each of the characters shows an awareness of the existence of others. Woolf makes that awareness apparent by inserting their name and the word "said" before or after each soliloquy, and enclosing the speech in quotation marks, making it obvious that their words are actually spoken out loud. This method distinguishes *The Waves'* monologues from the classic modernist stream-of-consciousness monologue, which is typically internal and thought rather than spoken. *The Waves'* characters express deep thoughts and insecurities as do many of their modernist contemporaries, but, unlike them, they seek a listener, presuming and hoping that someone can hear them. They speak in the first person, but are distinctly aware of the presence of others. Bernard muses after leaving a room: "Bernard in public, bubbles; in private, is secretive. That is what they do not understand, for they are now undoubtedly discussing me, saying I escape them, am evasive" (1978c: 76). He starts talking about himself in the third person, recognizing the others' point of view.

On many occasions, the speakers address a "you," often referring to their six friends, but also to the unknown people in their surroundings. Louis distinguishes himself from his friends: "I am the youngest, the most innocent, the most trustful. You are all protected. I am naked" (1978c: 96). In the traumatic moment after Percival's death, Bernard processes his grief by talking to the absent Percival, as well as to people he is passing in the street: "let me tell you, men and women, hurrying to the tube station, you would have had to respect him"

(1978c: 154). Neville speaks to his absent lover: "But you are not Ajax or Percival. … You are you. That is what consoles me for the lack of many things" (1978c: 181). The variety of pronouns in the speeches itself models the speakers' interest in interacting with their world: their speeches are hardly ever self-reflective "I" monologues for longer than a few lines.

As a writer, Bernard is most obviously aware of his need for an audience: "To be myself … I need the illumination of other people's eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is my self" (1978c: 116). He addresses a silent listener in the last section of the novel, a person to whom he needs to tell "the meaning of his life": "Now to explain to you the meaning of my life. Since we do not know each other (though I met you once I think on board a ship going to Africa) we can talk freely" (1978c: 238).

At the time of the reunions, the characters' drive to interrelationship visible throughout the novel becomes temporarily satisfied as they physically come together. The individual speeches become shorter and more focused on others. In the Hampton Court section, the "I"–"they" configuration sometimes present in their speeches is consistently replaced with "I"–"You" and, later, with a communal "we." The short reunion exchanges resemble closely their spontaneous childhood reactions. For example, Jinny comments: "The iron gates have rolled back. … Time's fangs have ceased their devouring. We have triumphed over the abysses of space, with rouge, with powder, with flimsy pocket-handkerchiefs" (1978c: 228). Susan expresses herself through her body, happy to feel in relationship, regardless of which intense feeling it is: "I grasp, I hold fast ... I hold firmly to this hand, any one's, with love, with hatred; it does not matter which" (1978c: 228). Rhoda breathes out in relief: "The still mood, the disembodied mood is on us … we enjoy this momentary alleviation … when the walls of the mind become transparent" (1978c: 228). During the reunion moments the six value relationship over isolation. Bernard imagines one life made of six facets: "Marriage, death, travel, friendship … a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower … One life" (1978c: 229). At the moments when the characters are physically close, the degree of their inwardness and self-focus temporarily decreases.

The Waves' characters' speeches manifest a need to interact with and ground themselves in physical space as well as other humans. Rhoda touches the surrounding physical objects to escape her feeling of drifting out of her body: "What then can I touch: What brick, what stone? and so to draw myself across the enormous gulf into my body

safely?" (1978c: 159). After hearing about Percival's death, Bernard directs his pain outward: "This then is the world that Percival sees no longer. … The butcher delivers meat next door; two old men stumble along the pavement; sparrows alight" (1978c: 153). Louis notes: "People go on passing; they go on passing against the spires of the church and the plates of ham sandwiches. The streamers of my consciousness waver out and are perpetually torn and distressed by their disorder" (1978c: 93). Woolf's characters notice what surrounds them in its own right rather than using the outside world as a mirror to reflect back on themselves, merely to trigger a thought, emotion, or memory, as Joyce's Stephen does, for example. In Stephen's monologue from the Proteus chapter of *Ulysses*, the experience of the outside reality serves as a mere catalyst for Stephen to construct philosophical existential musings about his life:

> Stephen closed his eyes to hear his boots crush cruckling wrack and shells. You are walking through it howsomever. I am, a stride at a time. A very short space of time through very short times of space. Five, six: the *Nacheinander*. Exactly: and that is the ineluctable modality of the audible. (Joyce 1986: 31)

We can see Stephen quickly dissociate from his physical experience to get lost inside his mind, which becomes more engaging than his physical surroundings. It is his mind's geography rather than the physical one that really occupies him. In contrast, while they are musing on their emotional and intellectual lives, *The Waves*' characters remain present and grounded in their immediate environment.

The effect of Woolf's spoken soliloquy method is a presence of multiple voices heard and interacting within a physical space. The characters' practice of reaching outwards through speech and interaction with their immediate surroundings is one of the qualities that makes Woolf's narrative method environmentalist: it models individuals engaging in a relationship with the "you" of the rest of the world, sometimes even achieving a shared "we."

Human and the Nonhuman: A Metaphorical Vision of One World

The novel's monologue sections are punctuated with nine interludes that are purely descriptive passages rendering a seaside scene. Each of the passages progresses in a similar order, from the position of the sun, the sea,

the garden around the house, the birds, back to the sun and the sea.[4] These italicized passages frame the human world, and their scenery provides the larger context for the consecutive monologues. However, importantly for Woolf's environmentalist form, the interludes are not as separate or purely "nonhuman" as they appear: they contain poetic language that inscribes the human presence into the natural description. That same imagery later permeates the human monologues. Through her particular use of poetic language and imagery, Woolf conveys her concept of "one" reality, of the interdependence of the human and the nonhuman.

Markedly, the nine sections of the interludes contain no living human presence, apart from the mystical figure of a sun-woman holding the light. Interestingly, here Woolf uses an abstract rationalist perspective of a disembodied narrative voice, underscoring the separation of nature and humanity: "The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky" (Woolf 1978c: 7). As we can see, emotion is quite absent from this objective description. The same scenery is described in the same order at different times of day, almost as if a scientist were observing changes in a subject under the microscope. This method can be seen to imitate the objectifying, isolating approach of pre-twentieth-century science. From the narrative point of view, the interludes' objectivity stands in stark contrast to the monologues saturated with the characters' extreme subjectivity, governed by emotional judgments. The novel's sections interweave the "outside, objective" nature and the internal, subjective humanity until the last page, where Bernard becomes one with the sea (1978c: 297).

The apparent separation of the interludes can be said to symbolize the self-generated human perception of being distinct, separated from the world. However, if we look closer, the interludes are not as unrelated to the monologue sections as they appear. Even those detached objective natural descriptions are inundated with the human element through the use of metaphor and simile. The comparison of the sea to a cloth with wrinkles in the beginning quote is a typical one for Woolf's method. A man-made artifact is chosen to capture the quality of the sea. Similarly, the wave is described as pausing "like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously" (1978c: 7); a horizon becomes "clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green" (1978c: 7), the sky "cleared as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green, and yellow, spread across the sky like the blades of a fan" (1978c: 7). There is hardly

a sentence in the interludes' natural description that does not contain a reference to the human world, presenting nature "as" human. Through her use of such similes in her description, Woolf shows the human element as inseparable from the nonhuman.

This strategy continues throughout the monologues: just as it is impossible to describe nature without humanity, so the reverse is true. From the first pages of the monologues the children are embedded in nature, and respond to its events. The seemingly objective and "objectified" nature "leaks" out of the formal interlude structures, the imagery resurfacing in the "human" world. The children move around in Elvedon like little animals, governed primarily by their senses. Bernard comments: "They will think we are foxes" (1978c: 18). In a famous passage, Louis feels like a stalk of a plant: "I am green as a yew tree in the shade of the hedge. My hair is made of leaves. I am rooted to the middle of the earth. My body is a stalk" (1978c: 12). Percival, who does not speak, is described as a tree: "Percival was flowering with green leaves … with all his branches" (1978c: 203). As we have seen, Susan identifies with nature: "I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees, mine are the flocks of birds" (1978c: 97). The women are described as resembling birds and foals. This use of metaphor shows the human as part of nature, one becoming the other. Through the power of poetic language, Woolf is able to present the unity that was her aim when planning the book: not merely the human, but the human as one with the rest of the world.

The images of nature from the interludes, most notably that of the waves, are interwoven throughout the monologues in the form of metaphors. Bernard says that "passions pound us with their waves. … The voice of action speaks" (1978c: 142). In another instance he notes: "we rise, we toss back a mane of white spray; we pound on the shore; we are not to be confined" (1978c: 267). His description of the garden outside captures the quality of the monologues as well: the "sudden rush of wings … the riot and babble of voices … and all the drops are sparkling, trembling, as if the garden were a splintered mosaic (1978c: 247). Finally, Bernard's last soliloquy contains not only metaphors, but exact images from the interludes, of the birds, the garden, and the sea scenery: "I had sat on the turf somewhere high above the flow of the sea and the sounds of the woods, had seen the house, the garden, and the waves breaking" (1978c: 287). He almost sounds as if he were quoting from an interlude passage:

> Day rises; the girl lifts the watery fire-hearted jewels to her brow; the sun levels his beams straight at the sleeping house; the waves deepen

> their bars; they fling themselves on the shore. … The birds sing in chorus; deep tunnels run between the stalks of flowers; the house is whitened; the sleeper stretches. (1978c: 291–2)

Bernard practically assimilates the previously objectified nature from the interludes into his soliloquy. The nonhuman and the human presence are most fully united through Bernard's consciousness, the metaphor rendering Woolf's desired vision of humanity in relationship rather than isolation: "And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back … *The waves broke on the shore* (1978c: 297). This passage contains a great deal of integrating imagery. The wave, part of the sea, is now a part of Bernard, and at the same it is an animal, arching its back. The wave inside Bernard soon joins the ones breaking on the shore. This last image is the culmination of Woolf's use of metaphors to portray a world where the artificial boundary between the human and the nonhuman is deconstructed.

Cognitive metaphor theory is helpful to define the significance of Woolf's method. Katherine Erikson remarks, "The idea that metaphors reflect the underlying value structures is not new. … The metaphors we use reveal the reality we perceive" (2006: 86). Even closer to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reading, Paul Ricoeur points out that "den[ying] the … distinction between sense and representation, the metaphorical meaning compels us to explore the borderline between the verbal and the non-verbal" (1978a: 151). He explains the mechanism of "unconcealing":

> The sense of a novel metaphor … is the emergence of a new semantic congruence or pertinence from the ruins of the literal sense shattered by semantic incompatibility or absurdity. In the same way as the self-abolition of literal sense is the negative condition for the emergence of the metaphorical sense, the suspension of the reference proper to ordinary descriptive language is the negative condition for the emergence of a more radical way of looking at things, whether it is akin or not to the unconcealing of that layer of reality which phenomenology calls preobjective and which, according to Heidegger, constitutes the horizon of all our modes of dwelling in the world. (Ricoeur 1978b: 153–4)

The metaphors we create can be said to reveal reality as it really is, despite the ways our perception is biased by our separatist thinking. Therefore, metaphors can be used to (re)form our view of the world

to be more "radical": multicentric, nondivisive, diverse. Metaphors suggest and propose new ways of looking at the world. As M. Jimmie Killingsworth phrases it, "Metaphor often provides the rhetorical means by which ideological ends are enacted" (1992: 61).

I argue that Woolf's own view of metaphor was cognitive: contemporaneously to developing *The Waves*, she praises Proust's poetic method in her "Phases of Fiction":

> As a consequence of the union of the thinker and the poet … we come upon a flight of imagery—beautiful, coloured, visual, as if the mind, having carried its powers as far as possible in analysis, suddenly rose in the air and from a station high up gave us a different view of the same object in terms of metaphor. (1967, II: 85)

Woolf suggests that poetic fiction makes it possible to show the world at its most complex, as spherical rather than flat; it captures what "forever escapes" (1967, II: 97). She is excited about the poet's potential to "give a different view of the same object." Ricoeur phrases her idea in the following way:

> The poet is this genius who generates split references by creating fictions. It is in fiction that the "absence" proper to the power of suspending what we call "reality" in ordinary language concretely coalesces and fuses with the positive insight into the potentialities of our being in the world which our everyday transactions with manipulatable able objects tend to conceal. (1978a: 155)

Conclusion

Woolf's search for new fictional form shows undeniable ties to environmentalist philosophy. *The Waves* models the close relationship between humans and the outside world that Woolf imagined during the genesis of the book. In Bernard's search for embodied language, she criticizes the master narrative based on abstract reason divorced from bodily experience. She deconstructs traditional objective narrative into multiple, subjective, and equal points of view. She also counterbalances the developmental loss of the characters' original reactive spontaneity and connection to the world by the use of the spoken monologues, which, in contrast to the classic modernist silent stream of consciousness, show the characters reaching out to reestablish their connection

to the world. The six protagonists are actively engaging with the space outside of themselves. Significantly for my ecopoetic argument, the novel is about trying to situate oneself in the world, to find one's place in harmony with the rest of existence. Finally, Woolf's use of poetic metaphor where, in a cognitive visual leap, the human is seen as one with the natural dissolves artificial boundaries between me and not-me, and between human and nonhuman. The effect is a vision of "one" interrelated reality that, Woolf sensed, existed all along.

4

Living with the Other: Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*

In an interview for *Books on the Radio*, Jeanette Winterson discusses the connections between nature, humans, and art:

> Don't mistake me. I don't believe in a static objective reality that is out there. I believe in shifting, changing patterns of energy; the shifting, changing patterns of energy that we've begun to apprehend in nature and in the very molecules and atoms and DNA of our bodies. Nothing is solid; nothing is fixed. But this movement, this energy, is not chaos. Science is just beginning to unravel the patterns and shifts and connections that seemed so impossible and implausible. But art intuitively understands these patterns and shifts and connections, because that is exactly how art functions too. And I believe that one of the reasons we go back and back to art, why we don't give up on it, why people go on making it and wanting it, is because through art, we recognize life's intrinsic quality, that everything is connected. (2009, http://booksontheradio.ca)

She points out that humans and nature share the same patterns of atomic energy. Art, a human creation, is governed by the same evolutionary force as the rest of the universe, propelled by a constant pull of change, flux, and experiment. In this short paragraph, Winterson identifies as her own the fundamental tenet of ecofeminist philosophy that "everything is connected." She also validates Virginia Woolf's belief that art recreates life's interconnectedness. Art, including literature, reminds us of how the universe is made to function at its ecological, interrelated best.

Winterson has expressed her ecocentric stance on multiple occasions in a number of venues, most notably her journalism (*The Guardian, The*

Times, The New York Times, The Independent, Harpers'), interviews, and the personal column on her website (jeanettewinterson.com). She has advocated responsible ecological practices that range from the choice of a heating system to buying local/organic produce. Author of nine novels, two collections of short stories, and one of critical essays translated into as many as 32 languages, Winterson's opinion and influence have worldwide reach. She has established herself as one of Britain's most prominent and respected voices on literature and art. Asked to co-edit a new Vintage Classics edition of Virginia Woolf, she has acknowledged her debt to and admiration for Woolf in several interviews, most expressively in *Art Objects* (1997), which includes two extensive essays on Woolf's fiction. *Written on the Body* (1994) was Winterson's first international success that has reached millions of readers in translation. The novel has been discussed in regard to its experimental narrative voice, its poetic language, and its relationship to feminist and lesbian politics, but its form has not been linked to Winterson's ecologically conscious stance, or to the ecological context in general.

The novel's narrator makes several comments that are explicitly sympathetic of environmental and animal welfare. S/he expresses concern that "There are too many of us on this planet and it's beginning to show" (Winterson 1994: 42). S/he comments on the ability of nature to know how to "fulfill" itself "without fail," and its superiority to humans in this respect: "We don't know who we are or how to function, much less how to bloom. Blind nature. Homo Sapiens. Who is kidding whom?"(1994: 43). S/he advocates for vegetarianism ("I won't eat what I can't kill"; 1994: 186); empathizes with the plight of zoo animals (1994: 135); and refers to the hunting season as "the blood season" (1994: 179). After s/he saves a stray cat from starvation, the benefit from the action is shown to be mutual: a reciprocal relationship develops, the cat brings her a rabbit for dinner, waits for her when she returns home from work, and helps her to start healing her despair, and even, for a brief moment, forget the past. This chapter focuses on the various ways in which the novel's form fosters the values of the ecological coexistence of difference and otherness evident in the narrator's comments. The figure of the ungendered narrator who destabilizes gender difference in favor of individuality is central to this project. The narrator figure introduces nonmainstream sexualities of bisexuality and lesbianism and unsettles the readers' assumption of normative heterosexuality. "Difference in relationship" is also evident in the way the novel reimagines relationships between humans and nonhumans through poetic metaphors. Winterson's narrative techniques result in

a closing up of the distance inside the dichotomies of male/female, gay or bisexual/straight, and human/nonhuman. Through destabilizing these binaries in the reader's mind, *Written on the Body* extends an ecological challenge to accept and respect difference in the world around us, and to learn to live with the Other.

"Most beautiful creature male or female I have ever seen": Narrative Destabilizing of Gender Identity/Dualism

Winterson's novel is most known for its famously unnamed and ungendered narrator, who remains so throughout the story. After a series of affairs, s/he encounters a more significant love relationship, but leaves it for reasons that s/he later reevaluates. The latter part of the book is devoted to the narrator's emotional and physical journey to find his/her lover, and to try to gain her forgiveness. The book ends with a description of the lover's return, which verges on a dream. The novel's chronology reflects the narrator's circling and spiraling motion. Starting with some musings from the latter part of the story, the book then reaches back in time to retell the events, until taking us further beyond the starting point. It forms a wrap-around spiral figure instead of the classic straight line of traditional fiction. Winterson disrupts chronological plot development as part of her larger project of dismantling the traditionally male structures of master narrative, finding a new form for her emotional Bildungsroman. In making the theme and the form mirror each other, she creates an interrelated system that imitates the underlying natural relatedness of all things.

Next to sexual identity, gender is one of the most pervasive social constructs that Winterson targets. As Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick has pointed out, "People are different from each other," and yet we lack sophisticated enough ways to define those differences (2008: 22). Instead of individualizing difference, we have developed crude systems of categorization based on such culturally constructed categories as race, gender, and sexuality (Kosovsky-Sedgwick 2008: 22). Within these categories, binary dualisms prevail, one of the two dualities always valued as dominant. Male/female dualism is an example of such categorizing resulting in discrimination that feminists have fought for decades. Winterson's construction of her narrative persona is an attempt at destabilizing the gender dualism, and replacing gender stereotypes with individualization. Writing a 200-page novel using a first-person narrator without revealing his/her gender is a feat not possible in many languages. The considerable difficulty of the task in English, not an inflected language,

proves how pervasive the gender binary is. It is impossible not to bring up male or female stereotypes embedded in the reader's mind with every turn of plot, with every thought or action of the main character.[1] Winterson's strategy is to balance each of the embedded gender "clues" with a contradictory one. And so when "I" knocks down Elgin in the heat of the argument (gender marker male: physical strength), s/he stops and carefully puts his head on a pillow to ensure that he is comfortable until the ambulance arrives (gender marker female: empathy, caregiving). By balancing out the gender clues, Winterson destabilizes the binary stereotype by creating a person who exhibits both male and female qualities, as most of us do. The narrator could be either male or female, but never decidedly one or the other, a situation that challenges the rigid exclusivity of the gender dichotomy.

Instead of being able to rely on comfortable gender and narrative structures, the readers of such unmarked narratives are put in a state of fruitful "unease." Julia Kristeva argues that when the reader does not possess gender information, s/he cannot judge the character according to the usual assumptions and s/he feels uneasy and confused. The stereotypes are shattered. The result is the reader's questioning of their own constructions of sex, gender, and identity (Sellers 1991b: 103). As Ute Kauer remarks specifically in the context of *Written on the Body*,

> the clichés in the reader's mind are subjected to a whirlwind of uncertainties, as one is forced to question not only the narrator's identity, but also the categorizing perception that constitutes the text in one's mind. Because only if the reader is shifted out of his/her own range of experience can something happen with the reading subject. (1998: 50)

Winterson herself comments in an interview:

> I don't think that love should be a gender-bound operation. It's probably one of the few things in life that rises above all those kinds of oppositions—black and white, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual. When people fall in love they experience the same kind of tremors, fears, a rush of blood in the head. … And fiction recognizes this. (Finney 2002: 25)

At some point in our reading, for some people not until the last word of the novel, we realize that the gender information we seek will never be disclosed. After spending some time reading for a clue, some readers'

focus on gender "suspense" diminishes and is replaced by an interest in the conflict and dilemmas that the narrator experiences, and that all human beings share regardless of their gender. This shift of the reader's focus from gender to other human issues marks the moment at which the reader becomes open to questioning gender, to reexamining how gender governs the way we "read" the world, how we form opinions and make decisions.

Thus affected by the narrative, the reader is held vulnerable to transformation. Winterson, who has said many times that she had meant the unknown gender of her narrator to open an unknown space, comments on the text's transformative properties: "we are our own inventions—at least we ought to be—because if we do not invent ourselves, someone else will invent us—If we resist the new space the text leads us into, we will recede into the other, familiar prison of certainties and dualities" (Fau 2004: 182). Jennifer Hansen describes the "I" protagonist used by Winterson as "intentionally faceless, genderless, and nameless." As such, Hansen argues, and I agree, the narrator cannot be defined and, consequently, objectified, "because we cannot generate a concept that distinguishes us from this character …, make this character into an object with clear boundaries … we are invited to occupy the space of the protagonist ourselves. We begin to experience the beloved and loving as the protagonist [the narrator] does" (2005: 367). The result is more life-like than fictional realism. Rather than "living" the character we read, the character "lives" us: s/he changes how we see ourselves and others around us. A space of great ecological potential is opened as we change the way we perceive and interact with our surroundings without the rigid, hierarchical binaries.

Winterson's formal "tricks" such as chronological manipulation, metafictional commentary, second-person address to the reader, and genre blending are tools to point readers off their habitual mental paths. The reader is confronted with the haunting question "Why is the measure of love loss?" which, for most of us, results in stopping to ponder our own experience in search of an answer before we go on reading. From the very beginning, we are distracted from immersion in the fictional world, and encouraged to connect the story we are about to read to our personal lives. Instead of comfortably sinking us into fictional oblivion, the story intrudes on our lives through its surprises and its metafictional "storiness." The narrator questions his/her own reliability, and points to his/her story being just that: "I can tell by now that you are wondering whether I can be trusted as a narrator" (Winterson 1994: 24). The technique of starting *in medias res* has

a similarly shocking effect on the reader, who is immediately told the outcome of the story, and immersed in the events ahead before being provided with the traditional chronological introduction and development. We discover that someone has suffered a romantic loss prior to finding out "who" the person "is," which is supposed to be revealed in the master narrative through the person's gender, age, appearance, and social status.[2] We therefore are forced to work with what we have, only to discover that the information we thought so indispensable is not so; in fact, it is secondary to the emotional depth the narrator is disclosing. Winterson uses chronological manipulation to distract readers from their expectations and offer them an intriguing alternative: to trade the surface of the genitalia for the depth of the heart. Rather than being flattened on the page to be passively used according to our needs, the narrator becomes three-dimensional and intrudes into our lives, refusing to be objectified. This is exactly where the ecological dimension of the text lies. It breaks the old habit of seeing others, including the natural Others, as objects to be used according to our needs, and commands respect and equal treatment for those whom we perceive as different. Again, as it did by undermining gender roles, *Written on the Body* teaches us to see Others as equals.

This analytical, transformative space is opened only if the reader chooses to interact with rather than reject the text. It is also not a fixed but a living space, the interaction and its results (opinions) undergoing constant verification. As Wolfgang Iser describes it, "the reader's communication with the text is a dynamic process of self-correction, as he formulates signifieds which he must then continuously modify" (Flynn & Schweickart 1986: 238). Readers continuously have to decide on their response to the text, which is dependent on each reader's personal experience, background, and formed beliefs. The text has the potential to change the reader. That premise lies at the core of my ecological reading of the novel.

Elizabeth Flynn identifies three main responses to a text: resistance, domination, or dialogue: "Either the reader resists the text and so deprives it of its force, or the text overpowers the reader and so eliminates the reader's power of discernment. A third possibility … the reader and text interact in such a way that the reader learns from the experience" (1986 & Schweickart: 237). Iser describes the particular interaction between past experience and reading in *The Act of Reading*:

> new experience emerges from the reconstructing of the one we have stored, and this reconstructing is what gives that new experience

> its form. But what actually happens during this process can again only be experienced when past feelings, views, and values have been evoked and then made to merge with the new experience. The old conditions take the form of the new, and the new selectively restructures the old. The reader's reception of the text is not based on identifying two different experiences (old versus new), but on the interaction between the two. (1980: 132)

For an interactive reading to take place, the belief that love takes place only among heterosexuals is confronted by the possibility of lesbian love occurring in the novel. The belief that we cannot really know the narrator without knowing his/her gender is confronted by the increasing sympathy we feel for the narrator, whose gender we do not know. The belief that men are strong and women weak is confronted by making allowances for individual diversity in personality and behavior, and so on.

Julie Rajan points out that a "transgressive gender identity: ambiguous, alluding of a taboo sexual orientation is a threat to the very fabric of patriarchal society" (2003: 40). Winterson creates a narrator who is "transgressive" on several levels. The narrator is ambiguous: *either* a man or a woman, but which is not determined by and cannot be gathered from his/her behavioral or personal attributes. Winterson's narrator persona is confounding because it undermines the stability of male and female gender norms by raising questions about what constitutes male or female identity.

Winterson uses several textual strategies to create a world where gender does not matter. She controls pronoun use to keep the narrator's gender ambiguous. She makes sure that cases where she does drop gender clues are counterbalanced by others that provide hints of the opposite gender (such as who the narrator dates, what s/he wears, and how s/he behaves in interpersonal interaction). She also uses an abundance of descriptions that are deliberately equivocal, as in the phrase "When I saw you two years ago I thought you were the most beautiful creature male or female I have ever seen" (1994: 84). Winterson's techniques confront our ideas of gender and reveal that reading can open a space for transformation. Through their confusion in response to the narrator's missing gender identity, Winterson makes the readers aware how much information they normally attribute to gender identification. The discovery from reading *Written on the Body* is that gender is a construct that can be separated from experience. Readers of *Written on the Body* who let the text interact

with their experience open themselves up to the possibility of looking at the world as composed of individual persons rather than simply males and females, homo- or heterosexuals, and even humans or nonhumans. As the remainder of my discussion shows, Winterson's interrogation of gender and genre also launches a reevaluation of other related binaries that we habitually construct in the world around us.

Lesbian/Bisexual Otherness

Julie Rajan considers the strong link between culture, gender, and sexuality:

> The stability of gender norms for a certain culture resides in the support of those norms by a significant majority of the citizens for that culture. In the context of the patriarchal culture, all social, political, economic, and spiritual institutions are rooted in the dominance of the male over the female gender. The stability of that hierarchy is rooted in two established beliefs: the separation between the public and the private spheres, and a strict adherence to heterosexuality. (2003: 39)

Since we cannot determine that Winterson's narrator is a man, the text opens up a possibility of a lesbian relationship, which, by excluding men, threatens the standard of heterosexuality, and therefore undercuts the power structure of patriarchy. As Monika Fludernik has observed, "Homosexuality or homoeroticism derive their transgressive potential … from the upsetting of the genderization structure where gay men are perceived to display 'feminine' gender traits and lesbians are seen to behave like men" (1999: 154).

Cath Stowers frames Winterson's narrative as a parody of masculine discourse of oppression, "remapping those old dichotomies of lover and beloved based on heterosexuality and domination into an almost fluid and fluctuating exchange of self and other, [where] suggested symbolic gender differences become undercut by lesbian metaphors of sameness" (1998: 93). The old dichotomy of lover/beloved, where the lover is active and the beloved acted upon, is revised and rewritten into a new lesbian "intertwined reciprocity" (Stowers 1998: 97). The process is underscored by the metaphor of writing on the body being done by both partners, the experience leaving permanent marks to be saved and

recovered. Stowers aligns this movement with the textual movement from authoring to being authored by the Other:

> Attempts to explore any passive female body … which have possession as their aim, have thus now been aligned with attempts to author the Other, to turn the body of the female Other into a text penned by the (male) self … instead the author becomes authored by the Other. (1998: 97)

The narrator frequently uses the trope of exploration, portraying him/herself as a pioneer discovering and "mining" the lover's land. The trope is very ecologically troubling, perpetuating the view of land as a field to be discovered, claimed, and used. However, as the narrator's relationship deepens, Winterson reworks that trope as well. As Stowers shows in her perceptive commentary, the classic exploration paradigm is reversed (1998: 92) and the Other is able to "redraw me according to your will" (Winterson 1994: 20). After "I" retraces his/her steps and ultimately gives up the search for Louise, s/he gives the first sign of abandoning the position of the decision-maker, the aggressor in the relationship. When s/he leaves the address behind, s/he makes the first gesture of openness to sharing the relationship-driving power, making it possible for Louise to find him/her *if* she wishes. The narrator thus gives up the initiative and lets the object of the quest decide whether it wants to be found. The one-sided quest stops at that point, the narrator's wait for reciprocation starts, and the call is answered, in fantasy or reality, by the Other. The explorer becomes the explored, the subject of inquiry—the object. Christine Reynier describes the power shift between the subject and the object as value-conscious, where reading becomes "an ethical experience":

> After leaving Louise to give her a chance to be cured by her husband, the narrator starts wondering whether he/she had the right to decide of Louise's fate. Doubt here appears as a way of taking the other into account and respecting his freedom of choice; it therefore becomes the sign of the ethical position of the text. (2005: 306)

Reynier adds that "In Winterson's work, the ethical encounter with alterity takes place as the subject–object relationship founders" (2005: 303).

The shift of direction from self-centered to Other-centered is paralleled by a shift in the narrative. After the section focused on

Louise's body eulogized part by separate part, we come back to the narrator's story. Unlike before, when s/he left, unwilling to suffer the consequences of Louise's diagnosis, the narrator is now willing to be affected, open to the outcome rather than forcing a favorable one. S/he also puts Louise's happiness above his/her own, even if it means that Louise is happy with someone else, as long as she is healthy and alive:

> Louise safe somewhere, forgetting about Elgin and me. Perhaps with somebody else. That was the part of the dream I tried to wake out of. None the less it was better than the pain of her death. My equilibrium, such as it was, depended on her happiness. (Winterson 1994: 174)

The narrator is becoming aware of the ecological interdependence of the Other's livelihood and happiness with his/her own.

In the final section of the novel, the narrator walks home through the countryside, where an interesting perspective shift occurs. The narrator notices some animals in the fields and comments on how they must see a human in their environment, at night:

> The cows reserved for me the incredulous look that animals give humans in the country. We seem so silly, not a part of nature at all. The interlopers upsetting the rigid economy of hunter and hunted. Animals know what's what until they meet us. (Winterson 1994: 185)

The fact that the narrator is able to empathize with the natural Others, and gain distance from the human-centered point of view at this time, is emblematic of his/her overall reversal of perspective from self-centered to Other-centered. In this short section, the narrator is described as interacting with the natural environment more closely than in any other section of the book. S/he walks through fields, climbs through hedges, eats sitting in the grass and in the darkness, and pees behind a bush. This shift is underscored by the narrator's appearance and behavior described as similar to the animals surrounding him/her: s/he is "clod-fettered" (Winterson 1994: 185), s/he "swills his/her face" in a river, and s/he "shakes" him/herself after s/he gets up from eating in the grass (1994: 188). The book's ending, which is ambiguous and inconclusive, both reality and a

dream, reflects the narrator's change; a happy ending, a requirement for patriarchally formulated romance fiction, is abandoned. Again, narrative form is changed to accommodate the narrator's new, Other-centered worldview.

Respect and openness to the Other find their expression on many levels. The "sameness" of the lesbian bodies extends further to encompass all natural bodies. The lesbian reading of the novel is at the same time an ecological reading. The Other shares our body; lesbian love is a symbol of the basic bodily sameness of all species through our shared DNA, interspecies differences emerging, like human facial features, only towards the surface.

Human and Nonhuman Otherness and Queer Ecology

Without ever resolving the gender and sexual identity of the narrator, Winterson challenges the readers to move beyond the habitual and prevalent notions of gender and sexual relationships, and to expand our inherited notion of what is "normal" and "natural." This prominent facet of the book's politics gains an ecological dimension in the eyes of queer theory, which views queer oppression as a subgenre of the oppression of nature in general. As Greta Gaard points out, anybody whom Western culture affiliates with nature (animals, women, indigenous people) suffers joint oppression. Queer bodies are stigmatized for two reasons that relate them to nature: for being allegedly governed by animal sensuality/eros, and for trespassing against nature by breaking its alleged law of procreative sex. Gaard posits that "A democratic, ecological society envisioned as the goal of ecofeminism will, of necessity, be a society that values diversity and the erotic" (1997: 115). Danne Polk explains:

> The patriarchal dream to eliminate homosexuality from the face of the planet … has drastic ecological implications in that human sexual difference is parallel to the ecological notion of biodiversity, such that the eradication of difference within a discourse of "oneness" or "sameness" becomes the transformation of human diversity into a monoculture. Thus, queer identity theory is ecological in that queering the cultural symbolic destabilizes the essentialist either/or dualisms of heterosexist logic and thus, opens up the possibility of a radical pluralism for the human species, a pluralism which is needed if alternative, more ecologically literate symbolic systems are to become possible. (2001: 86)

Polk discusses the "ecological implications of compulsory heterosexism" and proposes "symbiosis as an alternative metaphor":

> It is an anti-essentialist, anti-patriarchal, anti-Cartesian theory that expands the field of identity to include what the old tradition abhors: the symbiotic body, the relational body, the body in mutual, interactive alliance with others, both human and nonhuman. Thus, a queer ecological body is a corporeal body, a site of difference, a body-self-other. (2001: 87)

In light of this theory, Winterson's narrator's gender and sexual indefiniteness create a space for consideration and hopeful acceptance of all, including the nonhuman, otherness. Symbiotic coexistence is figuratively invoked when the male and the female, heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian, human and nonhuman exist side by side in the reader's mind. Winterson is able to create a space where genders and sexualities hover around, free of social regulations. Since none can be ruled out, they all coexist without discrimination or exclusion.

This ecological interpretation is supported by the way nature figures in the novel. The text recreates a coexistence of the human and the nonhuman as parts of one biological system through featuring nature as inseparable from humanity on various levels, especially in the characters' environment and metaphor. We have seen this at work in the last section of the novel, where the narrator's perspective shift influences his/her interaction with the environment.

In her "mixed" metaphors (examples later in this section), Winterson upsets the boundary between human as Other and animal as Other by constructing animal personification figures where the human is metaphorically interrelated with the animal, not to blur the distinction, but to show their affinity, equality, and interdependence. To answer Cheryll Glotfelty's defining ecocritical question, "How do metaphors of nature influence the way we perceive it, and, in turn, treat it, as readers, in our own lives?" (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996: xix), I argue that the consistency of Winterson's nature metaphors has the potential to produce an imaginative and cognitive shift in the reader, towards a feeling of empathy and solidarity with the nonhuman, while difference is affirmed and the binary of otherness neutralized.

Cognitive linguistics has contributed to a re-visioning of language as "metaphor-centered" and "imaginatively embodied, in the sense that it is 'subject' to construction by the environment surrounding the human mind and body" (Hart 1972: 1). Language is seen as "cognitive

and not transcendental" (Hart 1972: 1), and therefore environmental in the sense that it interacts with the world around it. N. Katherine Hayles argues that "metaphor connects abstract thought with embodied experience, providing a grounding we often fail to see precisely because it is so pervasive and fundamental … metaphor works to connect and contextualize, broadening the space of abstract thought by embedding it in physical, sensory, linguistic and cultural contexts" (2001: 144). Paul Ricoeur frames the cognitive value of metaphor in the following way:

> the theory of metaphor tends to merge with that of models to the extent that a metaphor may be seen as a model for changing our way of looking at things, of perceiving the world. The word "insight," very often applied to the cognitive import of metaphor, conveys in a very appropriate manner this move from sense to reference which is no less obvious in poetic discourse than in so-called descriptive discourse. … The poet is this genius who generates split references by creating fictions. It is in fiction that the "absence" proper to the power of suspending what we call "reality" in ordinary language concretely coalesces and fuses with the positive insight into the potentialities of our being in the world which our everyday transactions with manipulatable objects tend to conceal. (1978a: 152–5)

Seen in terms of the cognitive vision of language, Winterson's "mixed" metaphor renders the human and the nonhuman together, the way they exist without the filter of dualistic thinking. As early as the second paragraph of the novel, a specific metaphor portrays an arid landscape: "The trees are prospecting underground, sending reserves of roots into the dry ground, roots like razors to open any artery water-fat" (Winterson 1994: 9). To show what it is like to be a thirsty tree, Winterson uses concepts from the human realm: the trees quench their three-month thirst by wielding their roots "like razors" into the ground's "artery water-fat." Razors and arteries are here incorporated as part of the **trees**' botanical world. Winterson helps the reader achieve what Val Plumwood describes as "positioning oneself as the other" to reach empathy (quoted in Buell 2005: 108) and to develop an openness to other kinds of "otherness" in the process. (The merging of human and animal/plant life visible in Winterson's metaphors also prompts an ecopolitical reading of her ungendered narrator as a human as well as a nonhuman "Other," someone we come to understand and empathize with.)

Winterson often uses a form of personification where humans share animal or plant characteristics, as in the zoo animals example: "I keen in the fields to the moon. Animals in the zoo do the same, hoping that another of their kind will call back" (Winterson 1994: 135). In another instance, a lover's crying is like "blood in the water" to the narrator, who is encouraged to attack like a shark would be: "She was crying now. It was like blood in the water to me. I circled her" (1994: 45). In other examples, Louise "tiger-tears [her] food" (1994: 118) and gallops like a horse in the meadow, her mane "wrapped around her" (1994: 100). On yet another occasion, the narrator is described as "colt-mad" (1994: 168). Winterson reverses the usual direction of personification, a trope used to attribute human qualities to animals. Such metaphors recur and accumulate throughout the novel to form an expression of a biocentric consciousness.

To deconstruct the traditional boundary between the human and the nonhuman, Winterson often features the two in picturesque, startling juxtapositions. When the narrator describes Louise's bruises as "burst figs are the livid purple of your skin" (1994: 124), the reader is forced to imagine the tissue of the fruit and the body as one. In another example, thinking about getting old, the narrator muses: "Time that withers you will wither me. We will fall like ripe fruit and roll down the grass together. Dear friend, let me lie beside you watching the clouds until the earth covers us and we are gone" (1994: 90). The two lovers dream of sharing the fate of ripe fruit, which withers past its peak and disintegrates. Coincidentally, being covered by earth is what dead human bodies share with fallen fruit, which underscores their common biological being. When the lovers are sunbathing under a plum tree, Louise's hair is curling around the plums, intertwined with the fruit, hard to disentangle from it, and soon afterwards the narrator asserts that she "might still be beautiful if she went mouldy" (1994: 161). By metaphorically imagining the fruit and the human bodies as indistinguishable, Winterson calls attention to the unity of the world and forces the reader to conceive of the human and the nonhuman as part of one environmental body.[3]

Conclusion: Learning to Live with the Other

In accordance with her belief that the world's fruitful instability and connectedness are shared and reflected in art, Winterson entwines her book's form with its politics. She introduces multiple coexisting

configurations of gender and sexuality, challenging readers' values and creating a fertile ground for their transformation. The book's invitation to accept human Otherness extends to animal Otherness through consistent deconstruction of the perceived human/animal boundary in poetic metaphors. In the spirit of ecofeminism and queer theory, which relate women's and gays' oppression to nature's oppression, the novel portrays human "biodiversity" as inseparable from environmental biodiversity. The ecological message of the novel is that we are all individual beings made of the same basic DNA, sharing the same physical world.

5
Multiplicity and Coexistence in *The Powerbook*

When asked what her novel was about, Jeanette Winterson answered: "Oh, boundaries, desire, time, identity" (Reynolds & Nokes 2003: 25). These are themes she shares with both her modernist foremothers as well as her postmodernist contemporaries such as Ali Smith. Another of Winterson's affinities to writers like Virginia Woolf is her precision of expression: the utmost attention to language that pushes prose close to the brink of poetry and drama. The goal of eliminating conventional and verbal excess from the novelistic form is foremost in Winterson's writing, a point she has stressed on numerous occasions.[1]

Eliminating what she calls the "endless slackness" has the effect of producing a novel that may seem unfamiliar, chaotic, and difficult, but I argue that reading it may potentially develop some valuable environmental attitudes. *The Powerbook*'s highly unconventional form eliminates the usual orderly structures of the traditional realist novel such as chronology following cause-and-effect logic, a linear sequence, a finite ending, smoothly fitting chapters, and a central narrative perspective. Instead, it encourages relationships based on democracy rather than hierarchy. What is more, the book subverts the commercialized, consumer-oriented novel genre with its excessive explanatory and connecting structures. Its demanding, fragmented form poses a challenge to the consumerist, capitalist mentality of demand and "instant" supply, where the reader expects to be satisfied passively and quickly after having purchased the "product." Instead, Winterson challenges readers through encouraging their attitude to change from instant gratification to involvement: the author "gone interactive" shares some of her control with the reader, empowering us to co-create meaning to the point of choosing the ending and the order of chapters. A transition from "consuming" a disposable object to a reading experience that is

co-created develops a mindframe of a real-world environmental stance, where passivity and consumerism give ground to the more desirable attitude of participation and ownership.

Winterson's literary experiment promotes ecological values of multiplicity and coexistence. These two themes underlie the novel. The book contains diverse fictional "worlds" and systems: of plot; narrator and narrative perspective; setting ("meatspace" and cyberspace); genre (poetry, prose, and drama; fiction and metafiction). Winterson shows them all as interconnected and coexisting within a larger whole, side by side without conflict, their boundaries soft and fluid, often overlapping. Her novel is the "anarchic" space that questions rigid boundaries, reworks old definitions, and encourages an involved awareness of other systems and worlds. As a conglomeration of all these features, *The Powerbook* implicitly promotes a progressive ecological philosophy without direct reference to environmental issues. It questions rigid categorizing and hierarchical thinking, and emphasizes the attitude of seeking the relationship behind overtly dissimilar elements. Winterson creates a form that is a model of an anti-essentialist, nonoppositional, and heterogeneous world/system.

"Enter and be transformed": Book as Environment

Visually and otherwise, the first experience of *The Powerbook* distinguishes it from most novels. If we were to describe the book using ecological vocabulary, we would say that it consists of heterogeneous entities floating inside a shared atmosphere. The text is structured as an environment that we enter and participate in, the effect created through a purposeful use of space and graphics.

The first thing we notice on opening the book is the distinctive font that appears etched and three-dimensional, calling attention to the space we are about to enter. The ensuing pages, with short paragraphs sometimes just one word or sentence long, are frequently interspersed with large areas of white space. The recurring areas of space make the first few pages very inviting, like entering an area that is not cluttered, very unlike the tight, boxy print of many novels. These first few pages foreground visual space in its own right rather than as a mere vehicle for printed words. Blank space is used purposefully, unexpectedly, the way visual artists use negative space to create meaning. Our attention is drawn to the visual composition of the pages, whose two-dimensional space becomes three-dimensional, as it often does in a painting. The reader's entering of the book coincides with the narrator's invitation

to his/her interlocutor to enter a shop, and an "invented world" where "we" can be "transformed" (Winterson 2000: 4). Winterson creates this book as an environment, a world drastically different from what we expect. We enter it as we would a space, and are invited to participate: "Begin" (2000: 5).

"Fragments, hints, clues, letters, persuade me on": Fragmentation as a Challenge to Discover the Value of the Unfamiliar

Fragmentation is the most prominent and frequently noted feature of the book.[2] The text is divided into short chapters with numerous breaks within, and shifts of setting/place, narrator, characters, and time of action from chapter to neighboring chapter. Literary scholars have found fictional fragmentation to have a powerful ethical and political value of destabilizing the structures of power and domination. Nivedita Majumdar describes fragmentation as subversive of the traditional realist novel's reflection of bourgeois society and its values (2002: 4).[3] Allen Grove (1997) points to fragmentation's role in calling attention to the gaps and omissions of the voice of "an other"—especially women and minorities.[4] Molly Hite also describes the fragmented novelistic technique as an attempt to resist the "mechanical consciousness" of power, and to defy the suggestion that there is one "natural structure of all possible experience" (1989: 20).[5]

Changing the traditional novelistic convention allows for multiple and heterogeneous forms of recounting experience, and, by deeper implication, of the (reader's) experience itself. If we extend these values to environmental philosophy, we arrive at two central principles of sound ecology: diversity and coexistence of difference. An encounter with a literary text that diverges from the expected, such as a novel different from the majority of its genre, fosters the reader's appreciation of diversity in a world too often streamlined to consumer models of conformity and uniformity. Winterson's fragmented, unfamiliar text constitutes a multifaceted space that challenges readers to break with their schematized attitudes, and furthers values central to ecologically conscious thinking.

The book starts with a list entitled "MENU," containing chapter titles written in different font sizes, alternating to draw attention to each one separately. The lack of chapter numbers, as well as the word "Menu," suggests choice, not sequence, which is traditionally the function of a standard "Table of Contents." This is the first sign that this book will

impose greater demands on the reader, who, rather than having to accept a fixed, given order, is empowered to "build" the book by choosing from the "Menu."

Let me trace through the reader's experience of the opening pages. The first chapter is a short, two-page section beginning with a brief, two-sentence paragraph: "To avoid discovery I stay on the run. To discover things for myself I stay on the run" (Winterson 2000: 3). The meaning is enigmatic and we have to suspend our desire to pin it down. The paragraph is followed by a line-long space/break, and another distinct paragraph consisting of five short sentences: "It's night. I'm sitting at my screen. There is an e-mail for me. I unwrap it. It says—*Freedom, just for one night"* (2000: 3). This sounds more familiar, as we can perceive a narrative persona in a certain situation. However, another break follows. Then we read: "Years ago you would have come to my shop at the end of the afternoon, telling your mother you had an errand for the poor"(2000: 3). We are forced to change settings and imagine what this situation would look like a century ago, before the computer age. We make the connection that the desire for freedom existed then, too. The "I" narrator addressing his/her interlocutor as "you" is an intimate configuration that involves us in a specific way, since it also feels like the narrator is talking directly to her reader. Winterson's use of this technique is especially effective, since the words of this beginning chapter are so few, and they are often commands:[6]

> This is an invented world. You can be free just for one night. [Break] Undress. Take off your clothes. Take off your body … Tonight we can go deeper than disguise. [Break] It's only a story, you say. So it is, and the rest of life with it—creation story, love story, horror, crime, the strange story of you and I. … There is always a new beginning, a different end. I can change the story. I am the story. [Break] Begin. (2000: 4–5)

The words spoken to the narratee are also pertinent to our reading situation. The narrator is discussing her story-making at the same time as she is constructing a narrative situation and the beginning of the lovers' plot. By stepping out of the story she was immersed in narrating, the narrator has revealed an awareness of the existence of a whole different world, distinct from the one in which the story was taking place. Periodically throughout the book, the authorial narrator will remind us of the coexistence of these two realities: the fictional and the metafictional.

At the end of this first chapter, we have only a vague idea of what the book will be about. We know even less about *who* it is about, and who is

telling the story; very unsatisfying to a reader used to getting this information up front from a detailed exposition of the traditional novel. We turn the page to the next section titled "OPEN HARD DRIVE," which starts with a solitary line "I want to start with a tulip," followed by a space, followed by this short paragraph: "In the sixteenth century the first tulip was imported to Holland from Turkey. I know—I carried it myself" (2000: 9). Is this the same "I" who was sitting at the computer earlier? The voice addresses "you" with a directness familiar from the first chapter, yet the setting and the time period change again. The causal connection between chapters, which we are used to, is missing. We are challenged to continue without answers.

On page 62, Winterson provides a rationale for the unfamiliar narrative we have been reading. Having blundered through the enigmatic beginning, we have by then settled more comfortably into the exciting love plot that has been unfolding. But in the middle of the lovers' heated argument that we hope might lead to passionate sex, we are interrupted:

> Stop. There is always the danger of automatic writing. The danger of writing yourself towards an ending that need never be told. At a certain point the story gathers momentum. It convinces itself, and does its best to convince you, that the end in sight is the only possible outcome. There is a fatefulness and a loss of control that are somehow comforting. This was your script, but now it writes itself. (2000: 62)

The narrating/writing voice explains that she has slipped into the dangerous territory of a linear plot uncontrollably speeding to a conclusion. She knows that in the reader's mind this may be "comforting," but her purpose is different: "Stop. Break the narrative. Refuse all the stories that have been told so far (because that is what the momentum really is), and try to tell the story differently—in a different style, with different weights—and allow some air to those elements choked with centuries of use, and give some substance to the floating world" (2000: 62–3). Winterson reminds us that we have been so comfortable only because we were reading a story similar to ones we have read before. The territory was familiar, the same path we had walked before. Instead Winterson proposes a new path, a new world, because by walking the same paths we are denying that other "worlds" exist:

> In quantum reality there are millions of possible worlds, unactualised, potential, perhaps bearing in on us, but only reachable by

> wormholes we can never find. If we do find one, we don't come back. In those other worlds events may track our own, but the ending will be different. Sometimes we need a different ending. I can't take my body through space and time, but I can send my mind, and use the stories, written and unwritten, to tumble me out in a place not yet existing—the future. (2000: 63)

Her use of the term "world" here is one of the anchors for my environmentalist reading. As she is discussing possible fictional scenarios, Winterson is at the same time articulating a model of ecological diversity, stressing the need for awareness of "other worlds," other beings, and their existence. The narrator also validates the power of stories to imagine and create the future: "to use stories ... to tumble me out in a place not yet existing"—the premise behind my own project. The metaphor of multiple windows open behind the current computer screen captures the lives that we do not see or experience since our own is in the way, but that exist nonetheless: "There are so many lives packed into one. The one life we think we know is only the window that is open on the screen. The big window full of detail, where the meaning is often lost behind the facts. If we can close that window, on purpose or by chance, what we find behind it is another view" (2000: 119–20).

"You choose": Patriarchal Plot vs. Winterson's Reader-Centered Mosaic

The fragmentation of plot is an important aspect of Winterson's experimental agenda. I see her use of plot fracturing as precipitating three paradigm/attitude changes, all of which have philosophical consequences vital for ecological thinking. Her fragmented structure dismantles the conventional regime of a patriarchal plot and in consequence strikes against the anthropocentric attitude of domination; it makes room for multiple narrative voices that model environmental diversity; and it challenges the reader to find connectivity between overtly disparate elements to promote an understanding of that diversity.

Plot fragmentation/nonlinearity has philosophical significance as it defies the rationalist logic of cause and effect and linear, sequential chronology. Brian Richardson cites feminist scholars' association of causality with patriarchal control: "the assumption that life occurs in a logical linear order and is determined by linear, causal relationships [is] fundamentally patriarchal ... the prestige of cause over effect ... is analogous to the prestige of the father over the son" (1997: 46). Ecofeminist

philosophers such as Val Plumwood, Karen J. Warren, and Danne Polk have long emphasized the correlation between women's oppression and the oppression of nature, as well as the influence of patriarchal ideology on assigning value to nature as inferior to humans. Anti-patriarchal action is at the same time anti-anthropocentric and ecocentric, because patriarchal domination of women is inseparable from human domination of nature, and it stems from the same rationalist principles of discrimination based on value judgments.[7]

The Powerbook's plot structure circumvents the hierarchy of chronology. As the replacement of the traditional "Table of Contents" by the starting "Menu" suggests, Winterson relinquishes much of the traditional authorial power by giving the reader an option to arrange the book in multiple ways and create a diversity of readings. This is a radical move that targets the heart of all-powerful, centralized authorial control. The novel's chapters are relatively self-contained and not tightly connected by cause-and-effect structures, and their rearrangement results in a rewarding reading experience.

Those of us who choose a chronological reading out of habit, and perhaps complacency, still encounter a novel with a plot very far from traditional. The novel comprises multiple plots interrupting and interweaving with each other like colored strands of wool in a tapestry or differently patterned tiles forming a mosaic. The story of Ali the story-writer is interjected with other plots and stories. In the order they follow, we have the stories of the email lovers, Ali the tulip carrier, Lancelot, the authorial narrator, Francesca and Paolo, the narrator's childhood at the Muck House, George Mallory, more of the Muck House, Ali's tulip, Rembrandt, the red fox story, more of Ali the story-writer's plot, Giovanni da Castro, more of the lovers, Orlando (a bow to Virginia Woolf), and the narrator again. Each segment is relatively self-contained, provided with its own conclusion, which makes each a good choice off the menu, suitable for potential reshuffling if the reader so desires. For example, the narrator ends the Naples episode with: "So that's the end of it then. I felt as if I had blundered into someone else's life by chance, discovered I wanted to stay, then blundered back into my own, without a clue, a hint, or a way of finishing the story. Who was I last night? Who was she?" (2000: 69–70). The narrator accepts her lover's disappearance as an ending, no matter how unwelcome.

Linear chronology is also undermined when several characters comment on the relativity and even immateriality of their temporal settings. The thematic unity between the "ruinous lovers" and the contemporary lovers' plots overrides the temporal differences and makes

them insignificant in the presence of the emotions that the characters share. When George Mallory laughs at his watch broken but still ticking, he is laughing at the artificiality and insignificance of linear time, because the emotions he is feeling are timeless. The narrator repeats this point a hundred pages later as she drops her watch in the Thames: "No date line, no meridian, no gas-burnt stars, no transit of the planets, not the orbit of the earth nor the sun's red galaxy tell time here. Love is keeper of the clocks" (2000: 288).

Richardson comments on the role of cause-and-effect linearity in the "patriarchal master narrative":

> The rigorous and ruthless "marriage plot," complete with its limited possibilities for female behavior, narrow causal progressions, and definitive closure—in which the female protagonist was invariably left married, dead, or in anguished position—is indeed a primary oppressive force, as are the constricting, patriarchal teleologies that accompanied it. (1997: 46–7)

In the passage quoted earlier, Winterson's narrator seems to address the very issues Richardson identifies:

> Break the narrative. Refuse all the stories that have been told so far (because that is what the momentum really is) and try to tell the story differently—in a different style, with different weights—and allow some air to those elements choked with centuries of use, and give some substance to the floating world. (2000: 62–3)

Addressing the patriarchal plot ending, she states: "Sometimes we need a different ending" (2000: 63).

The Powerbook's use of "ending" testifies to the spirit of nonauthoritarian multicenteredness and reader involvement that the book has been encouraging. The email lovers' plot has several internal closures after each encounter. When we come to the lovers' decisive farewell, Winterson provides two endings and again relinquishes control to us readers instead of imposing a solution from her power position: "Here are two endings. You choose" (2000: 242). The novel's alternate endings (resonant of John Fowles's endings in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* because both involve a train station setting and "rewinding" of the time of a train's departure) reverse the patriarchal marriage plot: staying with the man whom one of the lovers married would be, surprisingly, the unhappy ending. The "happy" ending to the

story would be the woman leaving her husband to live with her lover, another woman, the audacity of this transgressive action underscored by the visible disgust of the witnessing passengers. Instead of having to accept the author's ending, the reader himself/herself is invited to make the decision. But perhaps more importantly, most of us read both endings, and let them coexist in our minds without actually "choosing" or prioritizing one over another. The novel's plot resists using patriarchal hierarchical structures and, in an ecopoetic move, encourages the reader to see multiple stories/realities coexisting without dominance or exclusion.

The book's conclusion is also far from traditional. The narration ends in an indefinite, cyclical, conversational manner. Certain events and moments are brought back and reintroduced, such as the memory of the lovers in Paris after the rain (Winterson 2000: 271), and the image of the narrator sitting in front of the computer in the old shop VERDE (2000: 277). By its refusal of definite traditional closure, the book once again affirms its spatial quality: rather than following a plot line towards a closing point, it becomes spherical and three-dimensional. The book wraps itself back to the first pages with the invitation to both the narratee and the reader: "Your body is my Book of Hours. Open it. Read it. This is the true history of the world" (2000: 289). One last time the narrator's address to the reader extends the space of the book beyond its pages, into the reader's world, adding our world to the many that the book names. Through such gestures, the book encourages awareness of the existence of a reality outside the one we inhabit, an indispensable environmental attitude.

Winterson's novel subverts the "tyranny of the plot" and the domination of a single authorial center that it supports. In the ecological context, this dominating center has for centuries been constructed as *Homo sapiens*. The multiple plots with multiple narrators and relatively self-contained plot segments of Winterson's new fictional system model an echosystem of beings existing within the atmosphere of the book's white space. They are nonhierarchical yet connected by relationships subtler than the hierarchy of cause and effect. As readers, we are invited to participate in this system instead of simply "consuming" it. Instead of the usual compulsion to "find out what happens" that would be inevitably satisfied as the book's pages come to an end, the ending following a familiar scenario and the whole experience soon forgotten, we experience a sense of unusual freedom and challenge to find subtler connections than authoritarian linearity.

"One life is not enough": The Multiple Narrator Model of Multicentered Diversity

The book's central point about the existence of a multiplicity of other "worlds" and interconnected realities is also demonstrated through Winterson's use of multiple narrative personas. The presence of multiple narrators in *The Powerbook* destabilizes the traditional narrative omniscient position (single, male, and patriarchal) in a similar way to multiple plots. Because it disperses the single, centralized position to include many other points of view, this formal feature has an ecological dimension if extended to species relations: it models a world devoid of human domination, multicentered instead of anthropocentric.

The authorial narrator explains: "I wanted to make a slot in time … One life is not enough" (Winterson 2000: 247). And on another occasion: "Time is downloaded into our bodies. We contain it. Not only time past and time future, but time without end. We think of ourselves as close and finite, when we are multiple and infinite" (2000: 121). These narrator comments guide the reader to pay attention to how the stories set at different times in history are versions of one shared story of "ruinous love" and treasure quest. This theme connects different narrators through time and space. Discussing Ali the story-maker's position in respect to his/her stories, the authorial narrator is at the same time describing her own project of multiple "mouths":

> What he doesn't know, really doesn't know, is where he begins and the stories end. How can he know? The people who think they know define reality according to what is obvious and advise Ali to do the same. … Ali tells stories. He puts himself in the stories. … What he is, what he invents, becomes part of the same story, one continuous story, where even birth and death are only markers, pauses, changes of tempo. … The obvious people shake their heads and say that when Ali is in the grave, that will be an end to his stories and an end to him. Will it? Or will it be a shift to other mouths and other tales while Ali, with his tale in his mouth, rolls on? (2000: 255–6)

The story lives, then, can be continued indefinitely through the "mouths" of other storytellers. Winterson encourages the readers to see beyond the "obvious" divisions of identity, space, and time, and, by extension, beyond the body and species differences: "Take off your clothes. Take off your body. Hang them behind the door. Tonight we can go deeper than disguise" (2000: 4). The idea that the body is a

"disguise" and that different bodies are really telling the same story is inherently ecological, as it encourages looking at others, including non-human others, as differently "dressed" versions of ourselves. Winterson puts forward the claim that through storytelling we connect to others, and can see ourselves in them: "I keep telling this story—different people, different places—but always you, always me, always this story, because a story is a tightrope between two worlds (2000: 141).

By her use of multiple focalizing narrators, Winterson challenges the reader to look through the divisions that we construct. She stresses that identity and self are outside disguises that we "fashion" to separate ourselves from others: "Another city, another disguise" (2000: 41). The narrator describes the outer space outside her lover's constraining marriage as the fertile space where "The self disintegrates" (2000: 45). Humans are the only beings that construct elaborate paradigms of difference to distinguish and create divisions, inevitably leading to superiority/inferiority binaries. Winterson's narrator proposes a different model: "What exists and what might exist are windowed together at the core of reality. All the separations and divisions and blind alleys and impossibilities that seem so central to life are happening at its outer edges" (2000: 129). Winterson is not arguing for eliminating difference, but against constructing it as divisive. In her model, difference is decentered and commonality becomes central: a groundstone of equality. As diverse as the various narrators are, divided by time, circumstances, and space, their stories share vital common traits. Winterson makes those bonds apparent by using such devices as the first-person point of view, a similar tone, and the theme of love as quest.

The majority of the book's episodic narrators speak in the first person (the exceptions being George Mallory and the hunter from the red fox story, which are related in the third person). Each of the longer inner narratives eventually moves into the first person, sometimes after being introduced in the third person, as happens with Francesca or Giovanni de Castro. When the third-person introduction is missing, the reader has to make sense of the shift in narrator from the few subtle clues that Winterson leaves for us. The transitions to another narrator are fluid in terms of point of view and voice. In Lancelot's section, for example, the syntax and vocabulary are not antiquated, making his story feel very modern. The contemporary narrator's direct, passionate tone, full of hyperbole and poetic imagery, is shared by the other narrators, making the stories and speakers almost indistinguishable: "Why then fear death, which cannot enter the body further than you have entered mine? Why then fear death which cannot dissolve me more than I dissolve in

you, this day, this night, always? Death will not separate us. Love is as strong as death" (Lancelot; 2000: 82). "If I could follow the map further, and if I could refuse the false endings …, I could find the place where time stops. Where death stops. Where love is. Beyond time, beyond death, love is. Time and death cannot wear it away. I love you" (Ali; 2000: 129). Both narrators use the emotionally heightened diction and strong poetic rhythm shared by all the book's lovers: the same absolute, extreme discourse of passion, full of overgeneralizations, hyperbole, and oppositions. They also exhibit the same sense of immediacy and directness in the intimate address to the lover. The I–you address brings the two narrators together as much as their common predicament of "ruinous love." This universal configuration characterizes the couples of modern lovers, Lancelot and Guinevere, and narrator/reader alike. For the reader, the effect is the same sense of empathy and intimacy, as we naturally enter the mind of the narrator speaking in the first person. Through her unifying theme of tragic love, Winterson destabilizes the boundary between ego and other, and shows commonalities underneath superficial differences. The formal uniformity of perspective and tone brings out the similarity of story and experience between diverse people and times. Winterson's method builds empathy for the other, as we discover that the worlds we normally construe to be so remote from ours are shown not to be so.

Another artificial boundary that Winterson's multiple narrators destabilize is the gender binary. Early in the novel, Ali the cyber-age story-maker, refuses to identify herself as male or female: "does it matter? … Ask the Princess" (2000: 30). S/he is referring to the story of Ali the tulip-bearer in seventeenth-century Turkey. This story within a story performs the point about the body being a disguise: Ali straps on the tulip bulbs and stem and the disguise actually becomes reality in her encounter with the Princess, as the tulip comes to life as the male sexual organ. Within the freedom of the fictional world, what constitutes male or female becomes fluid and constructed. Winterson is imagining a world where gender "does not matter."

Ali the story-maker eludes a defined gender identity until the love-making scene in Paris, where both lovers are described to have breasts (2000: 68). The same-sex configuration removes the power structure within the gender difference:

> Let me in. You do. In this space which is inside you and inside me I ask for no rights or territories. There are no frontiers or controls. The usual channels do not exist. This is the orderly anarchic space that

> no one can dictate, though everyone tries. This is a country without a ruler. I am free to come and go as I please. This is Utopia. It could never happen beyond bed. This is the model of government for the world. (2000: 205)[8]

The narrator is describing love-making as a space not subject to political power structures, where terms like "territory," "frontier," "control," and even "rights" become unnecessary and obsolete. This imagined space can be seen as an ecocentered environment where human/patriarchal power is subverted. The term "anarchic" is used as affirmative and constructive to signify a potentially liberating alternative system, one without dominance and control. This anarchic enclave "could never happen beyond bed," yet that it exists somewhere at all carries a seed of hope for the rest of the world—"the model of government for the world." This brief passage is an example of how the book continually imagines alternatives to patriarchal domination, and, to paraphrase a previously quoted phrase, "sends our mind to tumble us out into a future."

Ecofeminist scholars have long demonstrated that the dualistic rigidity of the gender binary inevitably leads to attaching value and discrimination (Warren 1990: 128). As we have seen in *Written on the Body*, a narrator that is not gendered undermines the entrenched value thinking, and dislodges attitudes reaching deep into our value system. Outside of the sexual encounters, Ali's gender remains unidentified, which is made easier (not *easy*) through the flexibility of the first-person narration. The narrator follows Ali's early desire for gender not to "matter," and presents the reader with a persona to which we relate deeply even though his/her gender remains hidden. Having advanced her nonessentializing gender politics throughout the novel, the narrator has to insert an apologetic disclaimer to the reader when the fox hunter is gendered explicitly male: "don't worry about the gender" (Winterson 2000: 183). She anticipates the patriarchal baggage that the idea of a male hero carries for her readers.

Towards the end of the novel, Ali the Turk's gender markers change within one page, her pronoun references changing from *she* to *he* (2000: 251). Soon the most famous literary sex transformer, Orlando, appears as one of the narrators searching for his/her lady love. By introducing the Woolfian character synonymous with his sex change, Winterson brings in the idea of gender being fluid, nonessential to personal identity. She is suggesting the reimaging of gender difference by making it less absolute. The idea again is that by crossing over into another's skin, we develop empathy that would rid us of the rigid categorizing that

we attach to the concept of male or female. The binary is fraught with value judgments and limiting stereotypes. Examples of the damage that gender markers can do are Ali's Muck-house father, who, by virtue of his male gender, imposes his value system on the whole family, and the discrimination between sons and daughters in Ali's Turkish family. Winterson encourages looking beyond this and other binaries (such as human/nonhuman and culture/nature) to develop healthier and more mutually beneficial relationships.[9]

Multiple Settings

Another facet of the book's heterogeneous ecopoetic project is the way it handles the fictional environment. The novel accommodates environments that are normally perceived as separate. Within its fictional space the virtual and the geographical exist side by side, their boundaries permeable and overlapping. The book travels from outer (cyber)-space to zoom in on specific places, as if cutting through all layers of stratosphere. The real geographical locations include Turkey, Paris, Capri, Mount Everest, and London, their particular atmosphere rendered with the precision of rich, sensual detail. The mention of children playing with rubies is enough to capture the atmospheric wealth of Istanbul: "now Istanbul is wealthier than Venice and Allah trades across the world. We give our children rubies to play with and the shutters of the seraglios are lined with gold" (Winterson 2000: 20).

The email lovers' plot starts in virtual space where physicality is immaterial, and facts such as hair color or gender can be as freely chosen as they are in fiction. Ali the writer revels in the freedom of virtual reality from the "disguise of the body." The primacy of the word and freedom to create one's identity in virtual space are shared by the fictional space in which Ali operates. The fast exchange of short lines, frequently one word long, renders the speed of communication online, where there is no possibility of ascertaining any information. Once the choice of location is made, we are anchored in Paris (and later in Naples and London), and now the geographical world ("meatspace") becomes part of the fictional: "Where are we?/ You tell me. Where are we?/ Paris. We are in Paris. There is the Eiffel Tower./ Yes, I can see it too. It's evening, the sun is going down" (2000: 32). By integrating the virtual and the geographical settings into fiction, Winterson plays with categories and hierarchies that we impose on experience to understand it. "Real-world" experience would usually be labeled as primary to "virtual," and both would probably be judged as primary to "fictional"

by rationalist standards. Mixing different settings together, the novel exposes the arbitrariness and fluidity of such categorizing and the discriminatory judgments inherent in it.

One of the obvious ecological aspects of the novel is the vividness of the geographical locations and their significant role in the story. Very realistic, place-specific local coloring renders the atmosphere of Paris, Capri, Anacapri, and London's Spitalfields. The rush hour of a Paris Friday night comes to life when the heavy traffic and "the exhaust haze" are described as "toxic red" (2000: 35). This realistic detail contrasts with the sentimental picture we have of the walkway by the Seine, making the city that Paris is in reality come to life in all its complexity. Strangers and lovers walking in the Parisian night reflect and anticipate the transition of the newly met strangers to lovers. The particular locations participate in the plot as vividly as a character would, their unique identity interacting with the characters' actions. The snare shop is where Ali runs into her lover by chance, commenting: "Is chance the snare or what breaks the snare?" (2000: 51). When the lover walks up the Louvre pyramid, the sun breaks through the clouds and the glass and rain change the surface of the glass, impersonating the book's theme of the fluidity of experience: "Nothing is solid. Nothing is fixed. These are images that time changes and that change time, just as the sun and the rain play on the surface of things" (2000: 52). A good example of how Winterson configures plot as inseparable from its environment is the scene at the park when the lovers are about to kiss for the first time, and Ali's judgment is blurred with desire:

> A man was exercising two Dalmatians under the trees. Spots ran in front of my eyes. … The man threw them two red tennis balls and the dogs ran for the balls and fetched them back—black and white and red, black and white and red. This feels like a grainy movie—the black dresses and white aprons of the matrons moving inside the lighted window at Pauls's. Your black jeans and white shirt. The night wrapping round you like a sweater. Your arms wrapped around me. Two Dalmatians. Yes, this is black and white. The outlines are clear. I must turn away. Why don't I? In my mouth there is a red ball of desire. (2000: 54–5)

The outside environment with its motions and colors mirrors closely what the narrator is doing: facing the decision whether to give in to her desire.

Place is present in the lovers' story; it colors the way they behave. The expensive shops on Capri help Ali realize the situation she is in.

As Ali's lover and her husband emerge out of one of the shops, Ali is made aware of what she is up against, having an affair with a woman so used to the luxury of the sphere that her husband provides. Anacapri where the lovers meet later at night is a more relaxed place full of food smells and local color. It is where few tourists go, and where a local family cooks slow food and the children play Frisbee. This place has a stimulating influence on the lovers, who abandon their argument to join in the stress-free, slow life going on around them: "I can see Papa, with his long-handled paddle, ladling pizzas in and out of the wood-fired oven. Nearby, Mama sits at the cash register, her glasses on a string round her neck" (2000: 114). The lovers watch as the children's Frisbee is retrieved from the head of a Madonna statue, and then go to the horse-jumping arena. Again, parallels to the lovers' own situation emerge. Ali muses: "The risks are interesting: do you aim for speed and a correspondingly greater risk of knocking off the poles, or do you take it steady and try for no faults?" (2000: 126). Wherever they are, the environment actively accompanies what is happening in the lovers' plot. A passage from George Mallory's section serves as a good description of the relationship of reciprocity between the physical world of the novel and the characters:

> he seemed to be an evolving part of the mountain itself. The mountain is endlessly moving, shifting, changing itself. Mallory was moving with it, using its undetectable flow as a rhythm for his own body. He sang the mountain, and the mountains, sharp, high, outside of the human range, heard and sang back. (2000: 176)

The mention of the real-life 1999 expedition that located Mallory's body on the Everest mountainside starts Winterson's fictionalized account of his last days, the climb and the love letters from his wife, making him one of "the ruinous lovers" across centuries. Real life and fiction are not at odds; to the contrary, one expounds on the other without contradiction. One can be "atom and dream" at the same time. As one of the email lovers argues: "Facts never tell the truth. Even the simplest facts are misleading" (2000: 43).

Real life becomes fiction at least once more towards the conclusion of the book, when the narrator walks at the bottom of the Thames during the lowest tide of the century, on January 19, 1998. We see the past century's objects surfacing through its silt, as the river exposes other lives and times, normally invisible but still physically existing "under the surface." The simultaneous presence of different lives in different

places is emphasized by recurring references to "the world outside" that various characters make in several chapters/stories (Empty Trash, the London visit). The narrator comments on the relationship between the real and the fictional environments:

> It used to be that the real and the invented were the parallel lines that never met. Then we discovered that space is curved, and in curved space parallel lines always meet. The mind is a curved space. What we experience, what we invent, track by track running together, then running into one, the brake lever released. Atom and dream. (2000: 108–109)

The Powerbook's multiple fictional stories take place in virtual and geographical settings. The particular environments are locally diverse, but not as separate or autonomous as we normally construct them: both the geographical locations and virtual space become part of the fictional world. By bringing real locales into the fictional environment, and crossing over to them from the virtual space of cyberspace, Winterson's narrator exposes the permeability of the rigid boundaries that we erect to create definitions: "The more I write, the more I discover that the partition between real and invented is as thin as a wall in a cheap hotel room" (2000: 108). Winterson's fictional boundary-crossing promotes a rethinking of the way we conceive of all the category-forming we engage in, including that which contributes to binary differences and divisions in the world, and the division between human/nonhuman. Softening the boundaries between fiction and "reality" and virtual reality encourages readers to "imagine" rather than go on "facts," to cross over to the worlds of others rather than stay locked in ours, not to see them as utterly separate and impermeable.

Multiple Genres/Genre Blending

Another element of the book's heterogeneous agenda is genre blending. As in the novels of Virginia Woolf, prose fiction is home to drama and poetry and metafiction, the genre systems interpermeating and correlating, another paradigm of different worlds coexisting in a relationship. As Fanny Delnieppe has noticed,

> The novel seems to reject an hierarchy between "high," "low," and non-literary genres. It privileges heterogeneity over homogeneity and brings together opposites such as poetry and crude language. …

> the stories written by Ali make one think of several distinct genres without strictly belonging to them. The novel may thus attempt to … resist categorization as well as question the categories corresponding to the different genres and discourses. (2010: 164)

Winterson's elimination of connecting structures such as omniscient authorial/narrative comments and transitions sometimes results in leaving only the bare necessity of dialogue to carry the plot forward. Winterson's dramatic exchanges are reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's increasing elimination of excess from the dramatic genre, to leave ultimately only a human mouth on the screen—proving that as little as one speaking subject is sufficient to create dramatic conflict. In *The Powerbook*'s dramatic exchanges, fictional prose is transformed to become the gist of drama—dialogue. Winterson uses minimalist drama to render the relationship between the couple of contemporary lovers. The dramatic dynamic of question and quick, often witty reply, statement and retort, is very effective in capturing the relationship's tensions and problems:

> 'You are not safe.'
> 'No, but your marriage is.'
> 'Listen, if I left my husband for you …'
> 'You think I'd leave within a year …'
> 'You are not a sticker.'
> 'I'm not a quitter.'
> 'You want me because you can't have me.'
> 'Is that what you think?'
> Heavy sighs. Bedclothes in a mess. Drink of water. Stare at ceiling.
> (Winterson 2000: 208)

Cryptic stage directions replace a full descriptive paragraph that would traditionally present the lovers' thoughts and actions. Instead, Winterson is using the dramatic technique to give maximum intensity to the argument itself. The retorts come fast and sharp, as in a sword fight, with nothing standing between the reader and the characters' conflict. Those exchanges are as close to a dramatic performance as can be found in fiction.

Winterson's fictional form in *The Powerbook* changes from page to page. Perhaps its most constant underlying current is the economy of word use that the writer shares with poets. Even the most "utilitarian" passages show a poet's relish for language, its puns and subtle undertones. Poetic

language flourishes on the minimalist purging of excess and demonstrates how when it comes to language, less is often more.

Poetic structures such as repetition of themes and imagery, as well as the intensity of tone in the lovers' discourse, bring the multiple sections and plots together, as in this passage:

> Found objects wash off on the shores of my computer. Tin cans and old tyres mix with the pirate's stuff. The buried treasure is really there, but caulked and outlandish. Hard to spot because unfamiliar, and a few of us can see what has never been named. … That's why I trawl my screen like a beach-comber—looking for you, looking for me, trying to see through the disguise. (2000: 73–4)

Figurative language sparkling with metaphor and simile may be difficult to permeate for a reader used to the transparent expository prose of commercial fiction. But if we slow our reading to the speed of poetry, and take in the metaphors, we discover that they provide connections guiding us through Winterson's fictional collage.[10] The metaphor of trawling through the screen fuses together the virtual and the physical (the London Thames) settings of the novel, foreshadowing what is to come in the ending section. It also infuses the two realities inside each other, the theme that Winterson's book is demonstrating on many other levels.

Winterson's novel is a home for various fictional systems. Her prose harbors poetry and drama and flourishes on never staying in one genre too long. The multiplicity of changing discourses provides a challenge to the reader used to settling inside a familiar fictional form. Instead, we are kept alert by the changing language environments and required to adapt to them. In the end, we are trained to expect change instead of stability and familiarity. Our consumerist reading habits have to give way to reading at the book's pace and its demand for a particular focused attention.

Conclusion

As readers of *The Powerbook*, we are personally invited to enter the book as a space which is from the beginning unfamiliar, multilayered, and challenging. We quickly discover that the definitions and categories we have used to navigate through experience are mixed and confused, and that we need to relinquish old thinking and reading habits and adapt to this new environment.

Discussing the political consequences of the experimental project of Jeanette Winterson's novel, Fanny Delnieppe concludes:

> postmodernist techniques such as generic mixing, narrative ambiguity, and incoherence can be seen as strategies used to react against the dominant discourses of society including traditional liberal humanism—and its values of hierarchy, homogeneity, and totalization: Novelists seem to suggest another ideology or worldview based upon the dissolution or coexistence of binary opposites. The contemporary novel resists categorization as well as deconstructing categories. (2010: 169)

The values Delnieppe lists are coincidentally the key philosophical values of progressive ecology that I argue Winterson's form promotes. Her stance of resisting categorization as well as deconstructing categories lets oppositions coexist without prioritizing or discriminating. In ecological terms, such an attitude translates to democracy and heterogeneity, promoting the coexistence of species and countering oppositional, judgmental binary thinking.

The outward lack of coherence between chapters motivates the reader to seek connections, to dig deeper underneath the surface appearance. This aspect of Winterson's use of postmodernist fragmentation promotes values important in ecological thinking, as it encourages the attitude of seeking relationships between systemic elements that seem unlike each other and existing in isolation. As a result of our quest to connect the disparate, we are prompted to seek and learn to discover the underlying and sometimes not apparent relatedness, an attitude that we can apply in the real world of humans and nonhumans. Multiple plots and multiple narrators develop a sense of awareness of other lives and perspectives, and undermine the one central viewpoint characteristic of the patriarchal, anthropocentric philosophy.

Winterson's highly fragmented, demanding form changes the reader's relationship to the book from a passive consumer to an active participant. It encourages thinking according to the model of ecological diversity in relationship. In its ecological dimension, her project fosters the nonexclusion of difference and promotes an active, participatory, interconnective view of the world.

6
The Fiction of Abundance and Awareness: Jeanette Winterson's *Lighthousekeeping*

In an interview after the publication of *Lighthousekeeping*, Jeanette Winterson discusses the underlying principle of her eighth novel: "I love the idea of a dynamic universe where nothing is static and everything is changing at every moment. … I really believe in the power of art to show us this, to hold up a real mirror to reality and say, This is how it is: much wilder, much stranger, much more chaotic and exciting than you could ever dream" (Francone 2005). She emphasizes the capacity and perhaps responsibility of art to convey the intrinsic richness of reality. She points out that art's excess resembles the excess of nature as she describes it in the novel: "Nature measures nothing. Nobody needs this much sunlight. Nobody needs droughts, volcanoes, monsoons, tornadoes either, but we get them, because our world is as extravagant as the world can be. We are the ones obsessed by measurement. The world just pours it out" (Winterson 2004: 196–7).

This chapter examines the novel's heterogeneous form as modeling the natural economy of abundance. Just as nature's excess "peoples" the world with multiple and heterogeneous entities, always more than one, and always more than what seems "enough," Winterson's novel features multiple formal structures where only one of the kind would be sufficient. The novel exhibits formal abundance on many levels: multiple plots, different narrative perspectives (first and third person), diverse time settings, multiple "realities"—magic realism, fiction, metafiction, and history (the real)—multiple texts interweaving, narrative tone alternating from tragedy to humor, and so on. In all these aspects, *Lighthousekeeping* contains more than would be "enough" in a conventional novel. Winterson applies nature's recipe to fiction, creating a heterogeneous system that models and reinforces the principles on which nature has flourished for millions of years.

Importantly for my project, formal excess is a useful political strategy that can target some entrenched anthropocentric attitudes and replace them with new ways of looking at the world. Thomas LeClair defines "excess—at first accepting and employing, then exceeding conventions of selection, arrangement, proportion, scale, imitation, style, or other narrative properties" as a "quantitative strategy" of "too much." LeClair points out that writers use excess "to defamiliarize important subjects, to break through the moderating haze of conventional wisdom. … to communicate new, large, even planetary and possibly saving visions" (1982: 6). In other words, formal excess can be a strategy of social and, as I argue here, environmental change. The "haze" of conventional wisdom that Winterson is trying to dispel through her technique is the belief that the only reality that exists is the one that we are experiencing. If applied to human relationships with the nonhuman, this "conventional wisdom" lies at the foundation of patriarchal anthropocentrism, resulting in the objectification of the nonhuman. It privileges a single, centered position at the expense of others and assigns a hierarchical value of importance to diverse beings. Such attitudes have proven fraught with dire ecological consequences and can be said to have brought about the crisis that the earth and its inhabitants are facing today. Winterson dispels such views by alternating between diverse fictional structures. She cultivates a specific outlook in her readers: an awareness that there is always another reality, another view, equally valid and valuable, to be taken into account. In effect, her fiction teaches plurality and equality of perspectives, instilling respect and consideration for others: the principles of ecological multicentrism.

Multiple Centers: Silver, Babel, Pew, and Tristan—the "proper way to tell a story"

The novel begins in the voice of 10-year-old Silver, who tells us about her mother living on a cliff above the sea, the town of Salts, and her absent father. As we settle into her quirky story, there is a mention of an earlier time in the history of Salts, as a connection is made between Silver's temporary caretaker Miss Pinch and her ancestor Reverend Dark, and his father by the same name: "I suppose the story starts in 1814. … or perhaps it begins in 1802, when a terrible shipwreck. … So, the story begins in 1802, or does it really begin in 1789, when a young man …" (Winterson 2004: 11–13). The narrator implies that any given beginning is valid, and that there are multiple stories to be told depending on the choice of starting point and character. We proceed from the story

of Silver's mother to Babel, Silver, and Miss Pinch, to Pew, to Silver and Pew, to Silver in Italy stealing a parrot, to Tristan and Isolde, to Silver and her lover, to Babel bereft and alone on the beach, to Silver's last monologue to her lover. As we see one chapter end and another begin, or, rather, simply stop and start, we learn to expect a switch to another storyline. The abruptness of this transition increases as the novel progresses, since Winterson can by now count on the reader's anticipation and tolerance of the sudden shifts.

The novel's story consistently interweaves Silver's account of her life with Miss Pinch in Salts and later with Pew at the lighthouse in the late twentieth century, and the story of Reverend Dark and his nineteenth-century life and loves. Unlike Silver's first-person account, Dark's story is cast in a more distanced voice, told from the outside in the third person, which is appropriate to Dark's mysterious personality and gives more contrast to the two plots. The two main stories remain connected through Pew as the teller and the town as their shared setting, among other themes, such as fatherless children "born out of chance" (2004: 32). Importantly, each of the stories would be sufficient to make a full-fledged novel, and the ongoing presence of both plots trains the reader to keep in mind the details of where the character left off in each case. When grown-up Silver relates meeting the woman to become her lover, she speculates about what might happen, and proceeds: "I am shy with strangers. … So now, when I meet someone new, I do the only thing I know how to do: Tell you a story" (2004: 201). When we turn the page, we are back in the lighthouse with Pew telling more of Josiah Dark's story. The stories layer one on top of the other, and we are led to believe that the one about Josiah we are reading is also the one Silver tells her lover. Winterson's switching back and forth between the plots alerts us to the fact that they continue parallel to each other, and implies that there are other untold stories that continue in the same manner. It is having just one story that is "unnatural," and prioritizing just one necessarily means the exclusion of the others. This is a principle straight out of ecological philosophy: all around us diverse beings' stories continually begin and go on, and the awareness of other lives happening is the first step out of the ecological emergency that we find ourselves in. "Close your eyes and pick another date," Winterson writes (2004: 24). You cannot miss—there is bound to be a story, a life, that starts at any given moment.

Just as there is no one definite beginning, there is no one finite end in the novel. One of the early chapters opens: "A beginning, a middle and an end is the proper way to tell a story. But I have difficulty

with that method" (2004: 23). Neither the past associated with Babel, nor the present storyline of Silver, ends in a finite, satisfying way. We leave Babel on the beach contemplating suicide, while Silver ends her story with planning to meet her lover: "Don't wait. Don't tell the story later" (2004: 232). The last chapter of the book stands as an intended paradox: "Part broken part whole, you begin again" (2004: 227). That line connects us back to a statement made early in the novel: "Where to begin? Difficult at the best at times, harder when you have to begin again" (2004: 24). The novel just wraps itself up into a circle, resisting an end, and emphasizing constant rejuvenation in accord with the theme of natural evolutionary abundance: "To avoid either extreme, it is necessary to tell all the lives in between" (2004: 162). The narrative models the abundance of nature, where innumerable lives continue to go on, reformed and revitalized. When Silver asks Pew for "A story with a happy ending," he answers: "There's no such thing in all the world." "As a happy ending?" Silver asks. "As an ending," Pew replies (2004: 49).

As the book progresses, we discover that not only are the storylines multiple, but the characters manifest multiple identities as well. The characters of Pew and Dark have doubles: Pew in his past ancestors ("There's always been a Pew at Cape Wrath. But not the same Pew" (2004: 92) and Dark both in the past ancestors by the same name and in his dark alter ego, resembling Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The alter ego to Dark's abusive, self-negating persona is appropriately Lux (Light), the name that underscores the caring and self-affirming life that he has with Molly. Again, where only one character personality would be enough, we have to reconcile the presence of two or more, and to anticipate that someone completely different is likely to be lurking behind the next page. Such shifts develop a more inclusive vision of reality, and prepare us to accept its abundance. At some point an undefined narrator comments: "The Romantic solipsism that nothing exists but the two of us, could not be farther from the multiplicity and variety of the natural world. Here, the world and everything in it forms and is reformed, tirelessly and unceasingly" (2004: 169).[1]

When reading *Lighthousekeeping* we must be light on our feet. Never are we allowed to settle within one reality for too long-very soon another reality interrupts, its simultaneous presence made apparent. Winterson trains us to be constantly aware of the existence of *another*, and, by extension, of multiple beings and their realities coexisting in real life. This principle is also reinforced by the interweaving of the novel's big fictional frameworks: of fiction, fantasy, metafiction, and history.

Recognizing Multiple, Equal, and Interrelated Realities: Fiction, Fantasy, History, and Metafiction

When the novel's narrator tells us that she is "part precious metal, part pirate," we realize that we have entered a world of intersecting realities. Silver's name and her reference to pirate unmistakably conjure up Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island." Her character is therefore a mixture of literary history and fiction (this particular story). The girl's being part precious metal is less easy to absorb. It requires a gesture of imagination that takes us into the realm of the surreal—the human body does contain trace amounts of the metal, but here we are asked to imagine silver as one of the two main ingredients. The exercise of imagination continues as Silver describes her childhood spent "at an angle": in a house attached to a rock, only accessed by harnessed climbing. She talks about her mother's hardship of repeatedly hauling her daughter up and down the cliff:

> My mother and I had to rope us together like a pair of climbers, just to achieve our own front door. One slip, and we'd be on the railway line with the rabbits. "You are not an outgoing type," she said to me, though this may have had much to do with the fact that going out was such a struggle. While other children were bid farewell with a casual, "Have you remembered your gloves?" I got, "Did you do up all the buckles on your safety harness?" (2004: 4)

The extraordinary and the ordinary intersect. We are asked to imagine a very unlikely circumstance and accept it as a possible reality.[2] Similarly, "magical" description exposes new vistas when Silver tries to convey the conditions of life at the lighthouse:

> I soaped my body in darkness. Put your hand in a drawer, and it was darkness you felt first. ... The darkness had to be brushed away or parted before we could sit down. Darkness squatted on the chairs and hung like a curtain across the stairway. Sometimes it took on the shapes of the things you wanted: a pan, a bed, a book. (2004: 20)

Darkness as a palpable object is not merely a figure of speech here: the extended descriptive detail forces us to experience darkness with Silver as her sustained reality. This is an example of "an enhanced revelation of reality," which Stephen M. Hart lists as one of the identifying properties of magical realism: "The marvelous real comes into existence in an

undeniable way when it is born from an unexpected change in reality (a miracle), from an enhanced revelation of reality, or from an illumination which is unusual or singularly able to reveal the hitherto unnoticed richness of reality" (2004: 306). Hart captures the gist of my argument by describing the cultural significance of such formal devices:

> A cultural studies approach to magical realism … is one that focuses on the cultural politics underlying the ideology of representation. According to this methodology, the emergence of the magical-real is predicated on the existence of cultural bi- or trifocalism—that is, a cultural system in which no one single system of thought is given precedence over another. It is not that the savage is magical and the nonsavage refuses to see this, or that the narrator—in a gesture of anticolonialist recuperation—brings the savage's worldview to the fore in his or her fiction. For this in itself would still be monofocalism, not colonial but anticolonial. Rather, it is that the novel presents a worldview that is characterized by hybridity, in which no one of the competing visions is accorded preeminence. (1972: 308–309)

In this respect, magical realism functions as an ecopoetic device that challenges a single and hierarchically ordered worldview and encourages such attitudes as multicentrism and equal treatment of all beings. Eileen Williams-Wanquet points out that "magic realism—in which the supernatural and magical become ordinary, everyday occurrences—is used to transgress ontological boundaries, 'requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation'" (2006: 402). As readers of Winterson's magical realist descriptions, we are forced to abandon our preconceived notions of the reality we "know" and open up to the realities we may not know. When Winterson has the blind Pew suggest that he has been alive for 200 years, and that he saw when Babel read a story out of the Bible (2004: 64–5), she implies that this situation is possible in some circumstances, and that the problem lies with our inability to fathom it. Silver questions Pew: "'you couldn't see his Bible because you are blind.' Logic seemed to have no effect on Pew" (2004: 65). Together with Silver, we are challenged to search for a way to believe Pew, to sacrifice the logical principles that we would normally apply. We thus become open to the idea that there exists a reality, possibly multiple realities, that we simply ignore because of our limited way of seeing. Winterson thus effectively trains the reader to perceive her/his single reference frame as not the only one, but one of many. She makes us realize that

there are whole realms of which we are unaware, worlds and beings that we are dismissing at best and mistreating at worst, because of our ignorance. This realization is an essential step to precipitate environmental change.

Crossing Over to the Real

Next to the suggested alternative realms of magical realism, another of the realities intersecting in the novel is the plane of history. Navigating the worlds of Pew and Babel Dark, we are surprised to encounter references to contemporaneous historical persons and events. The lighthouse on Cape Wrath is a real location, built by the grandfather of the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson, Robert Stevenson, in 1828. In the novel, Babel's father Josiah Dark commissions Stevenson to build the lighthouse, and Stevenson's design drawings of it hang on the walls of Babel's room when Molly visits him years later (Winterson 2004: 89). Winterson details the Stevenson family history side by side with Dark family history: "There are twists and turns in any life, and though all of the Stevensons should have built lighthouses, one escaped, and that was one who was born at the moment Josiah Dark's son, Babel, made a strange reverse pilgrimage and became Minister of Salts" (2004: 25).

Winterson further intertwines the real with the fictional by having another prominent personage of the time, Charles Darwin, appear in the novel. Darwin visits Salts in search of fossil evidence still missing from his research after Babel accidentally discovers a cave with perfectly preserved fossils: "Darwin himself came to examine the cave. He admitted to being embarrassed by the lack of fossil evidence to support some of his theories. Opponents of his *Origin of Species* wanted to know why some species seemed not to have evolved at all? Where was the so-called 'fossil ladder?'" (2004: 119). Winterson references the historical debate at the time, citing the terms of the debate over evolution persisting until the present day.[3] She also makes Babel an example of the philosophical value crisis that the Victorians suffered as a consequence of Darwin's ideas: "Darwin tried to console him. 'It is not less wonderful or beautiful or grand, this world you blame on me. Only, it is less comfortable.' Dark shrugged. Why would God make a world so imperfect that it must be continually righting itself?" (2004: 120). To complete the historical picture of the age, Winterson chooses The Great London Exhibition of 1851 as the site of Babel Dark and Molly's accidental meeting after their child is born: "There were horses in heavy gear drawing beer barrels,

and a man with a panther offering the Mystery of India, and all this before they had queued to enter the Crystal Palace to see the wonders of the Empire" (2004: 77–8). The exhibition, boasting the industrial and military achievements of the Empire to the "rest" of the world, was the hallmark of the Victorian pride and self-confidence, just before it waned in the light of social and scientific developments.

By having historical facts intersect with fiction, Winterson challenges the "common wisdom" tenet that the two are separate and unrelated. This formal gesture invites us to break old attitudes and put forward new hypotheses about how preconceived ideas influence our perception of, and, consequently, our actions in, the world. She forces us to experience a world where even seemingly "opposite" and mutually exclusive realities exist in a relationship, intersect with and influence each other as parts of ecosystems routinely do. Her narrative method is a lesson in ecological interrelatedness.

Crossing Over to the Outside of the Text: Metafiction

The conventional experience of reading fiction involves a tacit agreement between the reader and the writer that the fictional world the reader enters will be a consistent reality in which the story unfolds. In a traditional realist novel, we willingly accept that the fictional world functions as the only world in which events take place. Of course we may periodically get up from our reading and make a cup of tea, but we know that the tea-making world has no bearing on what happens in the novel. In fact, this uninterrupted immersion in the fictional world is conventionally regarded as a criterion for a quality reading experience. Separating reality from fiction is the staple of realist writing. In contrast, Winterson persistently disrupts that world of fictional illusion with comments about its making. The comments about the nonfictional, "outside" reality of story-making consistently interact with the "inside" world of the story.

Defining metafiction, Patricia Waugh stresses its relational underpinnings: "metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (1984: 2). True to this definition, Winterson's use of metafiction achieves two goals of environmentalist consequence: it makes the reader aware of the presence of "another" world outside of the one in which we are immersed, and it reveals the connections and relationships between the two worlds that we did not suspect.

Hardly a few pages pass in our reading before the reality of the fictional narrative is disrupted by a metafictional comment. On page 10, the narrator introduces the two Darks:

> Miss Pinch was a direct descendent of the Reverend Dark. There were two Darks—the one who lived here, that was the Reverend, and the one who would rather be dead than live here, that was his father. Here you meet the first one, and the second one will come along in a minute. (Winterson 2004: 10)

The last sentence of this passage transgresses the illusion of the story by addressing the reader directly and breaking the cause-and-effect sequence through a reference to the future. Both moves reveal the character's/narrator's awareness of the reality outside of the story, where the reader lives, and from where the story's sequence is perceived. In the realist convention, we would have to exclude one to the full benefit of the other; in the metafictional convention that is not necessary. As in a well-functioning ecosystem, the two "world systems" of the real and the fictional are not competing but cooperating, providing information that enriches the text. Silver, Pew, and Silver's lover are frequently making references to storytelling: asking to be told a story, commenting on the nature of the story being told, its plot or ending. When Silver wakes up after a night with her lover, she looks back and reflects: "These moments that are talismans and treasure. Cumulative deposits—our fossil record—and the beginnings of what happens next. They are the beginning of a story, and the story we will always tell" (2004: 212–13). She observes watching fishermen on the river: "So many lives—layered and layered, and easy to find, if you are quiet enough, and know where to wait, and coax them like trout" (2004: 215). Silver's statements can be said to summarize what I call Winterson's ecopoetic project: the idea that multiple and interlaced stories create a record of many worlds and lives interacting and evolving.

What is more, in the book's typical fashion, Silver moves from the world of her experience to the world of storytelling and takes us with her: we follow her away from the plot towards the thought of the act of reading/writing itself. Through such comments, Winterson's characters/narrators connect their fictional, "inside" world to the "real," "outside" world in which the readers/listeners of their stories reside, transgressing the boundary that we may have thought impermeable.

Travelling between Texts

In a classic intersection between fiction and history, Winterson highlights another form of her literary excess—multiple literary texts:

> 1850—Babel Dark arrives in Salts for the first time. 1850—Robert Louis Stevenson is born into a family of prosperous civil engineers—so say the annotated bibliographical details—and goes on to write *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. (2004: 25)

Two of three titles mentioned have a significant function in the novel's multiple world-making. *Treasure Island* is the implied source of Silver's name and "composition" (part pirate), while *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* helps illuminate Babel Dark's double personality traits and lives. Significantly, Silver finds a first-edition copy of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* with notebooks "that belonged to Babel Dark" (2004: 124). We track the book's journey back to Pew's ancestor, who hears about it from Babel, who originally receives it from the author himself. When Pew asks if the book is about lighthousekeeping, Dark answers meaningfully: "In a manner of speaking, it is—if keeping the light is the one thing all of us must do" (2004: 184).

Sonya Andermahr discusses "Winterson's long-established interests in scientific theory and science as metaphor, tracing on a literary level what Darwin identified in terms of human evolution: the interconnections and interrelationships between things, whether these be species or texts. The novel may be seen as mapping a kind of tree of life of stories" (2006: 146). I see Winterson's method as even more ecopoetically significant in terms of portraying a relationship between human self and natural other as exemplified in the characters of Jekyll and Hyde. Winterson weaves a web of connections between Stevenson's novel and Darwin's work, citing the influence of the "ape" ancestry in the development of the dark side of Jekyll's character.[4] Babel mentions discussing Darwin's ideas with Stevenson: "I told Stevenson I did not believe that Man was descended from the Ape, or that he shared with such a creature a common inheritance" (2004: 186). Babel is fascinated by Stevenson's idea that "the ape" can be separated out into an alter ago and banished away from "light": "If each, I told myself, could be but housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin" (2004: 185). However, his own

life experience disproves that tempting fiction, and he eventually owns the painful truth that he is both Dark and Lux, Jekyll and Hyde: "I am Henry Jekyll. … And I am Edward Hyde" (2004: 186–7). He is therefore owning the "other" as part of himself, unable to banish and/or destroy what he views as an "evil," foreign form. The more "evil" the Ape within is perceived to be, the more powerful and significant is Babel's act of embracing it. Insidious species stereotyping aside, this admission is another statement of the interrelatedness of different worlds that the book portrays. The inclusion of Stevenson's text in the novel fleshes out this point in yet another way.

Another text/world that intersects with Silver's story is Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. Tristan actually takes over the narrative and a few pages are told in his point of view, in a seemingly abrupt and unrelated fashion. Wagner's opera dates from the same year as Darwin's *On the Origins of Species*, and "Both are about the beginnings of the world" (Winterson 2004: 169), yet they represent very different stories: the former is about the emotional beginnings, the latter about the biological. Winterson delineates their differences but stresses the importance of both: "Darwin—objective, scientific, empirical, quantifiable. Wagner—subjective, poetic, intuitive, mysterious" (2004: 169). Tristan's story is another example of excess in the novel. It constitutes another way of telling the history of the world: side by side and in addition to Darwin's world of bones and fossils and survival of the strongest. In Tristan's history of the world, the weak are saved and rewarded for qualities other than the excellence of their genes; loyalty and relation triumph over competition. Isolde speaks to Tristan: "Death frees us from the torment of parting. I cannot part with you. I am you. The world is nothing. Love formed it. The world vanishes without a trace. What is left is love" (2004: 182). Their story is an interesting emotional counterweight to Darwin's biological history of the world.

Humor and Heartbreak—Always Next to Each Other

A hallmark of Winterson's narrative is frequent changes of tone, where seriousness and humor alternate, sudden shifts of tone occurring by surprise. This is another form of excess that Winterson uses to sharpen and reshape readers' habits and awareness. We barely turn over one page of the novel when an unexpected detail in the description makes us laugh out loud. Silver, whose story starts rather ruefully—"I have no father. … He was crew on a fishing boat that harboured with us one night when

the waves were crashing like dark glass" (2004: 3)—starts describing her childhood house and the austere conditions of living:

> I lived in a house cut deep into the bank. The chairs had to be nailed to the floor, and we were never allowed to eat spaghetti. We ate foods that stuck to the plate—shepherd's pie, goulash, risotto, scrambled egg. We tried peas once—what a disaster—and sometimes we still find them, dusty and green in the corners of the room. (2004: 3–4)

The tone shifts from the difficult circumstances of Silver's birth to the humorous description of ordinary foods being valued for their adhesive properties. Seriousness and humor exist next to each other, interrupting and interjecting each other. In a similar manner, the mood of Silver's first night with Miss Pinch is twofold. This is a time filled with intense grief after Silver's mother's passing and with gloomy forebodings about the girl's future, yet it is lightened by her witty remarks:

> I wanted to take some of my mother's things too, but Miss Pinch thought it *unwise*, though she did not say why it was unwise, or why being wise would make anything better. Then she locked the door behind us, and dropped the key into her coffin-shaped handbag. "It will be returned to you when you are twenty-one," she said. She always spoke like an Insurance Policy. (2004: 8)

Later on, Silver lightheartedly comments about the bed covers: "Then she [Miss Pinch] got an eiderdown out of the cupboard—one of those eiderdowns that have more feathers on the outside than on the inside, and one of those eiderdowns that were only stuffed with one duck. This one had the whole duck there I think, judging from the lumps" (2004: 9). However, we soon afterwards return to the somber, grim mood of the night, to close the chapter: "We are lucky, even the worst of us, because daylight comes" (2004: 9). Winterson's manipulation of tone makes a point of not letting the reader settle and stagnate in one reality; even the heaviness and grief we perceive as natural after a mother's death are not the only emotion to be experienced. Humor is just nearby.

Other parts of the novel exemplify this multiplicity of mood as well. The account of Babel Dark's unhappy marriage and his vindictive treatment of his wife is perhaps the darkest part of the novel, unsurpassed by Dark's lonely wanderings on the beach contemplating suicide. But in between the accounts of Dark's predicament, we find two lighthearted

stories told by Silver. The first is about her youthful attempts to read *Death in Venice*, the book that happens to be always checked out, and that she pursues relentlessly as far as its current reader's home: "Days passed. I kept an eye on her [the reader] until she got better. I did more than that; I pushed aspirins through the letterbox. I would have donated to the blood bank if it had been a help" (2004: 143). Silver sums up her lesson from this experience: "I have a list of titles that I leave at the desk, because they are bound to be written some day, and it's best to be ahead of the queue" (2004: 144). This hilarious adventure is followed by a brief vignette of Dark solemnly looking at the moon: "The moon, bone-white, bleached of life, was the relic of a solar system one planeted with Earths. He thought the whole of the sky must have been alive once, and some stupidity or carelessness had brought it to this burnt-out, warmless place" (2004: 147). This solemn observation and the preceding story of Silver's pursuit of her book, filled with desire and joy of life, stand in stark contrast to each other. A similar prominent clash in tone exists between Silver's story of the talking parrot who spoke her name and whom she stole from her owner, and the neighboring pages. The result of these sudden shifts between seriousness and humor is the awareness that one is always present on the far side of the other. When reading *Lighthousekeeping*, we cannot settle into comedy or tragedy like we would into a comfortable armchair: we get ejected rather abruptly. Through such frequent changes of narrative tone, Winterson is reminding us that there is always another way of being in the world, a reality just as valid as ours, on the other side of the glass behind which we choose to live.

Conclusion

In *Lighthousekeeping*, Winterson creates a natural fictional form that is flexible and not restricted by the limits of probability, versimilitude, chronology, or singleness of plot. Here there are no endings, but numerous beginnings and constant evolving/shifting from one story to another. In the varied excess of her novel, Winterson has multiple fictional forms and multiple planes of reality exist side by side. Our awareness of coexisting multiplicity of life is raised through repeated crossing over from focal character to character, from fantasy to history to metafiction, from humor to tragedy, and from one literary text to another. The effect is that we are always reminded of the presence of other realities outside of the one we happen to inhabit. Consistently intersecting in the novel, these multiple, "excessive" elements also

deliver a point about the interrelatedness of the worlds traditionally perceived as unconnected and self-contained. Winterson has us move back and forth between exclusives and opposites that coexist simultaneously and are not as separate as we may have been used to imagining. These techniques of formal excess encourage the ecophilosophical attitudes of learning to look from more than one perspective, to acknowledge the existence of another, to value heterogeneity over homogeneity, and democracy and equality over hierarchy.

The awareness that there is more than one way to view a situation may be one of the most groundbreakingly environmentalist habits of thought, and one of the most difficult to develop. It requires us to coerce ourselves into leaving the self-centered universe that we inhabit the majority of the time, and into paying attention to what exists outside of our reality for its own sake; not solely as a reflection on us. Such an attitude entails learning to entertain a perspective that does not first and foremost benefit us, and that acknowledges and respects others. Such awareness lies at the very foundation of any pervasive environmental change.

Seen from an environmentalist perspective, literary excess, providing multiple options that command our attention, trains the reader to develop exactly such habits of awareness.

7
Hotel World: A Symbiotic Narrative Space

Existential symbiosis and the interrelatedness of species are fundamental concepts of ecological philosophy. As Karen J. Warren has stressed, "ecofeminism is a contextualist ethic. … Ecofeminism makes a central place for values of care, love, friendship, trust, and appropriate reciprocity—values that presuppose that our relationships to others are central to our understanding of who we are" (1990: 141–3). Ecofeminism contends that it is in relationships with others, human and nonhuman, that our identity is formed.

This chapter continues to map connections between ecology and discourse in the work of another writer of Winterson's generation, Ali Smith. The author of five novels and four collections of short stories, Smith has been highly recognized in Britain, more recently with the Whitbread Award for *The Accidental* (2005). She shares professional affinities with Jeanette Winterson, co-authoring with Winterson, Jackie Kay, and A.M. Homes the novel *52*, published weekly in *The Guardian*. Talking about her novel *Hotel World* (2001), Smith argues:

> Language is our means of expressing both potential and communication, and also our means of defining ourselves, pinning ourselves and others down, boxing ourselves and others more closely in. The book, I hope, demands that we fling the boxes open, that we challenge—or even just come to understand—our own means of communicating, even on the most basic level. (Jernigan 2004)

Smith thus expresses a philosophy of ethical use of language and narrative for transformative purposes. Narrative has consequences: certain narratives carry challenges to the way we think and act.

Danne Polk's description of the "symbiotic body" provides terms useful in defining what I see as Smith's ecological project in *Hotel World*:

> The symbiotic body extends between species and between members of species. Unlike our traditional notion of the masterful, autonomous self, the symbiotic self is always in relationships of alliance, of cooperation, and negotiation. In this way, we uphold the historically situated, contextual, embodied site of every corporeal production, thus understanding ourselves as a symbiotic field of exchange, a site of relations that extends beyond the layer of skin, beyond the merely human, and beyond the immediate present. In an anti-modern conceptual framework, the self is perhaps better understood not as a discreet or isolated body, but as an extensive field of relations-in-process that can never be claimed as absolutely one's own. (2001: 80)

Smith constructs her novel as "a symbiotic field" where connections are apparent "beyond the layer of skin, beyond the merely human, and beyond the immediate present." Every level of the text undermines the notion of the "masterful, autonomous self" in which the characters seem to be locked. The title itself underscores this ecofeminist agenda by pointing to the shared space that unifies the individual characters and chapters.

Juxtaposing biodiverse collectivity with competition, Brian Tokar states:

> A paradigmatic ecological model is the biotic community, which displays a tremendous capacity for self-regulation, adaptation, and a shared metabolism that preserves the health and stability of the whole. Unity-in-diversity, the sharing of abundance and the elaboration of complexity is the rule; scarcity and competition among species for the control of individual niches are the myths of a competitive society anxious to justify itself. (1992: 4)

Smith's novel shows the negative effects of the competitive, nonrelational thinking in the way it configures each of the five women characters inside the prison of their respective chapters, emphasizing their (often self-chosen) isolation. Even though, as Raoul Eshelman points out, "*Hotel World* shows how helpless, decentered subjects accidentally and unintentionally come together to—unsuccessfully—resist the hegemonic order around them" (2005: 1), I argue that Smith's text

does succeed in overcoming the "hegemonic order." She constructs the external "world" of the characters' physical environment, of the narrative, and of the outside of the narrative to reveal the inherent, underlying reality of connection and collectivity. The characters fail to notice their connectedness because by looking mostly inwards, they make a choice not to see themselves as parts of a community. In Tokar's terms, they are locked into the ethos of "scarcity and competition" rather than "unity-in-diversity and sharing of abundance." Yet the more they isolate themselves, the more their affinities are made visible to the reader in the larger context. Smith constructs connections between these five women as we cross the boundary from chapter to chapter, and ego to ego. Overcoming the ethos of isolation, the novel sends the message of ecological collectivity through such elements as the characters' and narrator's relationship to the nonhuman, the shared setting, the treatment of time, the frame structure and point of view, metafictional comments about language, and direct address to the reader. The underlying deep affinity, unnoticed by the individual characters, is a reality perceived in the space between the chapters, and between the novel and the reader, where the ecological symbiosis of the characters exists despite their outwardly isolating choices.

Love Is in the Details: Microcosmic Particularity, Humans, and Nonhumans

In discussing several women writers' "non-dominative literary practice" as an alternative to the "mentality of domination" embedded in the Western literary discourse, Josephine Donovan refers to Iris Murdoch's statement that "Moral change comes from an attention to the world whose natural result is a decrease in egoism through an increased sense of the reality of … other people, but also other things" (1996: 180). In her own project, Ali Smith redirects readers' attention from the human towards the nonhuman through what I call her technique of microcosmic particularity: the treatment of the nonhuman through highly detailed description. To use a photographic analogy, she not only focuses on the smallest nonhuman subjects, but zooms in to show their surprising complexity in close-up detail. She thus creates a conspicuous discrepancy between the attention these subjects receive in mainstream culture and their status in the novel. The result is our increased attention to their "reality" and complexity not unlike our own, bringing us closer to what we often think to be distanced and foreign.[1] The detailed attention to the nonhuman is expressed and shared by all the

main characters as well as the omniscient narrator of the last chapter, constituting one of the threads in the weave of the symbiotic field of the novel.

Various characters are united by expressions of respect and caring for animals and the environment. Other beings, even the most diminutive in size, are described in minute detail, suggesting that their subjectivity warrants such treatment. The ghost narrator of the first chapter describes the "earnest ticklish mouths of worms" (Smith 2001: 9), "the laid eggs of many-legged creatures, and the termites, the burrowing feasty maggots, all waiting" (2001: 14). She endows sparrows with their own stream of thought almost Joycean in its bare directness, and addresses them just as she does humans with the same message of *carpe diem*: "A sparrow waited till the leaves settled, and hopped about at the bottom of the pool, cocked its head. Nobody there. Nothing to eat. I have a message for you, I told the sparrow and the empty pool. Listen. Remember you must live" (2001: 27). The next chapter's narrator, Else, knows the color of the specks on almost every bird's egg. She thinks of letters as "biodegradable," and identifies them as useful for birdlife through symbiotic, interspecies recycling: "They rot like leaves do. They make good compost. Birds use them for lining nests, for keeping their eggs warm" (2001: 47). She thinks of animals in terms of affinity rather than difference. For example, when she sits absolutely still, she remarks that "She has seen spiders and woodlice do the same thing. She is good at it. She will not be noticed" (2001: 54). Else seems proud that she can do something as well as these creatures, and acknowledges that she is doing "the same thing" they do. When Lise, the following chapter's narrator, thinks about all the suffering in the world, she positions humans and animals side by side: "I worry for people who are being tortured. I worry for beagles strapped into machines and made to smoke, and horses farmed for oestrogen whose foals are routinely slaughtered" (2001: 87). Her thinking suggests that all species experience torture (even though only the human species instills it), and its atrocity is equal regardless of species. Lise possesses a sensitive awareness of other beings' welfare, even though she says she is no "world changer. But I will put a cup or a glass over a spider on the floor, slide a postcard under with care so as not to catch its legs, and then open the front door and put it outside. Is that good? Or if there is overtime at the hotel, and someone else needs it, I will give way" (2001: 88). She gets depressed thinking of trash "buried in a landfill" (2001: 90). Even the most self-serving narrator, Penny, includes a long list of various kinds of animals, from horses to one-day butterflies, fruit flies to airborne germs, alongside people in

her visions of the ghosts of the dead (2001: 129). She gives them the same amount of detail as the human dead. In this respect she is similar to Clare, who tries to process her sister's death by remembering the death of a mouse in her childhood:

> how one minute can you be walking about & the next you can't as if like you just got lifted up & disappeared into the sky … I saw what happened to that mouse that we put in the shed after Fluff got it it wasn't bleeding but it was in shock that's what mum said we put it on the saucer & put another saucer with water near it but when we got back from the holiday & opened the shed door there weren't even any bones left just a swarm of white things moving back & fore. (2001: 211–12)

The mouse's death is comforting because it shows that a similar "disappearance" of life had taken place, is known to have happened. The fact that Clare sees the mouse's life and death as helpful in thinking of the human ones suggests a sense of equality and continuity between all species. Similarly, when she thinks of Sara's continuing presence in the house, she thinks of tiny flakes of her skin that are part of the layer of dust coating the house: "years' worth of dust & stuff is all layered on I think our whole fucking family is up there in layers including the cats" (2001: 209). The cats are mentioned along with other family members, their skin particles equal contributors to the layer of organic dust. This microscopically detailed attention carries the message of respect for worthiness, affinity, and equality with the human of even the smallest creatures. As Josephine Donovan puts it, the ecological goal of such a project is "to sensitize dominators to the realities of the dominated, that is, to make the dominator-subject see/hear what has been construed as an object" (1996: 183).

The omniscient, outside narrator shares the others' detailed attention to the nonhuman. S/he starts the last chapter with a section resembling Woolf's interludes in *The Waves*, as it moves from description of one nonhuman subject to another. The result is a long, detailed inventory of plants and insects living in the garden on the winter morning after the ghost has left: "The tree is hung with yellows and reds, small inedible apples clawed or dropped. … There are leaves left on the branches but the new leaves behind them, sealed shut inside, are inching them steadily off" (Smith 2001: 225). The description goes as far as to include and anticipate, in X-ray vision, the yet invisible leaves of the tree.

The passage differs from a conventional scene-setting in the sheer length of the list: it mentions trees and grass, and identifies what seems like every shrub and plant in view. This part of the closing chapter, separated by a space from the rest, is devoted exclusively to those natural subjects, including "little flies suspended in the air, new and reckless" (2001: 225; an anthropomorphic adjective), and the birds picking at leftover strawberries (2001: 226). This "inventory" parallels the detail of the "inventory" of human subjects in the remainder of the chapter. Smith's narrator reports the state and "progress" of each plant in the same way as s/he later "updates" each person that the ghost mentioned in passing at the end of the beginning chapter, closing up the book's frame. The narrator gives the human and the natural subjects the same "attention," to return to Iris Murdoch's term, underscoring their equal value. The song of Dusty Springfield "(and behind it all the two-minute, three-minute songs there have ever been about the comings and goings, the gains and the losses, the endless spinning cycles of love and the trivia of living) come[s], as if on the spread grey wings of common collared-doves descending above a garden to land on the still-wet branches of the crab-apple tree, smoothly, inexorably, down to their close" (2001: 230). As this passage sums up and foreshadows the closing of the book, itself about "the cycles of love and the gains and losses," it features the presence of the birds and the trees as equal participants in this world, the human and the natural paralleling and continuing each other.

Smith's heightened attention to the particular helps render difference without hierarchical values. Other beings' particularity shown through detailed descriptions suggests equality to the humans, since it provides the attention that anthropocentrism awards only them. Ronnie Zoe Hawkins points out that "To overcome this distorting thinking of 'the master,' which defines the dualistically conceived other as radically discontinuous with the self and recognizes that other only as colonized by the (master's) self, [ecofeminist pioneer Val] Plumwood advocates reconstructing identities so as to affirm continuity among all lifeforms while recognizing 'a non-hierarchical concept of difference' distinguishing self and other" (1998: 158). In my opinion, Smith achieves exactly this kind of reconstruction. Her microcosmic particularity fosters what Donovan calls a necessary "epistemological awakening," and constitutes one of the new "forms of attention":

> The task … as I see it, for ecofeminist critics, writers, scholars, and teachers is to encourage the development of forms of attention that

> enhance awareness of the living environment, that foster respect for its reality as a separate, different but knowable entity. Such a commitment entails reconceiving literature and literary criticism … as epistemological and moral practices that can contribute to the designed spiritual transformation, to metanoia. (1996: 181)

Despite their individual differences and degrees of inwardness and isolation, all the main characters exhibit the overarching attitude of attention towards the nonhuman others that involves caring, thoughtfulness, and respect. This attitude is also shown by the outside narrator. As Gibson argues, this increased attention has an ethical significance and extends to readers by creating an ethical sense of responsibility (1999: 7). Through extending the same ethics towards the nonhuman world, all the main voices of the novel are brought together on yet another level, and shown to share one symbiotic "world."

Physical Environment: One World

Like Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Smith in *Hotel World* constructs a shared physical environment to emphasize the relationships that bind characters who are seemingly detached from each other. They live and move around the same town, streets, and buildings. The physical space of and around the hotel itself is inhabited, at different times, by Sara, her ghost, Else, Lise, Clare, and Penny. The last three are found together in the hallway next to the shaft previously briefly "inhabited" by Sara. Clare stops short of throwing herself down the shaft, and throws a variety of objects instead. Lise joins Clare in the hallway later. Clare also sits on the steps of the building across the street from Else, who watches and traces her movements. Else keeps her distance, and sees her as competition, later taking the money left by Clare and giving it back to her in the hallway inside the hotel.

Smaller elements of the physical world also connect the main characters. In the scene in the hotel hallway, different objects belonging to the female narrators all land at the bottom of the shaft following Sara's body, pointing to the characters' affinity. They include Clare's shoe and uniform, Else's coins, and Penny's clock. Else's coins help Clare to time Sara's fall, Penny to pay for her taxi, and, posthumously, Sara to time her fall. The change left by Else in the hotel hallway is later found by Lise and used to buy Clare's breakfast. Similarly, the five-pound note

is a physical token of connection between Duncan, Sara, and Clare. Clare also cherishes the last traces of Pepto-Bismol left in Sara's cup: "I touched it with my tongue it tastes sort of sweet it is lobotomic I know but I couldn't not keep it in a way it is kind of like the five pounds he owed you I put the five pounds in the cabinet too" (Smith 2001: 215–16).

The same watch sits on the wrist of Sara first, and the shop girl later. The same wrist size and the band closing on the same hole embody the idea of extending Sara's body beyond the grave, as the girl's ongoing expectation of Sara's arrival extends Sara's love and life. She imagines a future encounter with Sara, a perpetual "today": "Every morning she thinks it as she fastens the watch on. It is today. She will put her bare wrists on the counter and say, I've come to pick up a watch, for Wilby" (2001: 235). Similarly, the physical experience of her surroundings helps Clare to connect with Sara. She is trying to extend Sara's existence by tasting, smelling, and touching the world "for" her sister:

> when I eat a piece of toast it is slowly so I remember for you what it tastes like … one time I stood up on the arm of the couch when there was nobody else in the room & put my hand on the top of the door for you where the wood is still kind of rough … & when I came down I touched the velvet of the armcover of the reclining chair so you could know what it felt like though the touch of velvet makes a shiver go down my spine like if you scratch your finger across one of those old vinyl singles in his collection not you me & I look at things hard so you will know if you want to what they look like … & I have even been to the pool yeah the pool me so I can smell it for you … (2001: 209)

Importantly, Clare's determined experience of the physical world connects her to her sister and takes the reader back to the first chapter in which Sara's ghost is wishing she was able to experience the physical reality of life. By tasting Sara's leftover Pepto-Bismol, Clare is perpetuating the taste sensation that Sara's ghost was earlier complaining of losing. In her frenzied search for peace and explanation for her questions, Clare practically embodies Sara by wearing a hotel uniform and all but throwing herself down the wall shaft. She collects Sara's debt from Duncan and preserves the five-pound note because it is Sara's:

> I won't ever spend it it is yours in a way it means you maybe because it means you it will call you back or if you know it is here you will

> come back for it it belongs to you even if you don't I will keep it for you it is worth more than anything. (2001: 216)

The dictionary functions in a similar way: "your dictionary you had from school it is full of words you could have looked up I am always wondering when I look at it which of the words you needed to know the meanings of" (2001: 216). The plate with toast that Sara brought Clare exists as the sole proof that the moment of sisterly closeness between them really happened (2001: 219). Smith makes the often minute parts of the physical setting unusually active and significant; they reach across time and space as connecting threads between the characters.

These elements of the characters' physical environment are important "participant[s] capable of generating meaning," to use Carol H. Cantrell's phrase (2003: 33–4). Perhaps the most encompassing example is Clare's family house, which delivers the communal message as it gathers into one space dust from generations of its owners, including Sara and other dead family members (Smith 2001: 209). In the reader's mind, this function extends beyond Clare and Sara's family to other families that lived there, as well as to other houses. Significantly, Else, who lacks a home, takes her walk in the suburban street peering into people's windows, soaking up the atmosphere of the spaces shared, not always happily, by family members. From the place of an outsider and lack that she occupies, her action validates the unifying potential of the inside space. The house symbolizes the communal meaning and function of space quite powerfully. The hotel is another such active and meaningful space, especially since the way it gathers people into itself counteracts the centripetal force of the capitalist profit-focused machine. In Sara's case, it kills, but it also makes Else, Lisa, Penny, and Clare come together.

In Smith's novel the physical environment, natural and built alike, is an acting character: it takes part and affects humans. It cannot be separated from the humans; in fact, humans constitute it, as flakes of skin or bodies moving around each other. Smith's configuration of place therefore practically embodies phenomenological teaching that "just as we cannot talk about mind without body, we cannot talk about body without a place" (Cantrell 2003: 35), and Merleau-Ponty's foundational statement: "my body is made of the same flesh as the world … this flesh of my body is shared by the world" (1968: 248). Although the five women are primarily contained in their respective chapters, they participate as minor characters in the other chapters, functioning almost as

each other's physical background/environment. Smith builds the physical world as inseparable from the human world. The nonhuman refuses to be marginalized, and reinforces the connectedness of all things, extending the meaningful tentacles of relationship among everything.

"The field of care": Point of View

In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram describes the role of written language in isolating humans out of their environment:

> The speaking I is locked inside the narrative—the rest is outside. I—consciousness—locked inside the brain or body, no reciprocity with the outside world. With the alphabet, and "with the addition of written vowels … human language became a largely self-referential system closed off from the larger world that once engendered it. And the "I," the speaking self, was hermetically sealed within this new interior. Today the speaking self looks out at a purely "exterior" nature from a purely "interior" zone, presumably located somewhere inside the physical body or brain. Within alphabetic civilization, virtually *every* human psyche construes itself as just an individual "interior," a private "mind" or "consciousness" unrelated to the other "minds" that surround it, or to the environing earth. (1997: 257)

These linguistically conditioned, separate individual identities are what Danne Polk terms "'isolated bodies' or 'encapsulated bodies,' bodies that are distinct facts of matter within a neutral environment free of any symbiotic alliances, governed only by exterior mechanical relations of cause and effect" (2001: 89). In contrast, he contends:

> A symbiotic understanding of difference expands the notion of body into a relational, interactive field of concerns which transcends the boundaries of the skin. For self-conscious creatures, such as ourselves, we could call this field of symbiotic relations a "field of care," to use the words of Neil Evernden, and the phenomenal body of that field (what the western tradition has seen as the site of consciousness), a "concentrated core" of a larger sense of self. (2001: 89)

I argue that Smith's novel portrays such a "field of care" by bringing in the rest of the book's world inside each narrator's chapter and revealing

the interdependence of the narrated "worlds." Her project, like Virginia Woolf's, is to bridge the gap between language and reality, to reestablish connections between our isolated linguistic selves, and between ourselves and the environment around us. The novel's multiple and complexly constructed points of view help to manifest these connections and overcome the characters' isolation as the reader recognizes other familiar characters, events, and settings as belonging to the same world.[2]

Hotel World is narrated by seven narrative/focalizing entities: Sara's ghost, dead Sara speaking from the grave, Else the homeless woman, Lise the hotel clerk, Penny the journalist, Sara's sister Clare, and the authorial/omniscient narrator of the last chapter. With the exception of dead Sara who speaks from the confines of her grave within her ghost's larger narrative, each of the narrators/focalizers inhabits a separate chapter, which effectively isolates them from each other. As Emma E. Smith has pointed out, this complex narrative method is not simply "polyphonic" but "communal": instead of merely offering multiple narrators' viewpoints, *"Hotel World*['s] … complex communal structure … does not simply share or pluralize narrative authority but actively redistributes it, producing what Smith has called 'a democracy of voice'" (2010: 84). The narrators/focalizers' social positions (the homeless, the ill, the young, the dead) are reshuffled through Ali Smith's use of diverse narrative techniques, each laden with a different power value: the omniscient narrator being the most empowered, and Penny the least (Smith 2010: 85–7). As Emma Smith's article argues, their narrative power frees these characters from their social positioning, coming close to the "democracy of voice" that Ali Smith mentioned. I strongly support the argument for the novel's narrative ethics, specifically the point that the novel "writes the wranglings of radical democratic [and ecological] relations. … the challenges it poses ask of readers a similar kind of engagement—a negotiation, that is, of our own ethical responses" (Smith 2010: 97). Furthermore, I see the communal aspect of the novel's form as an expression of an ecological community, extending even beyond the book to the reader.

Narrative polyphony is valuable as a political strategy from literary-theoretical perspective. As Andrew Gibson argues after Richard Rorty, "The novelist's substitute for the appearance–reality distinction is a display of diversity of viewpoints, a plurality of descriptions of the same event" (Gibson 1999: 7). The novelist's "ethical practice" is not to privilege one perspective but to feature several and "move back and

forth between them" (Gibson 1999: 7). Gibson continues: "The novelist presents us with individuality and diversity alike without any attempt to reduce either to the terms of a singular scheme or totality. The novel thereby becomes the form for and expression of an ethics of free, democratic pluralism" (1999: 8). This narrative democracy translates into ecological polyphony; multiplicity of perspective is ecological because it is biodiverse. As Ronnie Zoe Hawkins argues,

> whereas the hyperseparation of the disembodied subject with the one correct "objective" view implies that "one could act upon the world without oneself being acted upon"—an attitude that becomes concretized in such beliefs as that"rainforests can be cut without affecting those doing the cutting" or that a laboratory animal "is an object which can be manipulated to produce knowledge, rather than a subject who himself knows" ([Hayles] 1995: 56–8)—recognizing interactivity returns us to the awareness that we are affected by our impact on the world, just as other subjects are affected by that impact. In Hayles's model, we humans are but one kind of subject interacting with the world, and hence "to sacrifice animals or exterminate species … directly reduces the sum total of knowledge about the world, for it removes from the chorus of experience some of the voices articulating its richness and variety" (1995: 58). Postmodernism, in helping to dismantle the notion of a totalizing "God's-Eye-View," can contribute to … a wider recognition of the multiplicity of subjects within the sphere of "nature." (1998: 174–5)

Smith's "democratic" narrative shows the multifariousness of life reproducing in front of our eyes: the characters proliferate, and everyone is a potential narrative center, including the sparrows whom the ghost narrator admonishes on a par with the humans: "Remember you must live" (2001: 27). Multiplicity of point of view carries the message of biodiversity: life flourishes; all life is to be cherished. Unlike central omniscience, narrative polyphony encourages recognition of the presence and voice of others as the first step to empathy and collectivity.[3]

Even though they are mostly focused on their respective personal worlds, the four living women are configured spatially as "gathered" around the event of Sara's death, enclosing it from their positions. Their distance to Sara's death varies, from intimate family like Clare, almost-witnesses like Lise, to mere passers-by who only visit the

place of the accident like Else and Penny. These focalizing narrators together create a space defined by their accounts and encompassed by the reader. The four characters occur in each other's chapters in various ways, mostly as bystanders/strangers or incidental witnesses interacting with each other on a superficial level, such as during the encounter with Clare in the hotel hallway. Else and Penny spend quite some time together, but their emotional relationship remains on the cautious surface. Although they do not know each other, and their interactions do not carry a deeper meaning in their individual perspective, we as readers are aware of the bigger world in which they are interconnected. Unlike the characters themselves, the reader registers character interactions with acute attention, since we know each of them in great depth from their personal chapters, and details of their interactions signify much more to us. We are on alert for familiar images and allusions that Smith drops consistently to our great satisfaction, unbeknownst to the particular focal character. For example, Clare's comment that now Sara is dead she "can tread air too not just water like people who are only alive" (2001: 185) builds a connection back to the ghost narrator of the first chapter as well as forward to the last chapter where other "ghosts are out" (2001: 226). Clare's seemingly random thought casts a web of connections that resonate for the reader while they remain unknown to her. Another example of this net of connections is in Lise's chapter when she daydreams lying on her bed:

> (Lise) had seemed to be hardly moving, though in reality the sides of the tunnel where flying up past her at thousands, maybe millions of miles an hour, the curved wall and its slime-cold roughly surfaced bricks only inches from the skin of her nose and chin and the knuckles of her hands and feet, and her whole body tensed, ready, waiting, always about to hit it, the surface to the water. (2001: 84)

Lise's imaginary fall inside the well is for the reader another version of Sara's fall; anyone who has read the first chapter of the book will connect these two experiences and characters together. In various ways, the novel's characters live each other's experience and embody each other with a slight twist, as Lise does Sara's here. The reader does the work of retrieving the numerous connections between the characters that Smith weaves inside the narrative. Her method underscores the idea that the characters' self-perceived isolation within each chapter is only

an illusion, and that they are embedded in a larger context of the world where all lives are interlocked. Working together, Smith and her readers weave a symbiotic web enclosing the individual characters' worlds. The reader's presence, which I will elaborate on later, is essential to the awareness of this larger reality.

The four living narrators' accounts are surrounded by a frame of the first and last chapters, which both feature a similar bird-like view of the entire town. The authorial narrator of the last chapter states that "The ghosts are out" (2001: 226), harking back to the first chapter's ghostly narrator and her extra- and across-body call to get involved in life, to open up, to engage and connect. Sara's ghost enters others' bodies freely—and in this respect is related to the final chapter's narrator, who revisits the same minor characters. We are made aware that there are other ghosts floating in the air, wishing to participate in life the way Sara's ghost is. The ghost narrator is free, open, and intent on connecting with the others, but her lack of embodiment stunts her efforts. The lack of a particular body with which to experience life prevents the ghost from achieving a connection with other people. Only the embodied and living characters have a chance of achieving such a connection through interaction, a chance that they mostly let pass by.[4]

As s/he conducts her inventory in the last chapter, the omniscient voice integrates the many minor participants of the hotel world into one chapter, underscoring their communality. The last chapter's point of view demonstrates Smith's layered method throughout the book—what the characters are incapable of seeing is obvious to us as readers. As I have shown earlier, the narrator pays attention to what seems like every creature and plant (including last summer's rhubarb leaves) and returns to the background characters that the ghost mentions passing at the beginning. The authorial narrator groups together people who suffer alone because of resisting meaningful relationships that would make their experience easier. They choose to see themselves as alone; most increase their isolation by keeping secrets from each other, as do the wives thinking of other men while going through meaningless morning routines with their husbands. The shop girl is certainly included in this group, frozen in her permanent expectation of a second chance at a connection that will never come. However, the all-encompassing narrator makes a point of entering the minds of everyone, filling in the gaps such as the watch repair shop girl's story, and showing that they are part of one community.

The last chapter's narrative loops back to the beginning, as the omniscient narrator takes over the actions of Sara's ghost and revisits the story's participants. The book is in fact more spherical than linear, folding its space back in itself. Other significant "spherical" connections are the shop girl's wearing of Sara's watch and Clare's responding to Sara's call to time her fall over the space of four interceding chapters. Significantly for Smith's ecological modeling, the spherical structure extends outside of the story: we are surprised to find the ghost's chant written on the neighboring page, by itself, like a poem, and as we turn another page, the ghost's "whoo-hoo …" similarly recedes into space in smaller and smaller letters. Here Smith uses typography to create an illusion of space as a painter would use perspective on canvas to suggest three-dimensionality. One final time, Smith extends the space of the book beyond the last chapter, reaching out into the world surrounding it. In that exterior layer of reality, the connections are not broken or missed, and can be perceived and acted on.

Shared Time: Chronology

As much as the characters are bound together by the physical space of the town and hotel environment, they are bound by the shared span of time. Smith's treatment of time is a major contributor to creating a larger, interactive ecosystem in which the characters "live." Like space, time helps create a dome over the characters rather than sending them on a linear journey. A shared timespan is one of the most obvious connections between the characters. As we move to each new chapter, the time stays focused a few months after Sara's death, and only the focalizing perspective changes as each character revisits significant moments, stuck in the same period of time. The chapters with time-related names seem to locate us in the timeframe, but when we get to the last chapter we realize that Past and Present are only divided by a few hours after the ghost leaves the earth, the interceding chapters residing "inside" this small margin. What is more, the consecutive chapters' times are ambiguously mixed: Past is followed by Present Historic, which suggests a mixture of the past and the present, as does Perfect (suggesting Present Perfect, a tense used to describe a completed action whose effects are persisting). Future Conditional and Clare's Future in the Past both suggest a fixation on the past. As the poignantly recurring images of stopped watches point out, we are anchored in time to explore the five women. The temporal movement of the book is spiral: we are circling

over and around the same traumatic point in time, Clare providing the most emotionally involved perspective, Penny the least.

Time is also at the center of the novel with the ghost's message of *carpe diem*: "remember you must live," an advice to use the time we have well, not to waste it on moments that Woolf would call "non-being." Ticking and stopped clocks permeate the novel, symbolizing Sara's life cut short at a nonsensical and absurd moment, when she was just beginning to experience life and love as a young adult. As the chapter names indicate, time in the novel is obsessively stuck, as if to stress the inability of changing the tragic past or moving beyond it. Clare's quest to recreate her sister's last moments helps her get closer to someone she only now appreciates—perhaps because she is dead. Just as it is for the narrator of Winterson's *Written on the Body*, for Clare "the measure of love is loss," and the remedy for lost time has to be found through grief.

Time imagery connects the women, most obviously Sara and Clare, both obsessed with timing Sara's fall, a habit of a fast swimmer. Clare clocks her sister's fall to help her own healing, but Lise, Else, and Penny's chapters also contain significant time references. In the passage I discussed above, Lise imagines her fall inside the well in terms of seconds stilled, "stretched" "in a place where a second of time was stretched so long and so thin that you could see veins in it" (Smith 2001: 84). The relative fastness and slowness of one second of time underscore Sarah's fall, which must have been fast and yet stretched out thinly in expectation of hitting the ground, as the last moment of her life that she did not want to end. Penny provides the clock out of her hotel room for Clare to send down the shaft. Else turns out to be an unexpected expert on time and gravity, firmly upholding Galileo's experiment. Her life being "change," she is connected to time because she knows "That they keep Big Ben in London running with two-pence pieces" (2001: 152). Lise is most aware of time as she is struggling to beat her illness, marking the passing hours until she feels better.

Raoul Eshelman comments that in *Hotel World*, "time is not transcendent, but instead depends on spatial restrictions and contractual obligations as demonstrated vividly in the last part of the novel. Sara's unrequited love for the salesgirl in a watch repair shop is answered—but only belatedly and in a mode of permanent deferral" (2005: 2). I see the temporal deferral as another kind of deferral of connection—possible but missed. This deferral resonates on other levels of the novel, characters moving in the same dome of space and time but blind to each other, locked inside their individual psyches. Smith's time does not

progress along a line, but forms an environment: a swirl that returns, revisits, and reconnects.

Metafiction: "You. Yes, you. It's you I'm talking to."

By giving all the chapters names of grammatical tenses, Smith adds a linguistic layer onto the human experience that they contain. Ecocritical theory values metafictionality for precisely that reason: "Just as the natural world is foregrounded as a participant capable of generating meaning rather than being relegated to mere setting, human language is also foregrounded as a process in itself rather than a mere vehicle for transporting thought or meaning" (Cantrell 2003: 43). Foregrounding the text calls attention to the medium through which nature is portrayed/distorted—it itself is "mute," so language cannot "transparently" render it; representation of the environment is always mediated by language (Kern 2003: 27).

I am interested in another ecological aspect of Smith's use of self-referentiality, namely in how her metafictional references make us aware of the space outside of the fictional world. A text that calls attention to the outside context encourages an ecologically sound practice of looking outside of one's individual reality to other beings and their worlds; it promotes an ethics of symbiotic respect and consideration. Of all Smith's techniques I have discussed, metafictionality extends the novel's space to that effect most powerfully.

Smith calls attention to the space between the text and the reader by addressing the reader and making references to the story/the book and the process of their creation. She does this most obviously in the last chapter, where the authorial narrator comments: "Anywhere up or down the country, any town (for neatness' sake let's say the town where the heft and the scant of this book have been so tenuously anchored) the ghost of Dusty Springfield ... soars" (Smith 2001: 229). This short comment identifies the text as a physical "book," an object necessarily surrounded by an environment, showing an awareness of a world outside of itself. Moreover, the narrator is aware that this world is inhabited by a person who is called on to get engaged and involved: the reader.

As early as halfway through the first chapter, the ghost narrator suddenly speaks to an unidentified "you": "You could put ground in your mouth, couldn't you? You, yes, you" (2001: 26). With this sudden, surprising address, she reaches out from the book into our "world." The narrator progresses by identifying a string of subjects as "you": the

sparrows, the sky telling each one, "Remember you must live. Remember you most love. Remainder you mist leaf" (2001: 30). The chapter ends with another request: "Time me, would you? You. Yes, you. It's you I'm talking to" (2001: 31). The address is especially poignant considering that it is heard by the reader as well as Clare, who, four chapters later, takes it upon herself to time her sister's fall. Using the same pronoun and extending the same challenge, Smith unites the characters with each other and the reader, challenging the ethos of isolation.

Lise's chapter is the next place where most of the direct metafictional comments occur. She is not well, hence unable to "act," to make things "happen," and action is necessary for the narrative:

> Unwell: the opposite of well. It ought to be a place where things levelled out, a place of space, of no apparent narrative. Nothing could be possible there. Nothing could happen there, for a while. Instead Lise, lying unmoving in bed, knew; it was as if she had been upended over the wall of a well like that one in the last paragraph and had been falling in the same monotonous nothing for weeks. (2001: 84)

Smith is playing with the word "well," using it as both an adverb and a noun. The fall into a "well" as the noun can only be metaphorical for Lise, signifying her depressed state, but for the reader it brings back Sara's physical fall down the hotel's well. The narrator's play with language underscores the commonality between Lise and Sara in yet another way. Another conspicuous phrase in this passage is the reference to "the last paragraph," a writing term that calls attention to our act of reading. Destroying the illusion that we are inside a closed fictional world, Smith's narrator is again showing an awareness of the book as a physical object: not a world enclosed in itself, but a part of the larger space that includes the reader.

A similar effect is brought about through other self-referential techniques. The narrator manipulates time in Lise's chapter, taking us forward and backward from the narrative "present": "In six months' time, Lise will be incapable of walking across a room with brisk purpose" (2001: 107), breaking the illusion that, unlike a traditional narrator, she knows nothing outside of the reality she is speaking. To the same effect, she directly addresses the reader: "Imagine her heart, leaping. Imagine her mind, sluiced wide" (2001: 101). The title of Deidre's "new epic poem, to be called 'Hotel World'" (2001: 93) is also not a coincidence. Smith periodically pulls the reader engrossed in the book out of the

story's world. By conspicuously foregrounding the text and the writer/narrator aware of it as an object being created in a larger context, Smith challenges the traditional mimetic hermeneutic, and situates her story as a part of a larger ecological space that includes multiple entities in relationship.

Conclusion

As she herself has stated, Ali Smith's narrative ethics is that of responsibility: "All the people in the novel except for the dead girl are in flux, in a potential space, and all are damming themselves—sometimes for safety, sometimes because there's no option—into a less potential space. Language is being: We are the words we use" (Jernigan 2004).

Smith's novel encourages ecological consciousness on many levels of the text. She features the nonhuman with microcosmic particularity, in a close relationship with the human. She challenges the concept of isolated identity and its separation from its environment, and adds a communal ecological dimension to the polyphonic narrative project. Although the main characters feel alone and fail to reach out to each other, they are connected through a set of formal elements and drawn together in the larger environment of the book. The smallest elements of the fictional world are active agents tying characters together to reveal this symbiotic ecosystem.

Through metafictional comments about language, storytelling, and the text, Smith extends the novel's space to its readers. Addressed directly by various narrators, the reader is drawn in to work with them, and constantly encouraged to look for relationships and commonalities beyond the isolated contexts of individual chapters. The novel promotes the ethics of relatedness by encouraging an awareness of a larger environment and looking outside of the immediate experience to the wider context.

8
Getting Close: The Ecopoetics of Intimacy in Ali Smith's *Like*

Describing the work of Ali Smith, Jeanette Winterson states:

> she sets high standards. "Do you come to art to be comforted, or do you come to art to be re-skinned?" Re-skinning is not a popular pastime. Few of us want to be flayed from our ease. In *Hotel World*, Ali Smith went for the big themes, love and death, and made us confront them differently. "The big themes are never finished. You begin again for each generation." Her particular beginning again is, of course, the voice, authentically hers, and a refusal of sentimentality at a time when we are drowning in the stuff. From adverts to happy endings, we risk losing tough emotion—call it real feeling. Soap operas and reality TV, popular novels and trendy politics depend on the sentimental gene. Smith's genius is an antidote to this. She pushes us into a situation and gives us no way out. Her work is cathartic because it is painful in the proper sense. Our feelings are engaged, measured, challenged, and released. This is what art is supposed to do, and still does, far away from phoney violence or bathos. (www. jeanettewinterson.com)

Winterson touches on the particular impact of Smith's prose, where we confront "real feeling" and "tough emotion" as opposed to the easy sentimentality so prevalent in popular media. Smith's often formally difficult prose challenges us to adapt to uncomfortable reading "conditions." Her term "re-skinning" captures both the discomfort and the cathartic impact of such writing on its readers. In her *Encompass Culture* interview, Smith speaks about the moving, "tectonic plate"

effect she aims for in her prose. She identifies the value of experiment as nothing less than life changing:

> a direct 'reflection' of … [experienced reality] can't illuminate as much for the shell-shocked, information-shocked generations we belong to as painstaking artifice can. It's a time for Greek tragedies, is what I sense—a shift back to the tectonic plate-quality that story has, in whatever form it is delivered (novels and stories can both do it, in their different ways), to move us at foundation and remind us how to live and understand what we experience, individually and en masse. (2007, enCompass Culture.mht)

In talking to Jeanette Winterson about films, Smith states: "most are too easy, and most of what we watch—and we watch things all the time—is too easy. That makes us expect simple solutions, closure, a beginning, middle and an end. It doesn't fit us for experiment or risk" (Jeanettewinterson.com/Ali Smith). Smith thus finds the true, transformative value in risk-taking, in the discomfort of relinquishing old reading habits and opening up to new possibilities. Like Winterson's, her work challenges us to tackle texts that resist immediate gratification and demand active and creative processing, where definite solutions are preempted by uncertainty and ambiguity. This chapter examines Smith's novel *Like* as a text that precipitates such a re-skinning process in the reader.

Challenging experimental narrative and living ecology share the qualities of fundamental unrest: "If anything, life is catastrophic, monstrous, nonholistic, and dislocated, not organic, coherent, or authoritative. Queering ecological criticism will involve engaging with these qualities" (Morton 2010a: 277). Even put in these most general terms, experimental narrative models all life in its diverse, unstable "chaos." Furthermore, in language, narrative, and life alike, the quality of unpredictability is accompanied by the fact of relationship: nothing can exist as separate; everything is defined as itself by virtue of its difference from a form next to it. As Timothy Morton argues, the most ecologically viable relationship is that of intimacy with the unknown, with the "strange stranger":

> The ecological thought thinks big and joins the dots. It thinks through the mesh of life forms as far out as it can. It comes as close as possible to the strange stranger, generating care and concern for

> beings, no matter how uncertain we are of their identity, no matter how afraid we are of their existence. (2007: 19)

This chapter argues that reading *Like* is a lesson in such progressive ecology: in how to pursue a relationship of intimacy with something/someone we do not fully understand. Normally, the response to a text that does not "make full sense" on first reading is one of distance, separation, and judgment that lead to objectification and often rejection. But *Like* provokes a different reaction in the reader. The text compels us to reread it, to approach it again, to become more and more intimate with it. Eventually, we come face to face with the fact that no matter how many times we scour the novel for details and hints, we will never know "the whole story." We realize that it has been left up to us to construct and imagine what might have happened. This is where we relinquish the comfort of being handed one authoritative version and become open to the excitement of all the possible scenarios. In Smith's terms, we shed the old skin of distanced consumers and don that of involved, creative participants. Last, but not least, our movement closer and closer to the text models the movement of language in general towards finding a match for experience: the deep theme of the novel. Ash, Amy, and the readers discover that we can only attempt to come close to describing a thing, and only do so by relating it to another. We thus arrive at an understanding of the world as a web of related, unique entities whom we cannot fully know. We acknowledge the gaps that we can only *attempt* to fill. By making these very gaps the site of attention, excitement, and celebration, Smith's novel voices a tribute to the ultimately indescribable uniqueness and diversity of the world.

"Ruining it" or An Invitation to Come Closer: Chronology, Point of View, Gaps, and No Ending

When Kate adds a classic, clichéd, "They all lived happily ever after" ending to one of Amy's stories, Amy responds: "Maybe. Who knows? … All the best stories end like that. … In the middle like that, like all true stories" (Smith 1997: 147). The idea is brought up again by Ash, defending the nondefinite ending of her movie to a neighbor:

> and then what happens? Melanie said. Nothing, that's the end, I said. That's the end? She just writes the things and that's the end?

> But what *happens* about the things she writes? Do you not get to find out if they are true? Well, no, I said, that's the catch, you don't. That's mad, Melanie said. That's so crap. She kicked at a stone in the grass. That's like ruining it, not showing you what happens, she said. (1997: 279)

Melanie and Kate represent the initial sentiments of the novel's readers, who expect a linear unfolding of events and information about the characters. The fact that true stories do not have a clear ending is no convincing argument. As far as an average reader is concerned, the fact that real life may be this way is all the more reason for fiction to make up for it, to provide a full and satisfying dose of meaning. That is what we have paid for, and that is what we expect. But with *Like*, we get something else.

The novel consists of two main parts bearing the names of the two women protagonists. Amy's section starts the novel and is the one that generates most unanswered questions. To make things more difficult, Amy's section is set forward in time, and chronologically follows Ash's, although we do not have that reference point at the time of our (first) reading. Amy's section is set in Scotland, where she lives with her daughter Kate. Kate is 8 years old, and her insights are useful to illuminate Amy's character, since the narration is kept in the third person, limiting our access to Amy's thoughts. Amy's section is set in the present, yet we do not get flashbacks into pertinent moments of the past as one would expect, flashbacks that would normally provide the missing facts about the character's history and relationships. Instead, Amy's section comprises a trip to her parents, which gives some information about Amy's family past and current relationships, and a trip to Vesuvius and Pompeii with the symbolic presence of ashes. Amy's emotions do not often surface through the third-person narrative for most of her section, with the exception of her conversation with a newspaper reporter who calls her looking for her friend Aisling McCarthy. Amy's intense reactions to the reporter's questions about their relationship provide some hints about its importance in Amy's life. Amy's part of the novel ends with the burning of the diary volumes (another highly ashy circumstance) and an open ending, suggesting that Amy and Kate will be staying in Scotland for a while.

In contrast, Ash's section (a nickname for Aisling) is narrated in the first person with considerable emotional honesty and exuberance. Ash's story gives the background information to the women's relationship in flashbacks, and explains some of the allusions to Ash made

throughout Amy's section. Staying briefly at her father's house, Ash is haunted by her memories, and decides to write the story down to get "rid of it" (1997: 158). The diary passages are interspersed with the present moment, comprising Ash's observations before her departure for America, as well as her complicated interactions with her father. Since the diary is dated April 1987, we realize that Ash is writing over ten months before Kate's birth, which makes it nine years before Amy's part of the novel starts. The diary is an intimate account of Ash's childhood in a small Scottish town, including her first love affair with a woman and her friendship with Amy, which on Ash's part progressed into a deep, unreciprocated attraction during Amy's college years. Ash retells the development of their relationship from the point of view of a 26-year-old, aware of all the omissions and distortions that a single subjectivity carries.

Reading Ash's section is an intense experience, since we are constantly on the lookout for information to fill the gaps that Amy's section left in our mind. Especially exasperating is no mention of Kate in Ash's section. Despite registering the time difference, we are still hoping to find a clue to how Kate came about, since this is all we have of Ash's story. We feel that we might be missing some vital piece of information that does explain Kate's birth and her being with Amy. Ash ends her narrative with the anticlimactic action of simply going downstairs to check whether her father had caught anything fishing: "I'll maybe just go down and see" (1997: 343). This is especially unsatisfying to readers, for whom these are the last words of the book.

We realize that we have no other recourse but to go back to Amy's section in the hope of digging up some previously missed hints of what had happened after Ash left her father's house. The reporter who calls Amy mentions that Ash might have had a child and might be in California, where "she is living with its father" (1997: 133). This is the only place in the novel where anyone but Amy implies that Ash has had a child, which supports the possibility of Ash being Kate's mother. But the reporter does not know the gender of the child, and the clue does not take us far. The idea of Ash settling down with a man in America expands rather than narrows the options for the plausible turn of events. We realize that the reporter has even less information than we do. The only logical source of information about what happened in the nine years "between" the stories is Amy's section, which we are compelled to reread over and over. Disappointingly, if we don't consider some vague allusions, Amy's section practically ignores the

past leading up to it.[1] Amy's account does not provide the expected clarification; what is more, it makes almost no direct references to the women's relationship. Amy is, fittingly, as silent about what Ash means to her as she was to Ash at the time of their relationship—as Ash remembers it.

In addition to fragmented chronology, it is clear that Smith uses point of view as another main obfuscating device of the novel. The third-person perspective of the initial section distances the reader from Amy and makes her only accessible through her actions, spoken words, and the few thoughts expressed in free indirect discourse, from which we are left to deduce her feelings. Our view of Amy is predominantly from the outside, as if watching a character in a drama. A good example is the scene of Angus firing Amy after their return from Scotland. When Angus leaves the office, having told her to find another place to live, we stay with Amy and merely watch her gestures and actions: "Amy sighs. She shuts her eyes and opens them, shakes her head. She sits down, leafs through the meaningless letters and packets. She rests her foot on the box, on the floor under the table. It is just the right height" (1997: 127). This outside perspective forces the reader to do more mind and action reading work. Instead of her actual thoughts, the physical way Amy interacts with the surrounding world will have to suffice as our only insight into her mind. Her physical gestures hint at her confusion and bewilderment, and an appreciation of any supportive thing at the time when the ground has been dislodged from under her feet. While it might not be difficult to imagine the state of mind of someone in this situation, the objective description in this case is all we have. In addition, the outside point of view also functions to underscore Amy's particular emotional withdrawal. Throughout the novel, Amy is not one to express her feelings outwardly, and Smith's choice of point of view keeps them safely "bottled" inside most of the time.[2] Control of point of view is another effective technique to keep the reader hunting for the slightest clues about the missing information.

We only know a few deeply personal things about Amy. One is that she loves Kate like a mother, even though she says that Kate was not "born" but "found" (1997: 53). Kate's origins are one of the events shrouded in mystery. Another such mystery are Amy's feelings for Ash; fittingly so, since we know from Ash's account that she had never revealed them, possibly because of being in denial about them herself. In the beginning scene at the train station, Amy stands at the very edge of the platform and "rocks on her heels, testing herself"

(1997: 4). She pretends that she has dropped something only "just in case someone recognizes her," and "for Kate's sake" (1997: 4). From this we realize that Amy has a traumatic past, which must be part of the reason she is contemplating throwing herself under a train. She ends the moment with "She mustn't be late for Kate. This has got to stop," confirming our suspicion that "this" means suicidal thoughts (1997: 4). This scene is another good example of how Amy's character is revealed, and how what seems to be vital information about the character is only hinted at, to most readers' frustration. The issue of Amy flirting with ending her life never surfaces again, and we must hypothesize about possible reasons for her fragile state, the same being true about the circumstances surrounding her loss of reading skills that she is only now recovering.

To our temporary relief, Ash's first-person narrative provides the luxury of consistent access to the character's thoughts. But Ash's section is also unreliable, precisely because it is subjective and remembered, undermining the hard-fact, what-really-happened credibility for which we are desperate after the mysterious first half of the novel. Ash herself discounts her diary (she calls it a "liary"; 1997: 169) memories as an "obsession," "adolescent luxury," and "self-torture" (1997: 326), and throws into doubt the accuracy and completeness of her account: "Making the shape up, like it's just a story, like it didn't even have to have happened. Random, meaningless, the things you're left with surfacing inside your head like driftwood jolting on to the surface of the water" (1997: 169). Ash's section answers many questions about who she is and how she is connected to Amy, but does not help us with reconstructing the events in the time gap between the two halves of the book.

Smith's manipulation of point of view, which defines the character's relationship to the reader and the story, is a big part of her plan to entice readers with unanswered questions. While Amy participates in the events around her, we get very little access to her mind and are frequently left with many logical gaps about Amy's life. Ash's account, although given from the position of the teller, also contains a great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity, which contribute to the reader's continued confused bewilderment.

Technically, the challenge of reading *Like* is logically coalescing the two main parts of the novel. Smith uproots our expectations about chronology and point of view, causing the reader's confusion and discomfort. The questions urgently needing answers are: Is Kate Ash's daughter? When and why did Ash decide to have a child? Did Ash

contact Amy about adopting Kate? How did Amy find Kate? How did she know where to look? Why did Amy stop being able to read?

In search of our answers, we are compelled to move from one section to the other, inching deeper and deeper into the text. We realize that the information we are normally used to being handed down has to be actively sought. Since merely tracing the plot sequence is not enough, we must now start paying heightened attention to other elements of the text. We analyze Smith's use of significant repetition, understatement, double entendre, and story within a story to hint at crucial information and to entice us to read closer. Instead of plot milestones and climaxes, now the smallest moments, often separate sentences, phrases, or even single words, start to carry symbolic significance. We hope that these subtler, more intimate strategies will become our keys to the text.

Significant Repetition/Recurrence: Following Clues

Smith places several "communicative" bridges over the chronological gap between the two parts of the novel. Significant repetitions are one of these connecting structural strategies. Whenever we encounter an element that we seem to remember from the previous section, it becomes an anchor that we use to pin down the "certain" and the "known." We feel that we have found a piece that gets us closer to the "whole story." One of these significant recurrences is connected with Kate's brief reading of Ash's diary, specifically the mention of the morning deer sighting by two girls (1997: 140). Kate mentions that she likes the passage, which we ourselves only come to read in full in Ash's section, when Ash describes Donna waking up and scaring the deer away by her sneezing (1997: 211). This recurrence confirms that there is coherence to be found between the two parts of the novel, and that we should stay alert to such significant detail.

Similarly, Amy remembers the trip to the T.S. Eliot–related site when she and Ash spent the night outside—the event later described by Ash at the end of her diary as one of the quintessential and happiest moments of their relationship, as far as she was concerned. These are the moments when readers' ears prick up with excitement at the story making sense, following the rules we were expecting. We feel satisfaction that we have retrieved the clue placed for us, encouraged that we have come a step closer to putting the pieces together. But importantly, at the same time, the fact that Amy remembers the moment differently from Ash is striking. It actually underscores

another aspect of the environmentalist poetics of Smith's narrative. Even as Ash and Amy sit leaning against each other, we discover that there is significant space between them due to inherent differences between their subjective points of view. Another example of this kind is Ash's fainting in front of Amy's room (1997: 231), which Amy denies in her conversation with the reporter, because as far as she knows or remembers it did not happen (1997: 132). Smith uses such recurrences to tie the two stories together while at the same time reflecting the difference between the two protagonists, and between individual points of view in general. This method is another way to flesh out the philosophy of environmental intimacy that I argue the book promotes, as it models closeness and individuality at the same time.

The largest "bridge" between the book's two sections is the physical environment within it; significantly, the geographical place as well as smaller elements of the physical world permeate and cross over from one main section to the other, in defiance of the overt separation between Ash and Amy's chapters. Since Amy and Ash are identified, respectively, with England and Scotland by upbringing and accent, to name just the two, their chosen location signifies their emotional placement in reference to each other. England and Scotland, between which the two characters travel, amplify their personal journeys.[3] Ash starts in Scotland and moves to England to join Amy at college, finally visiting Scotland briefly on her way away from both. Her imminent departure overseas conveys her desire to "rid" herself of her memories of Amy. Amy starts in England, briefly visits Ash, and moves back to England, finally moving to Scotland, where she seems to intend to stay. She even feels homesick for Scotland after her trip to Italy (1997: 125). Amy's making Scotland a home shows her emotional movement towards Ash perhaps more than anything else in the novel. Significantly, both characters inhabit the same places at different times, which symbolizes their emotional disconnect. (The most extreme example here is Ash's visit to Amy's rooms in Amy's absence to set them on fire.) Physical and geographical location simultaneously symbolizes their journey towards each other and the rift between them when they keep missing each other. We can rely on Smith to configure the outside space to reflect their emotional relationship.

Significant recurrences of the smaller elements of the physical environment also function to connect the two stories. Amy's room at her mother's house is home both to her own diaries and to Ash's volume.

The diaries cross the boundary between the sections; they follow Amy up from Ash's house to Amy's parents, back to Amy in Scotland. The diaries' migration is foreseen by Ash at the end of her writing:

> So, soon, I will close this book. Goodbye. Maybe I'll put it in a box with the other diaries. That'll be good; they'd breed, some sort of hybrid loping guttural creature that's terribly polite, roaming the countries of the world hopelessly looking up for where it belongs or looking for someone to rub up against, someone to listen to its story. On second thoughts maybe it'd be better to burn it. (1997: 327)

As we already know, Ash's diary does find someone "to rub against" in Kate: it connects Kate to Ash, and reveals their shared sensibility when Kate, who is rather bored with Amy's diaries, appreciates the language of Ash's book: "she … read a good thing about some friends who go camping … the writing said that the deer were like birds when they ran away like that, that is a funny thing to say, like a poem … that is a good idea, that is what birds can do" (1997: 140). In the final act of burning the diaries, which is itself symbolic since they were "the cause of the two women's estrangement" (Rodriguez Gonzalez 2008: 108), Amy fulfills another of Ash's wishes expressed at the end of her section (Smith 1997: 327). The final burning of the diaries is foreshadowed by Kate's multiple associations with fire, such as her being covered with ash (1997: 151) and her relishing the burning of a box of matches (1997: 94). Fire and ash are obvious elements connecting Kate to Ash, in name and in her act of burning Amy's rooms.

The recurrent objects and motifs function to reward the reader and to motivate him/her to engage in a yet closer reading. All the significant recurrences also suggest that the rift between the two parts of the novel is "unnatural," and that the intrinsic pull is towards their unification, as illustrated by the physical world that permeates and unites both main sections. The book embodies the ecological tenet that a radical, complete separation of two individuals is ecologically impossible, since they exist in a shared space that encompasses any boundary erected between them.

Understatement and Ambiguity as Reader-Engagement Strategies

One of the most enticing sources of mystery for the reader are multiple intimations made by Amy that she is not Kate's biological mother.

Smith uses meaningful ambiguity and innuendoes to intimate Kate's connection to Ash. For example, when Kate stands next to a fire, Amy describes her as: "Ash all over her. Her face, her hair, her mouth, her eyes" (Smith 1997: 151). She may be referring to either the physical ashen residue from the fire, or Kate's resemblance to Ash. At another time, looking at a photograph, Amy says ambiguously "It's a photo of your mother and her friend," which points to either Amy or Ash as Kate's mother and perpetuates the reader's uncertainty (1997: 81). Furthermore, Amy also lets Kate call her by her first name, and introduces her mother to Kate as "my mother," not as "your grandmother" (1997: 60).

Amy states that "Kate's birth was never recorded" (1997: 74), even though Kate herself knows her exact date of birth: "I was born on twentieth February 1988" (1997: 90). Amy talks about Kate not being "born" but "found" (1997: 53). Statements like these open up a possibility that Kate is indeed Ash's daughter. The reader is invited to speculate that since Ash ends her diary nine months before Kate's birth, she could possibly have got pregnant in the United States where she was headed, and then come back and written Amy to tell her where the child was, for Amy to "take" her: "Say you took a child. Say you just took a child. Go on. Say it" (1997: 95). There is no mention of Amy's communication with Ash about the child. However, Amy's insistence to relay Kate's age to the reporter is significant: "I live here with Kathleen who is now nearly eight. Did you get that?" (1997: 133). Is the interjection of "now" suggesting that Ash knew Kate earlier? Does Amy want to stress the girl's having grown, and is she implying that she had taken good care of her? The reader is wondering why else Amy would emphasize that Kate is with her to the strange reporter?

Another area where Smith's understatements entice the reader's imagination with possible interpretations is Amy's current feelings about Ash. We are desperate to know whether Amy is more receptive to Ash after the time that has passed, if she has any regrets, and if she is interested in reconnecting with her. We have to rely on the slightest clues she drops that might point to her feelings. For example, her explanation of her diaries to Kate offers some hints: "they're like when you draw something or write it for the first time and it's not what you wanted, so you throw it away and start all over again" (1997: 151). She could be talking about the diaries or her life and how she intends to live it anew. Does she mean remaking her relationship with Ash as well?

In the conversation with the reporter, Amy's reactions are the most revealing of her chapter. When she hears the first mention of Ash's

name, she feels an electric charge: "the woman's … voice … thin and sharp and distorted by lines of electricity, lines of power which suddenly pierces Amy so that it is as if her whole body jolts" (1997: 130–31). Amy is taken over by a sudden surge of memories and cannot distinguish whether she is speaking out loud or merely thinking to herself. The memories are pouring out uncontrollably as if a dam has been opened. Smith's description of Amy's strong reaction is feeding the reader's speculations about Amy and Ash reuniting. Interestingly, Amy and the reader share the same position of uncertainty, wondering "[do] You know where she is?" (1997: 131) and "are those all the stories there are about where she might be?" (1997: 133). The presence of a character who shares our questions is another source of engagement to the reader.

Allegory functions as a particular form of understatement that Smith uses in Amy's section, providing insights into what Ash means to Amy. Smith tantalizes the reader into speculating about Amy's possibly changed feelings for Ash. Instead of direct expression, Smith has Amy speaking in parables: the stories she tells Kate. In the story about the girl and the fish we register the girl's underlying regret about not "keeping the first one" (1997: 83): "she rolled the wet thread round her finger, tied it in a knot, and swore on the knot that she would search her whole life, if it took that long, until she found the one she'd caught again" (1997: 83). The girl, like Amy, has realized the value of what she has lost, and is determined to seek it out, aware that no other "fish" will do. Interestingly, Amy evades Kate's request for a story about the photo of herself and Ash by the statue, and tells the fish story instead, which suggests that the latter is an allegorical interpretation of the perhaps too personal account related to the photo. When Kate protests "What about the photo? It wasn't the story I was wanting," Amy answers "Well it's the only story you are going to get" (1997: 83). She may be suggesting to Kate and to the reader that we *are* getting the story about the girls in the photo, in allegory form. Similarly, the story about girls living on the opposite sides of the mountain, which they level out by hurling stones at each other, can be read as an allegory of Amy's tumultuous friendship with Ash. The two have been in conflict over something that may have once been insurmountable, but with time has turned quite insubstantial, not unlike the mountain that was dismantled by the girls. The sun and the moon over which the girls quarrel symbolize their different points of view, which are discovered to be equally valid. We cannot help but think of Amy's conflict with Ash, both women "right" in their reasons for harboring resentment. Again, we are tempted into thinking

that Amy has reevaluated her conflict with Ash, and is interested in rediscovering her friend without old prejudices.

Amy's section features several such "stories" that she tells Kate. It is obvious that Kate is used to them, adept at listening to them, and that, like the reader, she is a consumer and connoisseur of the stories she hears. We see this in her often impatient questioning, and in her awareness of the rules that must have governed Amy's storytelling in the past (like being given choices, and limitations on what story she can or cannot have). Also like the reader, Kate has specific demands and complains if the story does not meet her needs. Again, as when she protests about an unsatisfying ending, the reader shares Kate's sentiments, and is "instructed" by the text to learn to live with this particular kind of dissatisfaction.

Through dropping hints and clues for which we desperately want explanations, Smith sends us on a quest to know the characters and their story. The novel has the reader ensnared into the quest for answers. In our desire to know what happened in the story, we come closer and closer to the characters and the text, and have an unquenched (and ultimately unquenchable) thirst to know everything there is to know about them. Centrally, the reading process of the book is spiral, always encouraging a next reading. Instead of objectifying the not quite fully transparent text and alienating ourselves from it, we seek to get closer to it on each reading. It is a model of the ideal ecological relationship of intimacy with the coexistent beings, whom Timothy Morton names "strange strangers," since we cannot fully know or understand them. Smith's brilliant strategy of leaving information gaps to encourage a search for clues propels us to intimacy, outlining a model of relationship to the unknown "strangers." She encourages us to get more and more intimate with what we do not fully understand.

Smith's fictional form builds intimacy between the text and the reader, and the characters and the reader. She places gaps in the story that demand filling, provides pieces of information but withholds vital information, drops allusions and understatements, makes characters speak in parables (Amy's storytelling)—all to send the readers on the trail like bloodhounds. The master touch is that while answers to some questions can be found, some remain forever missing, and we as readers are motivated with each find to keep searching, getting perpetually more and more intimate with the text, unaware that some of the information we are seeking is not there to be found. The story remains mysterious, not entirely knowable, but with each reading

that reveals more we get closer to the text, and discover/imagine more connections.

After a few (if we are patient) rereadings, we realize that we did not miss anything: the numerous hints are not definite and only suggest possible interpretations.[4] The answers are simply not there. The nine-year chronological gap between the stories becomes the place of potential, one we realize we ourselves have to fill with a plausible version of events—or one that we would simply most *like* to see. Finally, our initial confusion gives way to the excitement and challenge of putting the two stories together. There is no right version to be found; there is only our version to be made up. Thinking about what might have happened is addictive: long after we put down the book, our brain keeps churning over possible scenarios. Our reading situation resembles looking at a pool of genes in various combinations to create different life forms. Smith has found a way for the characters to stay with us and to make them, perhaps obsessively, a part of our life and world with no ending that we live past, just infinite possibilities.

Intimacy of Chapters: Intimacy of Strangers

The circular/spiral reading process that the novel encourages captures a movement to intimacy of strangers on yet another level: of the two protagonists, once friends, now strangers, towards each other. The two parts of the novel are set up as determinately separate, the form upholding the characters' estrangement. Initially, the two sections appear to be marked mainly by difference. They differ in narrative perspective, timeframes, in having almost no mention of Ash in Amy's section as opposed to the (albeit negative) prominence of Amy in Ash's. This divided structure reflects the emotional separation between the characters as far as they themselves conceive of each other. However, in our increasing attention to the text, we as readers start to see beyond these surface markers of strangeness. As in Winterson's *The Powerbook*, we discover built-in, subterraneous connections beneath the obvious differences. In the extended environment of the novel, and through the reader's intimate interaction with the text, the two characters also become intimate.

The closer readings reveal how much the two women share. We come to notice that they express similar views on certain topics, such as the artificiality of any formal "ending" (1997: 147, 279) and the distance between language and reality (1997: 269, 335). Independently,

they conjure up the same memory of their time together: the summer night spent at the T.S. Eliot site.

More profoundly, both are emotionally tough and avoid easy sentimentality. We witness them struggle in a relationship with a "stranger," not only in each other, but in their own sexual otherness. As Amy is revisiting her feelings about Ash, she must also come to terms with a part of her that she has denied all her life: her same-sex desire and the love for Ash that she had been suppressing. The journey towards Ash that we witness in her section is simultaneously Amy's journey through her homophobia towards the strange lesbian self that she slowly embraces. Through writing out her diary, Ash is also becoming intimate with the part of herself that she has not shown to anyone.

Smith uses suggestive imagery to indicate Amy's emotional state in her journey towards Ash. As we learn to distill Amy's feelings out of her outward actions, and get closer and closer to the text, we see Amy become emotionally closer to Ash. Amy's emotions are rendered indirectly through formal means: the characters are separated by fractured, unsimultaneous timelines and different locations, and have not communicated with each other since the fire eight years before. In Smith's emotionally austere, ascetic narrative, the platitude of "less is more" comes true. We learn to look for the smallest signs, passing thoughts about the past, subtle softenings and changes in her rigidity, all showing Amy's growth towards acceptance of her love for Ash.

We witness no sex between the women (which Ash says we expect), but instead see an intimacy between them that reaches deeper. Amy is haunted by Ash in places and people, including her own mother. Amy refers to Scotland as "home" and has obvious traumatic feelings as she visits the house of her parents, which was her childhood home, the place that formed many of the attitudes that made her renounce the importance of Ash in her life. We see that Amy is trying to reconnect with Ash through going back to the country of Ash's childhood, where they first met. When we leave her, she seems to be consciously searching for her there: "She could be anywhere. … Anywhere in the world. Any minute now" (1997: 136). Amy's reaction to the phone call about Ash is as significant in Smith's cryptic narrative as physically making love to her would be, and possibly speaks louder, since it is objective and not influenced by Ash's actual presence. We trace the two characters' approach the stranger inside them, and, ultimately, become emotionally close without ever communicating

or reconnecting in person inside the fictional world. Our presence outside the two main parts of the text is a prerequisite for that intimacy taking place; in fact, the extended space that the presence of the reader creates is the only space in which the characters' present intimacy becomes real.

The harder we have to work at piecing the characters' emotions together, the closer we feel to them in their emotional journey. Regardless of our own sexuality, we identify with the theme of unrequited love, and with the struggle with otherness, of whatever kind, present within the self. There is a correlation between the challenge of fragmentation and the depth of achieved textual intimacy, counter to the popular belief that difficult form distances readers. In Smith's novel the difficult form paradoxically serves to bring readers in.

Like promotes an environmentalist awareness because it requires opening of the book to its outside environment where the space between the two stories is traversed in the particular reading process that Smith's novel invites. As we move from one section to the other and back in the hope of finding more answers, the two parts, so poignantly separate, become dependent on each other. We are always thinking about the other one as we are reading, trying to impose one chapter on the other to restructure the timeline and the events. We overcome the existing physical sequential order of the two parts as we weave them together into a shared account.

In the wider space that includes the reader, the two named, eponymous parts reveal individuals related and interacting, no longer locked into their personal chapter spaces. Ash and Amy, seemingly separate and enclosed in their sections, move closer and closer together by means of our insistent rereading. We effectively overlay one character/chapter over the other, Amy over Ash, in a textual love-making of sorts.

Close but Never There: Metafiction

We have seen Smith position Kate and Melanie as surrogates for the reader and for our response to the lack of story/plot closure. Amy speaks for the value of ambiguity and uncertainty as more lifelike: when she tells Kate that true stories end in the middle, she describes and defends the form of the novel we are reading (Smith 1997: 147). Both Amy and Ash make statements referring to the reading/writing process, explaining the challenges for the author and the expectations of the audience. For example, Ash anticipates that we have been waiting

for the sex scene and imagines a love-making scene between her and Amy, knowing that the audience will appreciate it: "It's the sex scene. … The crowd oohs and aahs" (1997: 298–9). But as soon as she gratifies the audience, she destroys the illusion: "NO. Of course not. That's not how it was" (1997: 301). Reality is different from what we see as a "good" plot. Smith, like Ash, shows awareness of what the average reader demands as a consumer, and thwarts that because consumerist attitudes have to give way to "how it happened" (1997: 301)—to more life-like reality. She ruins their illusion (the consumer product they have purchased) and makes them face the world similar to their everyday reality, where gratifying scenes do not often occur. Ash's "aside" comments point out the existence of a reality outside of the plot, and extend her world up to join ours.

Such metafictional comments are especially important for my argument about the creative role of the reader and its ecological implications, as they engage the issue of becoming intimate with the text despite its ultimate "unknowability." The title emphasizes the process of trying to get closer to what we mean: "It's like, like …" (1997: 342). Even though we will never find the exact word match for experience, we keep trying; the movement of language in general is for proximity, for coming closer. The whole novel is punctuated with the word "like," often used colloquially starting a fragmented sentence:

> Like the way a leaf opens, flattens itself out and you can trace the veins in it. Like holding a leaf in the palm of your hand. Like the brilliant color it is. Like the thirty seconds that it takes for an earthquake to kill thousands of people, or gas to leak out of a factory and poison and blind thousands of people. (1997: 331)

In this passage, as often in the novel, half of each attempted simile is missing, underscoring the inability to complete the likeness, certifying to the uniqueness of all leaves and, by extension, all experience. Ash tries to explain the ultimate inability to capture experience in language, always coming closer, but never really "getting near it":

> Like the time when. Like the time. Like. There was no stopping. All the way down the hill my head was full of the dried leaves I'd kicked into a mess. There was no stopping it and there was no getting near it. You say something is like something else, and all

> you've really said is that actually, because it's only like it, it's different. (1997: 335)

Interestingly, the relationship of language to experience captures the relationship and the individuality of coexistent beings. Morton explains the simultaneous ecological configuration of intimacy and difference:

> The ecological thought realizes that all beings are interconnected. This is the mesh. The ecological thought realizes that the boundaries between, and the identities of, beings are affected by this interconnection. This is the strange stranger. The ecological thought finds itself next to other beings, neither me nor not-me. These other beings exist, but they don't really exist. They are strange, all the way down. The more intimately we know them, the stranger they become. The ecological thought is intimacy with the strangeness of the stranger. (2010b: 94)

On many levels, *Like* foregrounds the process of trying to become intimate with what we know we cannot reach. It exposes the fact that relating the world is the same as relating *to* the world: naming requires relating experience to another thing in the world that is similar but not identical. The novel celebrates this process of intent striving to come closer to things in the world. It highlights connection, proximity, and the need to get as close as possible, but always stop at the ultimate uniqueness—the ultimate gap between the signifier and the signified, one being and another, not completely knowable. For Smith, failure to match language to experience is not a shortcoming, but a tribute to the infinite diversity of life. This is the deepest of the ecological messages that the novel relays.

Ash ponders the flawed nature of her recording, its incompleteness and omissions: "Instead [of a complete, reliable account] there's this blind obsession with something or someone; a decadence, … I've wallowed in it, swallowed it, rolled in its musk and my own, and I still haven't made sense of it" (Smith 1997: 326). She accepts that she has come so close to the experience as to "swallow it," and it still eludes her: "Well, good. I wouldn't want it to lose its impact completely for me. What would I do at nights without it?" (1997: 327). She concludes that the unknowability, the elusiveness, is necessary and essential. Ecologically speaking, physical proximity is not enough to obtain complete knowledge, which always escapes us. Becoming one with

a coexistent being does not mean that we know it; in fact, the space in between is essential to see the difference that makes each of us unique. Striving to come close but never "getting there" in language and in writing is the metaphor for the ecological intimacy of living with "strangers," of accepting the gap, the space, as an important part of the relationship.

Conclusion

Reading Ali Smith's first novel teaches intimacy with what we do not fully understand. Smith connects the two parts through a net of formal techniques and encourages the reader to piece the two characters' stories into a coherent whole. Our attitude changes from the consumerist desire for instant gratification to involved search and finally a realization that our curiosity will never be fully gratified. That acceptance does not bring the confusion and rejection that formally challenging texts often do, but rather a strong satisfaction, one arguably greater than that of having read a masterfully crafted traditional story with a definite ending. The remaining questions are the source of energy greater than finding all the answers. The story never ends—the book's space is opened up to let the characters enter our lives, their possible stories always alive and churning in our minds.

Morton's description of the ecological thought process captures the quality of our reading process of *Like* in ecological terms:

> The ecological thought hugely expands our ideas of space and time. It forces us to invent ways of being together that don't depend on self-interest. After all, other beings elicited the ecological thought: they summon it from us and force us to confront it. They compel us to imagine collectivity rather than community—groups formed by choice rather than by necessity. Strange strangers and hyperobjects goad us to greater levels of consciousness, which means more stress, more disappointment, less gratification (though perhaps more satisfaction), and more bewilderment. The ecological thought can be highly unpleasant. But once you have started to think it, you can't unthink it. We have started to think it. In the future, we will all be thinking the ecological thought. It's irresistible, like true love. (2010b: 135)

Morton identifies precisely the experiences through which we go as *Like*'s readers: the difference between easy gratification and real

satisfaction, the discomfort of the process in which we are compelled to engage, and the ultimate "bewilderment." Intimacy with the stranger is the only viable direction, its result the bewilderment and "re-skinning" into which Smith engages us. Her method emphasizes simultaneous affinity and individuality as an important reality of existence. The book's focus on the pursuit of relating experience, highlighting the gap between language and reality, is Smith's ultimate tribute to the diversity of life.

9

Stories That Change the World: Ali Smith's Ecological "Realityfiction"

In his essay "Ecocomposition and the Greening of Identity," Christian E. Weisser observes: "Our identities are always already ecological; we are who we are as a result of people, places, things, animals, and plants that have touched our lives. It is only for us to realize these connections and incorporate them into our discourse" (2001: 93). Like Jeanette Winterson's, Ali Smith's writing supports Linda Hutcheon's point about textual form existing in relationship to "real life" and readers' identities and choices: "A study of representation becomes not a study of mimetic mirroring or subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self" (Hutcheon 1989: 7).[1] Smith states emphatically: "Stories can change lives if we're not careful. They will come in and take the shirts off our backs. Tell the right stories and we live better lives" (France 2005).

My discussion of Smith's short fiction in this final chapter is informed by Harre, Brockmeier, and Muhlhauser's view of language as "the instrument through which we acquire knowledge about the environment and through which we acquire or change attitudes toward it" (quoted in Buell 2005: 45). Lawrence Buell captures the underlying agenda of my argument when he writes that "genres and texts are themselves arguably 'ecosystems,' not only in the narrow sense of the text as a 'discursive environment,' but also in the broader sense that texts 'help reproduce sociohistorical environments' in stylized form" (2005: 44). I argue here that Ali Smith's stories are such ecosystems both in the narrow and the broader sense, and that her prose can be termed "realityfiction" because she uses "rhetoric as a means of refiguring the world" (Buell 2005: 47).

If I were pressed to specify what Smith's stories were about, I would say relatedness, empathy, self-discovery. But I doubt Smith would

agree that "self" exists by itself, in isolation from "others." In trying to describe Smith's project, I am running into dichotomies and binaries long entrenched in our thinking: subject/object, form/content, reality/fiction, inside/outside. Smith exposes these binary categories as artificial and problematic. I will employ such terms to the extent that they are useful, but more integrated terms that heal rather than divide better convey her point: intersubject, realityfiction. Separately and together as a body of work, Smith's stories bridge binaries and build a model of a diverse, inclusive world governed by ecological principles of the connectedness of all things.

Anis Barwashi contends that "genres are rhetorical ecosystems that allow communicants to enact and reproduce various environments, social practices, relations, and identities" (2001: 71). He explains:

> As we move from one sociorhetorical environment to the next, we *shift genre boundaries*, which maintain and reproduce certain ways of perceiving a particular social activity, ways of relating to others and ways of lexigrammatically and rhetorically interacting with one another within an environment. The ways we use language to perform certain social actions and identities and to enact certain social relations and identities *change* as we adjust from one genre-constituted environment to the next. (2001: 75, my italics)

Barwashi supports this book's argument that all writing forms should be studied in respect to their environmental impact, and that genre/writing shapes environmental consciousness and ultimately the environment. All texts' form should therefore be seen as environmental, because there is an inherent connection between genre and environment: as we change genre, we change the world around it. In this light, the discussed texts' shifts in form/genre constitute a shift from a less ecocentric consciousness to a more ecocentric one. Viewed from this radical standpoint, all texts do this inherently, in either direction.

By revising the short-story form in her particular way, Smith both reflects and facilitates a shift in readers' view of the world and the environment: our need for a more ecologically conscious world necessitates new ways of telling stories, which, in turn, generate a response on the part of the reader, who revises his/her habitual behaviors. Fictional storytelling constitutes an important part of the cycle of causes and effects that eventually change the world. How we imagine the world, so it eventually becomes. Marylin Cooper argues: "It is not that a writer merely functions within a context, but that a writer participates in the

constitution of that context. Writing is both constituted by, and constitutive of, ever changing social contexts" (quoted in Weisser 2001: 70). As Barwashi concludes, "This is why writing is ecological" (2001: 70).

Smith's innovation to the short-story form includes experiments with narrative perspective (multiplicity, gender and sexual ambiguity), changes to linear plot (fragmented and inverted chronology, avoidance of completion or ending, suspense/mystery), emphasis on word choice (vivid detail, significant repetition, language play), and self-referentiality. Carefully configured together, these formal strategies render a rhetorical/ecological model of the world as a highly relational system, which includes the text and its environment.

The environmentalist content of these stories is evident in the comments and actions of their narrators and characters. Many of Smith's narrators express environmentalist concerns and are mindful of their footprint in the world. In "Text for the Day," the main character changes her habit of heating her bed up with a hairdryer "because of the global warming and the electricity bill" (Smith 1998: 20). In "God's Gift," the narrator thinks of "the waste products of humans atomizing instantly as they are shot out of thousands of airplanes into the sky" (Smith 1999: 4). The narrator of "The Child" buys organic apples, and her counterpart in "God's Gift" lifts a greenfly out of her tea to save its life. In "May," the boundary between human and nonhuman is questioned when a woman falls in love with a blossoming tree. The main character of "Text for the Day" "releases" books into the world, page by page, letting them become part of the environment. The books are described as literally becoming nature, driving home the point that the greatest human masterpieces are part of the natural world (Smith 1998: 30). Similarly, the distinction between human and nonhuman is symbolically blurred when a dining-room table is brought outside and becomes part of the garden, covered with vines and moss. The narrator comments that "it's the best thing that could happen to anything I ever imagined was mine" (Smith 1998: 207). "Nature" in Smith figures as a character, as itself, not merely as a setting or symbol. The animate and inanimate nonhuman others are involved in their own dramas and fateful events. These include ants and aphids that the narrator talks to in "Erosive," fleas with "miniscule eyelash hairs" (Smith 1999: 72) in "Small Deaths," a blossoming tree in "May," a fly with a "face striped velvet-silver" (Smith 2003: p4) and a life history in "The Universal Story," cut flowers with "eyeless open mouthed heads" (Smith 1999: 41) in "Blank Card," and a thrush hatchling whose parents voice a "panicked call for the loss" (Smith

1999: 5) in "God's Gift." Each of these beings is shown to possess a particular subjectivity rendered with a striking degree of detail, which elevates it in respect and importance from the traditionally insignificant place that it has occupied in mainstream culture. What we learn to recognize cumulatively as Smith's particular "voice" emerges as environmentalist through multiple narrative comments that evidence an ecologically conscious sensibility.

Because Smith demonstrates an environmentalist awareness in her subject matter, it is even more logical to seek an ecological agenda behind her form. This chapter locates these stories' ecological consciousness in the way their form works for the environmentalist cause. Smith's stories' rhetoric itself carries her message of interrelatedness: of humans to each other, of all living things to their environment, and of text to life. I discuss some of Smith's formal techniques and their significance in what I see as her stories' ecological project of healing divisions. I start with narrative perspective, then turn to gender and sexual ambiguity, and end with plot and self-referentiality.

"Always Another Story": The "Multilogue"

Because of their concise form, short stories are traditionally told from one narrative perspective, usually that of a participating character (first or third person) or an outside, often omniscient narrator. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Smith's stories, and one that she herself emphasizes most often, is their multivoicedness, which she terms a "multilogue." She speaks of

> the urge to tell a story in the several different voices that produce or provide it. For me there's no story without voice, no voice without story, and no single story that doesn't imply another one right next to it, or behind it, or in front of it—there's always another story. So when it comes to the novel, which is I think in many ways a more socially displaying form than the short story, by which I mean an art form that really lets us see how and where we live and who we live with, and the structures we live by, then the different voices, and a democracy of voice, if you like, are what make it for me. It's a take on novel-writing that some readers, who like their worlds to be more complete and hermetic and their stories to be more comforting, to take a less fragmented or multilogued direction, might find exasperating. It asks a reader to do quite a lot of work, and to participate. For me it's the thing that drives the novel form. (Encompassculture.com)

Even though she is talking about her novels here, the description fits her short stories' narrative project very aptly. Importantly, she defines her agenda behind the multivoicedness, which is the "democracy of voices" embedded in their environment. Like Woolf in *Jacob's Room* and *The Waves*, Smith emphasizes the simultaneous multiplicity and situatedness of the narrative point of view. Also like Woolf, she is aware of the challenges that the new forms impose on her readers, demanding their increased participation. I will return to the subject of reader involvement in this chapter's sections on plot and self-referentiality.

Most of Smith's stories are told from more than one character's perspective. As multiple and diverse as they are, and regardless of the conflicts they are in, these characters share a common humanness that is revealed through and because of their interaction with others (human and nonhuman), during which they process their feelings and discover themselves. Each one is part of his/her environment (human, natural, or constructed), which often (re)defines who s/he is and plays an active role in the story.

In discussing Smith's model of subjectivity, it is useful to bring in David Kennedy's definition of "intersubject": "an emergent form of subjectivity in our time which reconstructs its borders to include the other, and which understands itself as always building and being built through a combination of internal and external dialogue" (2004: 203). Kennedy elaborates: "The shift from monological to dialogical discourse is both a product and a producer of the intersubject, and is in turn made possible by a shift—underway for the last one hundred years or so—in the human information environment" (2004: 203). Like Kennedy, Smith sees the concept of dialogue as vital to self-definition, which is revised to include the perspective of the surrounding others. She comments on how she views voice and subjectivity: "I'm not interested in the notion that authority means that there's one voice, because it doesn't exist. … There is always another voice, there's always another version, and there's always another kind of light to throw on something" (Murphy 2006: 50).

Smith's defiance of a single authority to validate other viewpoints underlies her practice of destabilizing subject–object relations, which, as Timothy Morton explains in *Ecology without Nature*, is an environmentalist project:

> environmental writing wants to undo habitual distinctions between nature and ourselves. It is supposed not to just describe, but to provide a working model for a dissolving of the difference between

> subject and object, a dualism seen as the fundamental philosophical reason for human beings' destruction of the environment. (2007: 63–4)

Smith provides such a model for the deconstruction of the subject–object power relationship in her narratives. In several of her stories, she shifts narrative perspective from one character to another halfway through, reversing the subject–object configuration. Since the roles can be interchangeable, and each person can hold the subject position and tell his/her story, the power balance is equalized. This happens in several of her stories, including "More Than One Story," "The Start of Things," "The Universal Story," and others.

In "More Than One Story," narrated in the third person, a man is watching a young, partly nude woman sunbathing on a neighboring roof. Smith takes this much overused configuration of the male subject and female object in a different direction, as the man unexpectedly launches into a silent monologue about his brother's death in an accident: "When I was a boy, thirteen years old, and that's only a few years younger than you by the looks of it: when I was a boy my brother was crossing the road and he was hit by a careless motorist and he died" (Smith 1999: 55). Instead of objectifying the woman, the man identifies with her youth, turns inwards, and chooses her for his audience. She and He briefly become You and I, reflective of the listener position that he chooses for her. For the other half of the story, the narrative shifts to the sunbathing woman, who becomes the narrative center. She notices the man in the neighbor's yard, but also turns inwards to her thoughts of the recent unwelcome advances of a handyman, and of a more emotionally significant affair with a woman: "It was pretty good of her, really, she tells the gardens, the fences, the nobody below her; she came up to me at half past five when I was putting on my coat to go" (1999: 65). By reversing their speaker/listener positions, Smith saves the two characters from objectification. Instead, she lets them define a space for each other that makes it possible to process their respective inner conflicts. In ecological terms, they are able to grow and develop because of sharing the same environment and acknowledging each other's presence in it.

"The Start of Things" is another representative example of Smith's deconstructive model of subject–object relations. The story starts as narrated by a first-person narrator who brings us inside an intimate relationship apparently in its ending stages. I and You stand in the middle of a cold house in the middle of winter. You asks I to fetch some

firewood from the shed, and when the partner walks outside, locks him/her out of the house, saying "There was no other way to do this" (Smith 2003: 168). We stay with the I narrator outside in the cold rain, as s/he is watching You make tea inside, in the house they have bought together. Whenever I thinks of the house, s/he uses the pronoun "we," which shows the couple's history and closeness, and makes his/her position outside (of the house and of the relationship) very pronounced: "It's my house, you said, and shut the window and locked it. We had had those locks put in by a joiner to deter burglars. I could see you behind the condensation" (Smith 2003: 168).

The middle section of the story is written in italics, and describes the couple in bed, first turned away from each other, then slowly reestablishing intimacy through the sharing of memories. This section is pronouncedly more dialogic. "We" and "I" pronouns are interwoven, underscoring the couple's intimate dynamics. Changes in the environment hint to the reader that this section takes place after the conflict is resolved: "We are in bed with our backs to each other. The wind is howling on the roof and battering at the cardboard taped over the broken window. I can still smell the fire; the smell of it is all through the house" (2003" 170). This is where the story could well end, but there is yet another section, again told in the first person. This time the I narrator is the partner who stayed inside. We see his/her view of the relationship, as s/he looks at the lover outside and eventually comes out to join him/her. The subject who was relating the story is now the object being related, and vice versa. Moreover, periodically, while thinking/talking about moments of closeness, each of the narrators replaces "I" with "we." In Kennedy's terms, each subject "reconstructs its borders to include the other." By shifting the perspective from one lover to the other, from the observed to the observer, Smith underscores the interchangeability of their positions, and weakens the inherent power of the subject. Further reflecting Kennedy's dialogic model of the intersubject, there is a marked shift between the monologic character of each of the I narrators' sections and the middle italicized section, chronologically last. The first I narrative is "locked" inside itself and contains minimal dialogue, reporting the exchanged words using past tense ("I said,""you said"). The second partner's narrative is so self-absorbed that it contains no dialogic exchanges whatsoever. Ultimately, when the conflict is resolved and the two lovers are establishing intimacy again in the middle section, dialogue dominates. Significantly, conversations and thoughts are then rendered in the present tense, with "I say," "you say" reflecting the more independent, active position of each of the lovers,

whose actions are not related by, or a part of the (past) recollection of, the other lover, but happen as we witness them.[2] Moreover, this monologic/dialogic dynamics is embedded in the environment of the house and the garden, which plays an important part in the conflict and its resolution. When the fight takes place, the couple's environment becomes sharply divided between the outside and the inside, which is emphasized by the bad weather. However, the exiled "outside" space of the garden soon becomes the desired space: it becomes the "inside" (i.e., the place where both lovers are together) when the other lover leaves the house too. The inside and outside also merge when the wood is brought into the house and the smell of the fire "is all through the house, like some ash-scented animal has slunk muskily about, marking its territory in all the rooms" (2003: 170). When the relationship functions properly and the two lovers have equal power, there are no divisions between the inside and the outside, and the built environment and the natural one permeate one another. This can be seen as a model for "real-world" ecological relationships, with subjects possessing distinct and equal agencies embedded in a shared environment.

Another tour de force of multivoicedness is "The Universal Story," from the volume *The Whole Story and Other Stories*. The story is told by one narrator, but features several inside stories, each focused on a different participating character. The narrator starts with a woman who owns a second hand bookshop, only to break away to the story of a fly sitting on a copy of *The Great Gatsby*, then to the story of that book itself, to the story of a man who buys the book, to the story of his sister, an artist, who pays him to buy copies of *The Great Gatsby*, and in the end it returns to each of the interrupted miniplots to finish them. Even though the plots are short, there are no shortcuts in their development. Each of the characters is presented in her/his/its environment in great detail. The woman "lives" in the dusty bookstore, which she loves despite its looming failure; the book travels through each of its owners' apartments; the inside of the man's MiniMetro is strewn with copies of *The Great Gatsby*; his sister, who builds boats out of unusual things that quickly drown, is herself submerged in a bath. We see her in detail as she "shook the drips off the phone, dropped it over the side on to the bathroom carpet and put her arm back into the water quick because she was cold" (Smith 2003: 9). Most spectacularly, the fly's life journey moves from "an egg less than a milimetre long" laid in a "wad of manure," to a maggot that had "wriggled by sheer muscle contraction nearly a hundred and twenty feet," to an adult who "had broken the top off the pupa and pulled itself out. … Under an eave of the barn

it had spread and dried its wings and waited for its body to harden in the unexpectedly springlike air coming up from the Balearics" (2003: 3). Considering the shortness of each subject's vignettes, the precision of environmental detail calls attention to itself, underscoring the impossibility of isolating a self out of its environment. As in Woolf's novels, each character in this story—human, animal, or nonliving—is given equal treatment as a subject and gets to be a center, each in its environment, and each eventually connected to the others, internally in a physical space, and externally in the space of the story.

Like Woolf and Winterson before her, Smith seems to be saying through her "democracy of voice" that we must be aware of others and their perspectives; what is more, we need other voices to understand ourselves and the world. As Morton explains, this is one of the key ideas of ecocentrist philosophy and environmental writing: "subjectivity is not simply an individual … phenomenon. It is a collective one. Environmental writing is a way of registering the feeling of being surrounded by others, … by an otherness, something that is not the self … to write about ecology is to write about society" (2007: 17). Individually, Smith's stories are separate worlds, full of narrators addressing each other and/or a silent listener, all embedded in their environments. When read together, these stories create a multiverse of coexisting voices. The most obviously ecocentric aspect of Smith's multilogue emerges when the stories are viewed from the outside, as a body of short-story writing. As diverse as the voices are, they have enough in common to let us recognize Smith's signature voice behind them all: a particular directness, a quirkiness, a specific intimacy that is a sum of all the techniques I have listed, employed by a master of the form. We recognize each of her narrators as sharing the same basic DNA: a model of one ecosystem comprising multiple, diverse, and equal centers.

"You and I": Gender and Sexual Others

Smith's narrators undermine yet another entrenched dichotomy by being conspicuously gender ambiguous, as they are in "The Start of Things." Other stories with gender-unidentified narrators include "Erosive," "Being Quick," "Believe Me," "Fidelio and Bess," "No Exit," "The Second Person," "Astute Fiery Luxurious," and others. They all share the narrative configuration of "I" speaking to/about "you," where the speaker's gender remains almost always undisclosed, while the listener/lover is sometimes gender identified later in the story.[3] Here, Smith continues Jeanette Winterson's narrative gender politics,

recalling the gender-ambiguous narrator figure of *Written on the Body*. However, a prevailing majority of Smith's stories, especially more recent ones, feature no obvious gender markers, which is made easier by virtue of their compact form. Smith comments on her motivation behind this strategy: "When I started to write stories, I was thinking, Why would I be exclusive? … Isn't love much bigger? Why not ask people to question their own conceptions about code?" (Murphy 2006: 51). In ecological terms, her questioning of the patriarchally enforced structures of gender and heterosexuality is an invitation to open up to otherness, to imagine, acknowledge, and respect other ways of being. By not disclosing the gender of the partners in her stories, Smith is forcing the reader to acknowledge that the lovers may be homosexual, that homosexuality in fact exists. Danne Polk argues that "queer" identity in its very existence is always "already subversive," "always already invested with elements of disruptive power. Our bodies pose a challenge to the status quo since our difference is defined as a threat to the natural order" (2001: 84).

In addition to acknowledging the existence of homosexual relationships, Smith is forcing the reader to entertain multiple possibilities for the relationship simultaneously: it may be between a man and a woman, two males, or two females. In this way, these stories mirror the human "biodiversity" that Polk is describing. In effect, Smith's readers are unable to rely on the "codes" for gender and sexuality they have learned in "real" life, where the patriarchally sanctioned, heterosexual paradigm was enforced as "normal/dominant." Critics theorize the space in which the readers of gender-unmarked texts find themselves as valuable and transformative. Julia Kristeva describes the effect that the absence of a protagonist's gender identity has on readers: not allowed to make assumptions and judgments about the characters, readers face the text from a position of unease and fragmentation, which forces them to question their own constructions of sexuality, gender, and identity (Sellers 1991a: 103). Pia Brinzeu explains:

> Sexual transgressiveness generates a communicative disease: the readers have no control of the narrator, of style, or of characterization. They become prisoners of the fundamental linguistic instability of a lovers' discourse, being taken out of the stereotypical gender characteristics, which consider women passive, receptive, fragile, dependent, while men are active, determined, penetrative, and productive. Any confirmation of the narrator's sex would merely reinforce the clichés rooted in the male-constructed, 'scientific' knowledge about

> sexed bodies, underlining that the world is viewed in polar, sexualized, and essential terms. (2004: 118)

Interestingly, all these opinions acknowledge that this valuable transformative space created by the text is not closed, but instead opens out to include consequences in the "real world." In a similar way, Smith's textual experiment reaches out beyond the text into its environment—that is, the reader's life—promoting a more accepting view of otherness, both human and nonhuman. For example, Smith's story "May" takes the view of what is sexually "natural" literally, as it depicts a clinical case of a love obsession. The narrator is in love with a tree: "It was the white before green, and the green of this tree, I knew, would be even more beautiful than the white. … My whole head—never mind just my eyes—all my senses, my whole self from head to foot, would fill and change with the chlorophyll of it. I was changed already" (Smith 2003: 47–8). The tree is not problematized as a love object: it is presented as a fully legitimate subject worthy of anyone's affection. By making a different species an object of "I"'s romantic affection, Smith invites us to reconsider our narrow concepts of what is "natural" and "normal." The story can be seen as taking the trope of the unmarked narrator beyond gender markers into a cross-species relationship where the essence of the connection transcends species, sex, and gender. The reader is challenged to envision new paradigms of relationship: between humans, and between humans and nonhumans, the tree serving as figurative otherness as well as literal "nature."

Plot and Chronology: "Here I am at the beginning, the middle, and the end all at once"

Smith's experiments with plot structure, especially concerning chronology, reinforce the model of the unity of the text with its environment, as she uses linear fragmentation to involve and engage the reader. Her main strategies include a fragmented timeline and an absence of traditional closure (denial of ending). Charles E. May identifies the ending as one of the main semantic structures of the short story: "the modern story must be read … as aesthetically patterned in such a way that only the end makes the rest of the story meaningful" (1995: 59). Smith subverts this ultimate significance of the ending, thereby forcing the reader to pay attention to *every* part of the story: to see it as a three-dimensional space rather than a straight line. Her stories are chronologically complex and open systems, where meaning is actively

made by the reader in the process of communication with the author. In the already mentioned story "The Start of Things," the middle section is the latest chronologically. Recalling Woolf's "Time Passes" and *The Waves*' interludes, its italicized font and dialogic form that mirrors intimacy transform it into a different space, separate from the surrounding self-focused, monologic partner perspectives. (This section also marks a physical separation between the two lovers during the conflict: a space that increases during the fight, and then shrinks when the two are in bed, at first not even touching each other. The textual space dividing the two narrators physically measures their emotional distance.) The middle section is the reason the story is called "The Start of Things"—the title that has been on the reader's mind since the first line, "It was the end and we both knew it" (Smith 2003: 167). The middle section justifies the title in two ways: it recalls the beginning of the relationship, and presents a resolution of the conflict and a new beginning. In other words, the middle section contains the ending and a satisfying closure. But on first reading the reader does not feel satisfied, since there is more text to follow, and s/he has unanswered questions: Why is the window taped with cardboard? How did the lovers get back into bed? The last section is the next step in our discovery process, but it comes first chronologically. It seems rightly so, since we now regress into a self-absorbed perspective of the other lover. The timeline takes us forward to discover that s/he follows the partner outside and, at the very end, contemplates two options: going back inside and taking a bath, or locking her/himself out as well: "Then we could break into the house together. We could go back to where this has begun" (another reference to the title; 2003: 177). The last line is an enigmatic "I decided yes" (2003: 177), pointing to either option. But the reader now has the memory of the couple in bed and of the taped window (which we remember to be initially locked) as the clues to what must have happened in the interval. We reread the middle section to find our suppositions confirmed. In our discovery process, we have picked up the hints that Smith left, and "written in" the missing events. The author, the text, and the reader have functioned as one interactive system.

"God's Gift" contains more bending of the linear plot. The narrator is relating the circumstances of his/her life after a relationship break-up at which s/he subtly hints. The present day is spent in her/his house and yard, rescuing birds captured by a neighborhood cat. The rescue story is interjected with the flashbacks about the narrator's pain over the lost attachment, revolving around the thought that even bad experiences are a blessing: "every day, every hour is a gift … Each

small flurry of wings above a rubbly back garden, each infinitesimal hope" (Smith 1999: 11). The narrator places the rescued hatchling on a windowsill, the story ending with him/her preparing to check on the bird, considering two alternatives: "It will be dead. It will have flown" (1999: 12).

As was the case with "The Start of Things," this open ending sends us back to reread the story to find the satisfaction that we feel we have been denied. On the more careful reading, since we are now not "reading for the ending," we discover the thematic interconnectedness of the present plot and the flashbacks, such as the thrush parents searching for the hatchling, sharing the emotion of loss with the human narrator. Importantly, however, Smith does not use the bird plot as an auxiliary to provide illustration and closure to the human conflict. Nature is more than a setting for human musings here: it is has its own story that, on this day, happens to parallel the human one, emphasizing the truth that suffering is common to all living things. The open-ended structure of the story provides no easy answers, once again opening it up into the "real world," encouraging the reader to contemplate his/her own life as a complex ongoing experience with multiple possibilities.

Denied an ending in Smith's stories, we embark on a quest to find it hidden somewhere unexpected. Like the stories themselves, instead of ending in a finite discovery, our search for meaning is an open-ended process. Each time we are encouraged to read more carefully, and to pay attention to more detail that can be indicative of the author's intention. It makes us participants in a communicative exchange, as we create meaning in cooperation with the author.

"Erosive" is another signature Smith story with a fragmented chronology and a natural-world plot that intersects with the human one. The narrator speaks to the reader/listener directly at the very beginning: "What do you need to know about me for this story? How old I am? how much I earn a year? what kind of car I drive? Look at me now, here I am at the beginning, the middle and the end all at once, in love with someone I can't have" (Smith 2003: 99). Smith is challenging our expectations of an "exposition," of introductory information supposedly useful for our understanding of the character. But since this "romance plot" is thwarted at its beginning, we get no such thing. The end comes at the beginning; there will be no "plot development," and the materialistic parameters are useless.

What follows this travesty of an exposition are sections titled "middle," "end," and "beginning," all told in the attention-getting simple present tense: "I go out into the garden and look at the apple tree"

(2003: 99). We need to pay attention, since Smith does not delve into the narrator's psyche; instead, the perspective stays on his/her actions:

> I see someone in the mirror in the hall. I look again. It is me. It is the first time I have seen myself for days and I look as if I have been sleeping in my clothes. I go into the kitchen and I see how the piled-up dishes are coated in rot. I can't remember eating off any of them. I come through to the living room: the books are all over the floor. (2003: 99)

From his/her interactions with the immediate environment, we gather that the lack of connection with the desired other must have caused a disconnection from the narrator's own body and self. Throughout the story, Smith continues to show the effects of the narrator's emotional state on his/her environment.

The story's structure replicates the theme of disconnection through its fragmented chronology: the end comes before the beginning, the first section "unnaturally" compresses time into a "beginning, middle and end at once." It is obvious that the relationship has reached a dead end, and that for some reason the two potential lovers did not come together. The failure to make this connection is wreaking havoc in the narrator's life. What results is a process of emotional separation from and, eventually, indifference and hostility towards the surrounding environment and other beings. The narrator puts the books s/he was going to touch and open back on the shelves, in an emotionally random alphabetical order. S/he brutally kills the ants she was earlier patiently talking to, trying to coerce them to leave the apple tree. In the utmost act of hostility, she uproots the tree that s/he was trying to save. Smith shows an individual's failure to connect reverberating through the entire ecosystem. The more isolated the narrator gets, the more abusive to his/her environment s/he becomes. As ecofeminists have been pointing out for a while now, isolation creates objectification, while relationship generates caring. By fragmenting the sections of the story, Smith makes the text perform the effects of disconnectedness on the reader, who finds it hard to piece the story together, emerging with a sense of chaos and discomfort.

In a stark contrast, the "Beginning" section, coming at the end, presents the narrator freshly in love, the state that connects him/her to the whole world, living and nonliving:

> There are ants on my tree, killing its leaves. Let them. I love every single one of them, every single invisible DNA footprint they leave

> on its bark. I am in love with their aphids … with my neighbor and with Angela and Helen Sellar at the supermarket. I am in love with my grouchy father. I come in from the garden and sit in my living-room surrounded by books I have heaved off the shelves because otherwise will I ever pick them up and open them again? (2003: 104)

Even random words that the narrator looks up in a dictionary reveal applicable connotations in the context of love: "Gordian: as in Gordian knot. Hylic means corporeal … Need means want of something which one cannot do without … Gleam is a small stream of light, a beam, a brightness, often used figuratively itself, i.e., a gleam of hope, a gleam of understanding" (2003: 105). Positioned last, this section reads like a sarcastic parody of itself, since it comes just after we have witnessed the utter destruction of all the connections and relationships that it so hopefully builds.

What would normally be satisfying clues tying the previous sections together (interactions with the ants, the neighbor, the father, and so on) only function to frustrate the reader, since, by contrast, they only underscore the degree of destruction of these relationships. In ecological terms, the point of this fragmented structure, captured by the title, is precisely the effect of the loss of relatedness on the entire world system. However, despite, or perhaps because of, this unsettling effect, the reader feels even more compelled to piece the story's meaning together. Again, Smith makes the text work as an interactive entity, opening it out into its environment, saying that "everything is connected."

Self-referentiality: "What do you need to know about me for this story?"

The address to the reader in the first words of "Erosive" foregrounds the narrative situation itself, which brings us to one of Smith's favorite tropes: self-referentiality. Such a beginning disrupts the reader's comfort in two fundamental ways: by pulling us in, and by pushing us out of the text. The first line of Smith's story "God's Gift" reads: "There are so many things that you don't know about me now" (1999: 3). The narrator is speaking to us. Whether, as in some of Smith's stories, this initial identification implied by the second-person address is later replaced by a "you" protagonist or not, this initial address is crucial in creating the reader's involvement.[4]

Smith involves us, invites us in, often starting with a line like "Imagine Melissa's collection of books, spread between her bedroom

and her living room" (1998: 19). "I tell you. I fell in love with a tree" (2003: 45). The result of such beginnings is that we are no longer reading about "other" people in a story. We feel personally drawn into a world that is often different from we are used to. And we do not come out unscathed. As I have shown, the omission of personalizing/gender detail dictated by the I–you narrative configuration allows for increased reader involvement, identification, and, possibly, transformation.[5] This is the centripetal pull of Smith's realityfiction.

However, instead of letting us settle happily into a safe, processed, and contained fictional "reality," Smith's text also insists on becoming part of our own. The illusion of fictional safety is broken: we are reminded that the "real" world still exists, that in our act of reading we are still surrounded by something larger to which we, as well as the text, belong. By calling on the reader, Smith proves that she knows we are there. She reminds us that we are reading, pointing out from the text to our environment. This sobering reminder is the centrifugal pull. Morton calls this self-referential quality the text's "medial" function:

> When ecomimesis points out the environment, it performs a medial function, either at the level of content or at the level of form. *Contact* becomes *Content*. Ecomimesis interrupts the flow of an argument or a sequence of narrative events, thus making us aware of the atmosphere "around" the action or the environment in which or about which the philosopher [writer] is writing. Avant-garde and experimental artworks that are not directly ecological in content are environmental in form, since they contain medial elements. (2007: 37–8)

I argue that Smith's stories qualify as ecomimetic by being both "directly ecological" (featuring environmentally conscious narrators who respect all living things, buy organic products, and so on) and "environmental in form" (reaching out to the text's environment). In addition to directly identifying her readers' presence by using a second-person pronoun, Smith often interrupts her plots to remind us that we are reading "a story." In "The Universal Story," the narrative voice playfully addresses the reader/listener throughout, emphasizing its constructed nature. Just as the narrator settles into a story, s/he shifts to a new character's story, and breaks off as s/he thinks of a new idea: "Or no—wait: There was once a fly …" (Smith 2003: 3). "No. Hang on. Because: There was once a 1974 Penguin edition of …" (2003: 4). *The Great Gatsby*, the book as an object, connects all the characters, ending with the unusual boat-maker who, symbolically for Smith's mixing of reality and fiction,

launches thousands of copies of *The Great Gatsby* out of the bookstores into the outside world. Towards the end, the strands of each character's stories are painstakingly tied:

> The woman who lived by a cemetery, remember, back at the very beginning? She looked out of her window and she saw—ah, but that's another story. And lastly, what about the first, the man we began with, the man dwelt by a churchyard? He lived a long and happy and sad and very eventful life, for years and years and years, before he died. (2003: 11)

This time, instead of denying us an ending to draw us in, Smith smothers us with excessive, clichéd endings, flaunting fictionality, to remind us that we have been reading stories while sitting in our "real" world all along.

In "True Short Story," Smith's ultimate realityfiction, she marries life and fiction by making one out of the other. She builds a short story out of actual events from her life: her best friend's illness, her own problems with the academic establishment, overhearing two people discussing literature in a café. To balance reality with (meta)fiction, the story incorporates various writers' opinions about the short story, including two relating to my argument about Smith's practice of blurring the line between fiction and reality. She quotes Tzvetan Todorov's point that "short story is so short it doesn't allow us the time to forget that it's only literature and not actually life," and Grace Paley's comment that "short stories are, by nature, about life, and that life is always found in dialogue and argument" (2008: 14–17). Smith ends with her own playful insight, which can be seen as referring to the open, environmental character of her writing: "When is the short story like a nymph? When the echo of it answers back" (2008: 17). This answer, as the story, suggests a model of fiction as participatory, communicative, interacting with its environment.

Smith's favorite self-referential technique is including stories, often multiple ones, within a story. In several of her texts, such as "The First Person," "Believe Me," "No Exit," "Astute Fiery Luxurious," "The Theme is Power," "A Story of Love," and others, the characters engage in telling each other stories. "The First Person" starts: "This, though, is a new you and a new me. In this particular story, we are new to each other in the oldest way" (2008: 191). This is a version of Smith's classic interactive beginning, except that this time we are joining a conversation already in progress. Both of these sentences could refer to the narrator and the

reader, but soon the playful, intimate exchange identifies them as two lovers. They have breakfast, make love, but, most centrally, they talk to each other. Their dialogue is the primary proof and performance of their intimacy: they play with words, each putting forward a challenge to the other for more word play; they finish each other's sentences. They break into a story, build it and change it as they go along, and object to their choices:

> Or how about this? How about we're story-free? … Ultimate liberation. … A story with no story. No adjectives. No beginning or middle or end. Ultimate freedom. Ultimate open sky. No ultimates, you say. Above our heads through the open dormer window in the slant of the roof of my bedroom: leaves, clouds, blueness, swifts. (2008: 202–204)

By making references to the story form and advocating freedom from formal structures, Smith's narrators push at the boundaries of the stories they are "inside," make holes in them, and peek at the "outside" world.

The open-roof environment of "The First Person" enacts the openness of the story form that the narrator is advocating. Ultimately, the narrator "liberates" the dining-room table into the garden, and lets it become part of the outside:

> It looks unsafe, anomalous. It changes the garden. The garden changes it. It strikes me, as I look at it, that the table is way beyond my control. Up until this moment, I mean, I believed I owned that table. Now, looking at it out in the open air, I know that I don't. … its legs will sink into the grass, grass will come up and round the sides of its legs. Bindweed will find it. Heat and cold will ruin it. Greenness will swallow it up, will die down and spring back up round it, will make it old, ruined, weathered. … It's the best thing that could happen to anything I ever imagined was mine. (2008: 206–207)

The vivid, active imagery of this ending renders the environment as one. The "inside" and the "outside" permeate each other and unite; in fact, the table's wood simply rejoins the place of its origin. Smith shows the world as a complex unity, where structures and boundaries, textual and otherwise, do not seem practical.

At another time in the story Smith uses the image of a library with an open roof, where the books can interact with the world. The image reflects what I have been calling the centrifugal force of her

writing: the text as, literally, embedded in its environment. Smith captures this concept by showing texts as physically open to the sky, exposed to the elements, even disintegrating as physical objects of the "real" world. The powerful image of books becoming one with the natural environment first occurs in Smith's early story "Text for the Day," where the protagonist takes all her books outside and scatters them page by page wherever she goes:

> the thick books, the thin books … all the known names and the lesser or unknown lost or forgotten names flying immeasurable in the air, settling on the ground like seeds or leaves dropped from the trees, rotting into pieces, blown into the smithereens of meaning. … Somewhere where there are no houses, no people, only sky, wind, a wide-open world, a poem about a dormant volcano lies held down half-buried in sand, bleaching in the light and heat like the small skull of a bird. (Smith 1998: 29–30)

The text becomes one with the environment on at least two levels: literally in the image of the disintegrating book, as well as figuratively in the simile that Smith chooses. Freeing books from libraries and bookstores, like freeing the story from its canon, is Smith's ultimate rendering of all-inclusive environmentality.[6]

Conclusion

"Free Love and Other Stories," "Other Stories and Other Stories," "The Whole Story and Other Stories," "The First Person and Other Stories"—in naming her books of short stories, Ali Smith is less than subtle. She believes that stories must persist: as a genre that needs to be cherished and promoted, as a communicative tool that helps people understand and change the world. The need to tell and hear stories is a constant, life-changing, awareness-generating force.

I have termed Smith's method "realityfiction" not only because she consistently deconstructs the boundaries of the text, but because she sees fiction as having such transformative power. As Greta Gaard argues, "If ideas and feelings give rise to particular forms, it can also be said that forms give rise to particular ways of thinking" (Weisser & Dobrin 2001: 175). By making changes to the traditional linear structure and narrative form of the short story, Smith is encouraging a rebellion against domination—of the narrative, and, by extension, of the patriarchal hierarchies that have traditionally stood behind it. She imagines alternatives

to the oppressive gender and sexual divisions. Her plot fragmentation and denial of ending involve the reader in communication with the author. Her self-referential techniques highlight the situatedness of the writing and reading process, and bridge the division between the text and the reader by underscoring their position in a larger environment.

Smith's short stories model ecological relationships within an environmental ecosystem. They challenge the single, anthropocentric perspective and portray a diverse world system, peopled with multiple human and nonhuman subjects defying objectification, and bound by a network of relationships within one environment. Smith unsettles the division between fiction and reality, makes us discover affinities where we did not suspect them, and traces an underlying unity behind dualities. Having read her stories, we look at the world differently.

Conclusion: Re-visioning the World from the Inside Out

That books influence readers is not a new concept. Literature transforms our lives because it imagines our greater potential, models a better, more evolved state of being. Such imagination has never been more essential at a time when our existence on the earth as we have known it has become endangered. This strong statement becomes reality if we consider the rapid changes to most ecosystems we have observed even in the last decade. We are in need of an imaginative transformation effecting a change of our behaviors from mindless to responsible, from passive to participatory, a transformation deeper than learning to separate our trash and take the recycling to the curb.

Environmentalism at its heart is a deep philosophical stance. One cannot be an environmentalist without being respectful of difference, aware of the commonalities underlying seemingly disparate experience, wary of the paradigm of individual isolation. These principles and attitudes are communicated through language/text on its many levels. How we communicate ideas and tell stories about our experience is as important as our message itself. Any narrative that attempts to destabilize hegemonic patterns of thought and expression is inherently an environmentalist narrative—leading to a progressive transformation of reality through the very way we talk about it.

The writers and texts I have discussed testify to that premise. Woolf believes that art can recreate the hidden patterns of the rest of the world: the harmonious, symbiotic coexistence based on mutual respect of difference that we so desperately strive for among humans. She encourages a search for relationships underneath the surface appearance, exposing a world of connections. Winterson destabilizes the binaries of gender and sexuality, promotes respect for otherness and awareness of an existence of a reality outside of our own. Smith is fascinated with

language as a system of relationships where distinctions and differences are respectfully upheld, contributing to the creation of identity. All three writers believe in challenging the reader to discover multiple and complex layers of the text's meaning, and in the reader's inclusion in the creative process through active participation. They ban divisive thinking and present narrative designs that are inclusive and flexible.

These novels and stories model a better world by revising traditional formal structures: dispersing the single (anthropocentric) narrative point of view into multiple but equal voices; emphasizing the world's interconnectedness through structural repetition; using metaphors converging the human and nonhuman to debunk the assumption of difference and superiority, and the me/not-me, inside/outside distinctions. They encourage a shift in consciousness that begins with an awareness of how we see others, how we can direct our thoughts away from the self-centered to empathize with others' experience. They reveal that what is social and literary is at the same time environmental and global.

Reading these texts leaves one feeling freer, less constrained, refreshed. There is a sense of possibility, of a potential that we absorb from writing that breaks the expected, a potential that can be transferred into our lives. Reading these texts has changed this reader's life, for one. Having read Ali Smith's "The Universal Story," I have no longer been able to smash circling insects no matter how annoying—something I had mindlessly done before. More expansively, I have designed an English/Women's Studies course ("Narrative Ecology—Experimental Writers and Environmentalist Politics") that features Woolf, Smith, Winterson, and other experimental writers. The course's underlying agenda is that narrative form is intrinsically ecopolitical: it carries messages of unity and equality or isolation and discrimination that run underneath the texts' thematic surface. The course examines how this deep narrative ecology permeates beyond the obvious (that is, the explicitly environmentalist themes) to the fundamental ecological principles that the text engages.

Analyzing these texts, my students experience patterns of thinking that encourage the seeking of connections beyond the apparent disparities. They are invited to bend their minds out of the habitual: for example, the view that we are entitled to dominance, or to espousing the "me" vs. "not me" mentality. A better world is created step by step by demolishing the illusory barriers that we had constructed. Most importantly, students discover that environmentalism is an attitude, a way of thinking, and that certain habits of thought are pervasively anti-ecological and anti-environmentalist because all thinking has practical consequences.

I encourage students to look deeper than the surface, to adopt the radical view of the person next to them, the tree, the rock, as a different form of themselves. This is one of the worldviews that these texts elicit through their concept form. The students come to realize that how they look at their gay neighbor, a stray dog, the weeds in their backyard, the ants that cross their path, the mosquito, carries seeds of specific actions and matters on a global level. Nothing exists in isolation.

When I teach these texts, my students tell me: “We walk more carefully now, watching out for insects in the way.” That seems like a good start.

Notes

Introduction

1. See Bailey (2010);; Rodriguez Gonzalez (2008); Smith (2010).
2. As even postmodernist critics have asserted, a literary text cannot escape being political, since it is created by particular individuals with particular opinions situated in particular contexts. See Hutcheon (1989).
3. "Once they are written down … *the visible text becomes the primary mnemonic activator of the spoken stories* … the places are no longer necessary to the remembrance of the stories, and often come to seem wholly incidental to the tales, the arbitrary backdrops for human events that might just as easily have happened elsewhere. The transhuman, ecological determinants of the original oral stories are no longer emphasized, and often are written out of the tales entirely. In this manner the stories and myths, as they lose their oral, performative character, forfeit as well their intimate links to the more-than-human earth" (Abram 1997: 183–4).
4. The "Cityreads" program utilizes that process: "Cityreads is a city-wide reading initiative designed to open up the world of books to the widest possible audience throughout Brighton & Hove during March, April and May 2007. This involves selecting one book by one author for the whole city to read. The audience is then encouraged to come together to discuss, debate and creatively engage with the chosen text through a series of workshops, events and/or performances across the city. The project links the City's major reading proponents from Brighton Festival, Brighton & Hove Libraries, bookshops, and education" (First Great Western 2004). Smith's *Hotel World* was "released" in the town of Brighton, multiple copies of it being left in various locations, to be picked up, read, and replaced for others to read.

1 The Narrative Ecology of "Kew Gardens": Virginia Woolf's Ecofeminist Imagination and the Narrative Discovery of *Jacob's Room*

1. My dating has to do with one detail of "Kew Gardens" that seems to place the story later than November 23, 1917. On Friday, November 23, Woolf records her visit to Kew Gardens in her diary, with the mention that she did not go in because "I settled that if it was the 6d day at Kew I wouldn't hesitate but decide not to go in. It was the 6d day; I turned without pausing & had therefore to walk back. Certainly this decision brings a feeling of peace, though I rather think I was wrong. It was a warm, windless day, the sky genuinely blue" (1977–84, I: 81). Since Woolf did not seem to know prior to November 23 that Fridays were 6d days, at least the latter part of "Kew Gardens" must have been composed after that date, since it contains

this very piece of information in the dialogue of the young couple—along with the same dilemma of Friday admission being worth "6d" (Woolf 1997: 43–4).

2. See Bishop (1982), Oakland (1987), Goldman (1998), and Lee (1999).
3. This project would qualify Woolf as an ecofeminist. Lawrence Buell defines the connection that ecofeminists, most notably Karen J. Warren, make between the patriarchal exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women: "[ecofeminism] starts from the premise of a correlation between the history of institutionalized patriarchy and human domination of the nonhuman" (Buell 2005: 19).
4. See Buell (2005): 86.
5. Weisser and Dobrin (2001) define ecocomposition as

> the study of the relationships between environments (and by that we mean natural, constructed, and even imagined places) and discourse (speaking, writing, and thinking). Ecocomposition draws primarily from disciplines that study discourse (chiefly composition, but also including literary studies, communication, cultural studies, linguistics, and philosophy) and merges the perspectives of them with work in disciplines that examine environment (these include ecology, environmental studies, sociobiology, and other "hard" sciences). As a result, ecocomposition attempts to provide a more holistic, encompassing framework for studies of the relationship between discourse and environment (2002: 6).

6. Normally in a classical play, the central location would be associated with the human participants, which Woolf replaces with a small animal with very limited mobility within a flowerbed. The fact that the central "hub" is not a human, but a botanical and biological center, is of great importance in my argument for Woolf's writing as ecological.
7. Charlotte Zoe Walker discusses Woolf's juxtaposition of nature to British imperialism in her other writings (2000: 155).
8. C.Z. Walker points out that the "symbolic use of light as consciousness in Woolf's writing often connects to specific images of nature" (2000: 148).
9. Judy Little describes the relationship of the main narrator to the other characters in the following way: "she [the narrator] purports, like a good gossip, to glean evidence from other female characters who observe and encounter Jacob. She and they cooperate in creating a picture of Jacob; together they write the kind of shared understanding or text" (1992: 245). In my reading, there is no one "shared" picture, but multiple pictures from multiple standpoints that Woolf emphasizes.
10. Ecofeminists aim at dislodging the patriarchal system, with its emphasis on objectivity, order, and hierarchy of knowledge, as well as its Cartesian assumption that the world is knowable by the power of the human intellect, which is superior to nature. Ecofeminist philosophy makes significant connections between the domination of patriarchy and the domination of (hu)man over nature. Karen J. Warren redefines feminism as a movement to end all oppression, including the oppression of nature. She argues that for

centuries women have been categorized with all nature and equally labeled as lacking, and marginalized and oppressed as "other":

> The dominations of women and nature are intimately connected. Failure to notice or make visible the connection in 1990 [2012] perpetuates the mistaken (and privileged) view that "environmental ethics" is not a feminist issue. One of the goals of feminism is the eradication of all oppressive sex-gender (and related race, age, affectional preference) categories and the creation of a world in which *difference does not breed domination* (1990: 145).

11. Claiming Woolf for ecofeminism seems no more far-fetched than calling her a pioneer postmodernist or gender theorist, which is now an established practice. Labels are useful shortcuts, but cannot begin to define the probing, complex intellect of this writer, whose intuitive inquiry reached far ahead of her time.

2 "All Taken Together": Ecological Form in *Mrs. Dalloway*

1. Originally published in *Critical Insights: Mrs. Dalloway,* ed. Dorothy Dodge Robbins (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, a division of EBSCO Publishing, 2012). Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
2. "For technological breakthroughs, legislative reforms, and paper covenants about environmental welfare to take effect, or even to be generated in the first place, requires a climate of transformed environmental values, perception, and will. To that end, the power of story, image, and artistic performance and the resources of aesthetics, ethics, and cultural theory are crucial" (Buell 2005: vi).
3. Gregory A. Wilson interprets this passage as "a vision of mankind's wholeness and triumph over division after the war's devastating effects" (2003: 37). I extend this wholeness to the environmental dimension, to include the nonhuman as well.
4. Frustrated with the omniscient convention, Woolf criticizes Arnold Bennett's narration in *Hilda Lessways*: "But we cannot hear her mother's voice, or Hilda's voice; we can only hear Mr. Bennett's voice telling us about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines" (1967, I: 330).
5. "Monika Fludernik says that this device [FID] is used ironically for purposes of textual selfconsciousness, illustrating the dissonance between meaning and experience, the modes of thinking and speaking. The consistently featured voice is that of the narrator. The narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway*, a subject for both linguistic and metaphysical speculation, is a working class narrator with ink under her unpared fingernails. Often viewed as unobtrusive, this narrator interrupts everyone, demanding that they see things through her eyes, while mocking the speech characteristics of whichever person swims into her view. Her influence is palpable; she has a finger in every pie. Linguistic clues reveal that she goes into everything with her characters, seemingly endorsing their foibles; she rules the utterance but leaves the

diction to the individual, a characteristic of free indirect discourse. Readers are properly oriented from the beginning. According to Andrew Laird, 'the narrator's presence is mediating, interfering with what was actually said'" (Hoff 2009: 254).

6. Andelys Wood (2003) discusses the relationship of the walk and clock time in the novel.
7. Wendy Faris points out that "Birds represent the fragile and the semiotic lives vs. the official civilized lives of Homes and Bradshaw. … That intimate, bird-like existence in which they are connected emotionally with each other and with the forces of the natural world is set poignantly against the public sphere of civilized reason, and constitutes a realm in which they are not in the doctors' power, a camouflaged power also expressed via an animal metaphor: 'Holmes and Bradshaw were on him! The brute with the red nostrils was snuffing into every secret place' ([Woolf 1981]: 223)" (2007: 114). Faris also notes that "in a similar moment of cosmic embrace, Mrs. Dalloway includes 'dogs and canaries' in her list of beings to whom 'one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments', which seem to be a kind of substitute for God, since they are mentioned as a corrective to her denial of belief in him ([Woolf 1981]: 43)" (2007: 123).
8. "Several devices of writing are enlisted to figure the narrator of Woolf's novel, among them the Homeric technique of the rhapsode, carefully stitching fragments of song together just as Clarissa sews her dress; these devices emerge in *Mrs. Dalloway* when traditional settings such as the walled garden become narrative devices in description and when dialogue is absorbed into free independent discourse. Also, in scene-switches the urbane narrator employs a character such as Peter Walsh to lead the discourse from Clarissa's drawing room to Regent's Park where Septimus Smith is seated. The reader's eye is led then, from Septimus Smith back to Peter watching him. Even thoughts about characters lead from one to the next, as between Clarissa and Miss Kilman, then on to the Army and Navy Stores, in a kind of extra-sensory dialogue. The segue between Richard Dalloway and Clarissa in her drawing-room is made by the sound of Big Ben that he hears and that simultaneously floods Clarissa's room. Sometimes a door that is opened by one character is later closed by another. When we have a dead body in one episode, an ambulance arrives in the next. Labyrinthine symmetry demands that when someone ascends the stairs, someone else must descend" (Hoff 2009: 2).
9. In their article "Literary Communication: Effects of Reader–Narrator Cooperation," Peter Dixon and Marisa Bortolussi conclude that readers of fiction establish a communicative relationship with the narrator rather than the author:

   > Linguists such as Grice (1975) have argued that communication in conversation relies on a principle of cooperation: One assumes that the other participant is rational and is providing only necessary and sufficient information given their knowledge, perspective, and goals. We believe that similar cooperation occurs with readers processing the narrator. Readers assume that the narrator is rational and that the narration suffices to understand the story events and the narrator's stance. To

> cooperate with the narrator in this communication process, then, readers must use their own knowledge and experience to generate 'implicatures', inferences about the described world and the story events that allow the narrative to make sense. In particular, this means that readers will attempt to rationalize and justify the stance of the narrator towards the characters and events of the story. Our view is that such justification is part of the process of cooperating with the narrator in order to foster communication. (1996: 409)

10. Reed further writes: "Since the characters do not see into one another as fully as readers perceive them, ideal communion lies beyond the boundaries of the novel. The union of voices in the reader's mind realizes Clarissa's theory of immortality" (1995: 129). Mark Hussey comments on the text's relationship to the reader: "Peter Walsh and Clarissa … strive through the novel to complete a circle, joining past and present in the hope of achieving unity. The party at the end does not solve the problem … because the characters are no longer the people that came together at Bourton. This 'incomplete circle' … is the form of the novel; it involves the reader by placing him or her in the memories of the characters (and vice versa). For the reader, then, the circle can be completed in that the whole timescale is not in the actual world of time and death, but in the virtual space between reader and text" (1986: 123).

3 Singing the World in *The Waves*: The Ecopoetics of Woolf's Play-Poem

1. Woolf comments on the beginnings of her creative process:

> the mystical side of this solitude. … It is this that is frightening & exciting in the midst of this profound gloom. … One sees a fin passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean? Really there is none I think. The interesting thing is that in all my feeling and thinking I have never come up against this before. … I hazard the guess that it may be the impulse behind another book. (1977–84, III: 113)

2. Steve Pinkerton interprets the moment of transition from short poetic observations of "I" subjects to longer, conventional passages as connected to sexual initiation: "normative, acceptable (hetero)sexuality comes too soon, bringing with it the dawning of a persistent conventionality in thought, in behavior, and—worst of all—in language" (2009: 77).
3. Paul A. Jaussen describes the typical modern speaker's alienation and the "language of one": "For the modern, silence comes from the lack of the listener; increased independence and alienation result in a language of one, the inability to speak to those around you. There is no collectivity and consequently no communication" (2006: 118). Woolf's characters' particular spoken monologue, as opposed to the silent recorded stream of consciousness (underscored by the presence of the word "said" following or introducing each character's soliloquy) counterbalances the isolating effect of the

"language of one." The speaking characters can be described as calling out in a communicative effort, aware of the presence of a listener.

4. See my discussion of the interludes as a rhythmical feature of the novel in *Virginia Woolf's Experiment in Genre and Politics 1926–1931: Visioning and Versioning* The Waves (2005: 40–42).

4 Living with the Other: Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*

1. "Trying to infer the sex of the individual," we tend to rely on the most "tendentious stereotypes, which would come to serve as standards: this observation sounds feminine, this one masculine" (Pier 1999: 169).
2. The depth of effect that Winterson achieves here brings to mind Virginia Woolf's famous argument from "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and "Modern Fiction" about the "materialist" fiction of the male premodernists like Galsworthy and Bennett. Woolf argues there that external detail and social background do nothing to render individual particularity, that novelists must devise other means to "capture" the complexity of character. Winterson's beginning sidelines the obvious facts as basic as gender, and encourages the reader to discover who the person is through other means.
3. Susana Onega points out that Winterson breaks the conventions of (lesbian) romance through her particular use of nature imagery. Even though the female bodies are traditionally described in sea/nature terms, Winterson "explodes the binaries and boundaries of the romance genre" by choosing edgy, strange images juxtaposing various animals (fillies, cats, starfish) in talking about female sexuality (Andermahr 2007: 95).

5 Multiplicity and Coexistence in *The Powerbook*

1. In the interview with Margaret Reynolds, Winterson talks about her attitude to fictional form:

   > I think of myself as somebody who tries to use poetic disciplines and align them in a narrative stretch. But what interests me is that every word should do its work. I'm not simply happy for words to convey meaning. It can if it's journalism and it's perfectly alright if you are doing a particular kind of record or memoir, but it's not alright in fiction because fiction itself demands a vividness and a transparency which is only possible through exactness of language. … Using just any word will not do. You have to be able to justify to yourself each word that you choose, and make sure that it is doing its work in the sentence, and that sentence in the paragraph, and that paragraph in that part of the story. … Fiction is not approximate, it is precise. And that's why I get angry when I read things which seem not to care about that at all, because it just becomes journalism by another name, and indeed the best journalism is much more precise than quite a lot of fiction. (Reynolds & Nokes 2003: 22–3)

2. See, for example, Delnieppe (2010), Kauer (1998), and Reynolds and Nokes (2003).

3. Majumdar explains:

> As an expression of this fragmented consciousness, the contemporary novel typically abjures the "wholeness" intrinsic to the realist mode; realism's neat, formal structure is a more authentic representation of modern life. The concern for order and symmetry in realism is, however, not ideologically innocent. The symmetry of the realist mode is the symmetry of hierarchy, a hierarchy generated by a capitalist mode of production. The "structure" of realist literature is arguably parallel to the ideological structure of an exploitative system. In this sense, the modernist experiment with form can be viewed as an attempt to reveal the deep structure of bourgeois social reality, and hence a refusal to accommodate itself to the latter's surface normality. (2002: 4)

4. Grove discusses the connection between fragmentation and the exclusionary patriarchal agenda in Gothic novels:

> because the majority of Gothic novels present themselves as either ancient romances or historical documents—two overtly masculine forms—authors can invest the points of absence and uncertainty in their works with specific ideological significance. Namely, when an author draws attention to an omission from a tale of male adventure (either historical or romantic), he or she often draws attention to those voices that have been repressed or silenced by the writers of these precursory literary forms. Almost invariably, they are the voices of women. (1997: 2)

5. Molly Hite writes about the politics of Lessing's form:

> To adopt the description of Philip Sollers … the traditional novel has become for [Lessing] "the way the society speaks to itself," and thereby an instrument of repression, "the manifestation of power in our time and the key to its mechanic, closed, everyday consciousness." To resist this "mechanical, closed, everyday consciousness," she systematically undermined the form of the traditional novel, in the process undermining the assumption that this form is the natural structure of all possible experience. (Majumdar 1997: 4)

6. Catherine Emmott, Anthony J. Sanford, and Lorna I. Morrow's interdisciplinary study has measured the effects of fragmentation on reading. They conclude that "foregrounding devices" like sentence fragments and short sentences heighten readers' attention in a measurable way. Their hypothesis is that "simply putting the text into its own sentence fragment may be enough to maximize attention, bringing it to a peak" (2006: 23).
7. Ecofeminist philosopher Danne Polk describes an alternative identity theory as necessarily feminist and nonanthropocentric:

> It is a feminist theory because the oppositional logics of our tradition identify and define all bodies that do not win the status of the patriarchal subject as Other. And it is an ecological theory because identity itself

> depends upon the material conditions of the earth and because the political and ethical dimensions of identity production entail our relationships to both human and nonhuman beings. Thus, such a theory would be trans-human in scope, historically situated, non-racist, non-sexist, non-heterosexist, non-anthropocentric, and whatever else such a theory needs to be for promoting the construction of alternative, ecologically informed cultural scripts. (2001: 72)

8. Mine Ozyurt Kilic comments: "Through the description of the love-making between two women, Ali describes how one becomes the other. The description demonstrates the ultimate aim of using the fantastic in this novel—the effacement of limits" (2008: 292). See Kilic's discussion of the book's anti-patriarchal politics in "Transgressing Gender Boundaries: The Function of the Fantastic in Jeanette Winterson's *The Powerbook*" (2008).
9. Warren explains:

> The problem is not simply *that* value-hierarchical thinking and value dualisms are used, but *the way* in which each has been used *in oppressive conceptual frameworks* to establish inferiority and to justify subordination. … Ecofeminists insist that the sort of logic of domination used to justify the domination of humans by gender, racial or ethnic, or class status is also used to justify the domination of nature. Because eliminating a logic of domination is part of a feminist critique—whether a critique of patriarchy, white supremacist culture, or imperialism—ecofeminists insist that *naturism* is properly viewed as an integral part of any feminist solidarity movement to end sexist oppression and the logic of domination which conceptually grounds it. (1990: 128-–33)

10. In her essay on Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Winterson addresses this exact issue of the contemporary reader's consumerist attitude: "It is just not possible to read literature quickly. Neither poetry nor poetic fiction will respond to being rushed. In a traditional novel, in a crime novel, in any of the trash novels that come and go, it is easy to skip ahead or to miss out whole sections. … a real book needs real time and only by paying it that small courtesy can a reader begin to unravel it" (1997: 90).

6 The Fiction of Abundance and Awareness: Jeanette Winterson's *Lighthousekeeping*

1. Winterson talks about the dynamic universe and the power of art to move people out of stagnation towards new experience:

> I love the idea of a dynamic universe where nothing is static and everything is changing at every moment. … As people get older they have these rigid patterns that they impose on themselves, and it kills them. They become dull, they become dead to new experience, they become afraid, biased, and bigoted. It's simply to do with refusing new experience. I think art is always challenging you out of that refusal, challenging you towards

> the new, towards confrontations with the self and the world and with other ways of seeing. (Francone 2005)

2. Magic realism is characterized by "the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic, bizarre and skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the elements of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable" (Cuddon & Preston 2000: 135).
3. Renowned biologist Stephen J. Gould writes about the concept of the ladder of species and the role of fossils:

> I want to argue that the "sudden" appearance of species in the fossil record and our failure to note subsequent evolutionary change within them is the proper prediction of evolutionary theory as we understand it. Evolution usually proceeds by "speciation"—the splitting of one lineage from a parental stock—not by the slow and steady transformation of these large parental stocks. Repeated episodes of speciation produce a bush. Evolutionary "sequences" are not rungs on a ladder, but our retrospective reconstruction of a circuitous path running like a labyrinth, branch to branch, from the base of the bush to a lineage now surviving at its top. How does speciation occur? This is a perennial hot topic in evolutionary theory. (1977: 61–2)

4. Scholars have long suspected the influence of Darwin's ideas on Stevenson's novel, although Stevenson himself only cites a fantastic dream he had as the novel's source. It seems an obvious conclusion, however, that like most late Victorian intellectuals he was familiar with, if not haunted by, the possibility of humans' common ancestry with "apes." Some view his use of Darwin's phrase "the missing link" as proof of the influence (Creed 2009: 23).

7 *Hotel World*: A Symbiotic Narrative Space

1. Andrew Gibson assigns ethical significance to the "particular" in the novel: "the ethical power of a given novel is inseparable from its fusion of clearly defined category and vividly recorded particular ('an art of vivid essential record'). The particular is numinous, pregnant with a significance that both precedes and will outlast it and is not for an instant to be confused merely with the conventions of the language in which it is articulated" (1999: 56). Following Levinas, Gibson stresses the ethical role of fresh, nonessential perception of the other:

> Thus the ethical power of great fiction is inseparable from ontology on the one hand and cognition on the other … ethics cannot be constructed on a foundation of essences and is not a question of cognition. The ethical relation takes place in an immediate realm where the relation to or encounter with the other is antecedent to knowledge, and brings with it the burden of responsibility to the other. To proceed towards the other on the basis

> of what is deemed to be prior knowledge is at once to have neutralized an exterior complexity and liberty. (1999: 56)

Smith's "microcosmic particularity" affords us such a fresh perception of the other's complexity, and thus has ethical consequences of responsibility.

2. Smith's project in the novel resonates closely with Polk's "symbiotic understanding of difference" as he describes it:

> A symbiotic understanding of difference shatters the quick and easy defining lines traditionally used to demarcate sites of difference. In effect, it erases the hardened (ir)rational separations between one body and the next. It shifts the location of the old divisions which allows the fluid interactive relations between bodies to take on more importance. Perhaps our identity emerges not in some recovery of patriarchal privilege, but rather, from what has never been able to emerge into consciousness, from the relations that continually transpire and transfix the in-between-us-all. (2001: 89)

3. Josephine Donovan quotes an anecdote from Dorothy Wordsworth's life to illustrate the significance of what she calls "resisting the figuration of the literal":

> Homans gives another pertinent example of Dorothy's ability to resist figuration of the literal. In her journal of 1802 she follows for several days the fates of a pair of swallows who have built a nest by her window. Instead of turning their story into a metaphor for events in her own life (which would have been easy because the episode occurred in the period just prior to her brother's marriage, a traumatic event in Dorothy's life), she is concerned only with the swallows as swallows: "she convinces us by her long and minute observations of their behavior that the swallows have their own life quite apart from hers" (Homans 1986: 55). In short, unlike her brother, Dorothy "sees before she reads" and in this way corrects his tendency (and indeed the tendency of much Western literature) "to obliterate the image in favor of meaning" (Homans 1986: 63)—to impose a symbolic order upon the literal, the natural, denying its "thouness," killing it in order to exploit it for the signifying purposes of the author. To be interested in the swallows as swallows suggests that the swallows have a being that is valuable and worthy of attention. Such attention indicates respect; it validates the ontological status of the swallow. It acknowledges the swallow as "thou." (1996: 165–6)

4. N. Katherine Hayles explains the importance of embodiment:

> Appreciation of interactivity shatters the illusion of a transcendent rationality, forcing us to focus on the particulars of actual existence: interaction is possible only because we are embodied, and the precise conditions of our embodiment—which for humans include that portion of the electromagnetic spectrum which we utilize for sight, as well as our upright posture, grasping hands, binocular vision, and so forth, in conjunction with our individual and cultural contexts—have everything to do with the

> nature of those interactions and thus with how we construct our knowledge of the world. (1995: 56)

8 Getting Close: The Ecopoetics of Intimacy in Ali Smith's *Like*

1. One of the few confirmed, yet not described, events within the nine-year space between the two stories is the death of Ash's father, which caused the diaries to be sent to Amy's parents' address, and obviously the birth of Kate. An unconfirmed fact is whether Ash ever went to America as she was preparing to do.
2. James Bailey interprets Smith's use of the third person as revealing of Amy's traumatic past:

   > While Ash revisits and reclaims past events in her narrative, Amy, who is unable to speak of her early life following an incident of unspeakable trauma, is devoid of any such narratorial control. Accordingly, the third person, present tense narrative found in "Amy" (both characters' sections are eponymously titled) reflects its subject's inability to recall past experiences or construct a narrative identity of her own. It is only by reading Ash's narrative, therefore, that the otherwise unfathomable story behind Amy's distress begins to appear. Amy, the reader gradually infers, remains traumatised having surviving an arson attack inflicted upon her by Ash, and has had to emerge, in both a literal and figurative sense, from the ashes of the past to live again. (2010)

3. Carla Rodriguez Gonzalez argues that

   > *Like* presents both protagonists deciding to abandon their homelands in a moment of crisis, leaving in search of an opportunity to construct a new definition for their experience, and thus rejecting the space where their identities had been developed according to norms they would not recognise. Therefore, Ash leaves the strict morality and the intolerance of her northern town behind in search of an educated and liberal life in southern England, whereas Amy escapes her bourgeois environment, where she has struggled for an academic career, so as to enjoy anonymity and the tranquility of a small Scottish village by the sea. Such radical changes allow them to create a new web of identifications and transcend the local and class restriction of their former lives. (2008: 104)

4. My own path of reading the novel testifies to this experience. After several rereadings, and in preparation for writing this chapter, I contacted Ali Smith to make sure the ambiguities are indeed unresolved. She confirmed my interpretation, at the same time grounding my argument about the novel's intent to engage the reader: "… wanted to reassure you that it [the story's internal gap] is intentionally left open to the reader's imagination, and that each and every interpretation of the relationships in the book is valid" (Wylie Agency personal email). In the typical Ali Smith nonauthoritarian practice, multiple

readings are encouraged, none is excluded, and the reader creates his/her own version of the novel.

9 Stories That Change the World: Ali Smith's Ecological "Realityfiction"

1. In her website column introducing the writing of Ali Smith, Winterson writes:

   > I have to confess that I love Ali Smith's work because she is so ambitious for the form. There is little British fiction that tries to push the boundaries of prose writing. Most novels are content to tell the story in much the same way as it has always been told, and without a commitment to language. Ali Smith finds the short story form particularly seductive because it has to be so tight. There is no room for the endless slackness of ordinary prose. The form itself demands resolution, but it can be of an unconventional kind. She laments the fact the publishers are wary of short stories, and she laughs when she tells me that her publishers offered her a third more money if she would write a novel instead. "But if we all have the attention span of a gnat, shouldn't short stories be big business?" I ask. "No, because they are hard" says Smith. "They are closer to poetry in their demands. The easiest thing in the world is to read a blockbuster—you can skip and skim in a way that is impossible if every word counts." (www.jeanettewinterson.com)

2. Fludernik discusses Weinrich's model of tense, which distinguishes between "discussing vs. narrating: attention vs. relaxation, the present tense system vs. the past and attracts the reader's 'attention' even in a narrative context" (1993: 51). This is another way of alerting the reader to the change of narrative perspective and to the difference in the speakers' position.
3. Jennifer Hansen describes the "I" protagonist often used by Smith, as well as other contemporary women writers such as Winterson and Rebecca Brown, as "intentionally faceless, genderless, and nameless" (2005: 367). As such, Hansen argues, and I agree, the narrator cannot be defined and, consequently, objectified, "because we cannot generate a concept that distinguishes us from this character … , make this character into an object with clear boundaries … we are invited to occupy the space of the protagonist ourselves. We begin to experience the beloved and loving as the protagonist [the narrator] does" (2005: 367).
4. Both Fludernik and Richardson focus on the destabilizing value of the second-person narrative, where the boundary between the text and the reader is blurred: we are invited into the story; someone is speaking to us. Fludernik writes: "the second-person pronoun in its generic or generalized usage—which constitutes its major opening gambit, successfully steering the reader into the fictional world so oddly represented by the second person—always relies on the submerged deictic significance of the original address function of this pronoun, even where that deictic significance is then channeled into an enhancement of the reflectoral quality of the text" (1994: 468).

5. Fludernik writes: "As regards the second-person texts in the teller mode, their deictic properties are even more strongly in evidence both for their marked nature and their immediate affective quality. Thus you (like the present tense) is one of the attention-inducing features of the discussing mode in Weinrich's model: you always alerts the current listener to pay attention since he or she may be directly called upon to react. You, especially in languages with a familiar nondistanced you form, additionally tends to stimulate an aura of intimacy or closeness, adding even further to the effect of involvement and Betroffenheit" (1994: 469).
6. Copies of Smith's *Hotel World* had actually been scattered around the town of Brighton. When asked what she thought about the experiment, Smith responded:

> And what a wonderful scheme, to release books into the air, as it were, and let them find readers who do or don't take to them. But most of all in this I love the idea of books liberated (that good word you used) out of bookshops, in other words out of the market which decides the arbitrary worth of books, and waiting for readers to come randomly across them. I love, too, the inference of it all: it's as if someone peeled the roof back off a library and scattered books out into the world. It's as if the whole town is a kind of library, waiting to be read. Wonderful. (Jernigan 2004)

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