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Different Natures:
An Ecocritical Analysis of Selected Films by Terrence Malick, Werner Herzog and Sean Penn

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Humanity's relationship with nature has, in recent years, undoubtedly been one of contention and turmoil, an issue whose drama is gaining popularity in popular culture and, especially, film. In this dissertation I examine how these challenging human-nature relationships play out in Terrence Malick's *The New World*, Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* and *Encounters at the End of the World*, Sean Penn's *Into the Wild*, and the Jon Krakauer book, of the same title, upon which Penn's film is based. As one's views on nature (like all else) are mediated through language, using ecocritical principles slanted towards filmic, as opposed to written, texts, I provide a close examination of the ways in which these artists portray the relationship between language and nature, and the impact this has on our cultural and individual identities. I will also show how these primary texts make use of centuries-old Romantic aesthetics in order to humanise nature for moral ends. The primary texts agree that a large part of the problem in the poor relationship between humanity and nature is due to inadequate metaphors with which humanity views the earth. Thus, each artist promotes a certain kind of anthropomorphic understanding of nature which he believes is pivotal in encouraging better interconnections between humanity and nature. As a result, I provide a critique of the kinds of metaphors used by each respective artist, where some metaphors of nature may support or contradict a certain artist's aims in his portrayal of human-nature relationships.

Keywords

Terrence Malick; Werner Herzog; Sean Penn; Jon Krakauer; nature; film; documentary; ecocriticism; celluloid ecocriticism; ecofeminism; deep ecology; anthropocentrism; anthropomorphism; Romanticism; Gaia

Declaration

I declare this dissertation my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Karl van Wyk

8th of February, 2012

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Dedication

To my parents for giving me the love of art;
to Trevor with whom I share this love.

We do not see nature with our eyes,

but with our understandings and our hearts (Hazlitt 249).

Introduction

> For what is nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and only then, does it come into existence (Wilde 27).

What is Nature?

Nature is one of the greatest living poems. It is a poem because it lends itself to multiple and often controversial interpretations. It is living because, as I will argue, to treat it otherwise would be suicidal. The manner in which humanity treats and defines this living poem is an issue which has garnered increased attention in the last four decades in art, literary scholarship and science. However, humanity's attempt to define nature has consistently resulted in nature's tendency to slip away and evade definition, a reality which has led Raymond Williams to claim that nature "is perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language" (219). Indeed, the complexity of the word is showcased by the several problems which arise the instant we attempt to define it: *Is it possible to come to an objective definition of nature? Is it* necessary *to come to an objective definition of nature? Is it possible to live in harmony with nature? What does it mean to live in harmony with nature? Are humans a part of, or apart from, nature? If humans interfere with nature, does that mean nature can no longer be considered 'natural'?* These are some of the questions with which artists have grappled, especially, more recently, in film. Thus, it is with film's recent interest in humanity's relationship with nature that I will attempt to explore these questions by offering an ecocritical reading of Terrence Malick's *The New World*, Werner Herzog's documentaries *Grizzly Man* and *Encounters at the End of the World*, Sean Penn's *Into the Wild*, and Jon Krakauer's book, of the

same title, upon which Penn's film is based. It is expected, but not any less interesting because of it, that these artists present widely differing readings of nature, a perpetually elusive concept. Malick seems to be of the opinion that it is entirely possible to live a life in harmony with nature, while Herzog offers an antithetical view on the matter, demonstrating that it is wrong and dangerous to perceive nature as a safe haven from human culture. It is because of this that Herzog perceives nature as harsh, unmerciful and ugly. While Penn and Krakauer do not view nature to be as brutal as Herzog does, their respective texts certainly carry this warning, and come to the conclusion that one cannot know all of nature all of the time, especially when attempting to do so solitarily. Each artist valorises and promotes a certain perception of nature, with each definition of nature as contentious, puzzling and problematic as the next.

There are certainly several repercussions that arise when assigning a particular and idiosyncratic definition to 'nature', a consequence which does not escape the artists under scrutiny. Thus, when providing their own definition of nature, each artist also illustrates what it means to 'immerse oneself into nature', to 'live closer to nature', or, to use a phrase which appears throughout my dissertation, 'to establish better interconnections between humanity and nature'. These are phrases which are as difficult to define as nature itself, mainly because they rely on a definition of nature to make sense. One of the findings that presents itself in analysing these texts is that part of the difficulty in defining nature and all related terms comes from the fact that the definition of nature is culturally determined. Thus, in the process of providing a definition of nature, each culture does so by negotiating their placement on the nature-human continuum, if, indeed, we are to assume that nature and humans fall on opposite ends of the same scale. That we may conclude that nature is culturally determined comes mainly from the fact that every culture views nature in a different way. Take, for example, the Native American perception of nature when compared to the white American perception of nature, a point on which Luther Standing Bear, a Native American, comments:

> We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as 'wild.' Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame (38).

Luther Standing Bear, therefore, demonstrates that the interconnections between Native Americans and nature were far stronger than those between white colonial Americans and nature. In her book *What is Nature?*, Kate Soper provides an extensive and full account of the history of the perception of nature in western culture. One the major conclusions Soper reaches upon examining the trajectory of western perceptions of nature is that definitions of nature, while determined by culture, are simultaneously determined by changing times, as we find that while Karl Marx thought nature to be anything that remains untouched by human hands (Soper 18), a definition which becomes increasingly problematic as the earth's last unexplored spots rapidly disappear, the original pre-Socratic Greek definition of nature purported nature to be everything that existed (Naddaf 3). Coates highlights the problems of this original Greek definition of nature, stating that if we are to believe it,

> then, strictly speaking, nothing can be unnatural. However, the distinction between the natural and the unnatural (or artificial) is invariably made and, while nature has no conceptual opposite, we usually think of it as human culture. Indeed, without a concept of culture as the works of humankind, there can be no concept of nature (6).

It is Coates's last point which illustrates the futility in any attempt to define nature objectively. However, that nature is the central theme of this work necessitates some definition of nature for the purposes of pragmatism. It is for this reason that I will utilise the definition of nature provided by Raymond Williams, who defines nature in terms that are broad enough to be practical. Nature, according to Williams, is "what man has not made, though if he made it long enough ago – a hedgerow or a desert – it will usually be included as natural" (223). Thus, as Coates does, I will view humans and nature as two dichotomous entities, which may seem an imprudent assumption given that through the evolutionary process humans have, essentially, sprung from the loins of nature. However, Jonathan Bate is certain that the two entities must be considered as discrete, stating that "The difference [between humans and nature] is made by the very act of considering: to think and talk about our distinctiveness as a species is to mark our distinctiveness as a species" (*Song of the Earth* 243).

Many critics would disagree with this distinction between humanity and nature, which is most clearly seen in the substitute names critics assign to the term 'nature'. David Abram, throughout his book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, refers to nature as "more-than-human". Critics such as Cheryll Glotfelty, Gretchen Legler and George Sessions all refer to nature as "nonhuman" (xix; 72; 189). Regarding Abram's term "more-than-human", what I find problematic is that in an attempt to display his respect for nature, Abram's label can perhaps be read, ironically, as either patronising or *overly* respectful, undoing any intended reverence he has for it, a point which may also be applied to spelling nature with a capital 'N', as in 'Nature', as some critics are inclined to do. Further, the terms "more-than-human" and "nonhuman" (intentionally) imply that nature is more important than humanity, or, at the very least, that nature and humanity are equivalents. However, there is a problem in the manner in which these labels have both used "human" as their root word, which only reaffirms humanity as the ontological yardstick against which all life is measured, thereby predicating humanity as the centre of the universe, undoing any intention to advocate what was oppositely intended. It is for these reasons that I find the terms 'nonhuman' and 'more-than-human' to be unnecessary complications when the terms 'human' and 'nature' will do. Now that 'nature' has been defined and labelled, it is necessary, as this dissertation's central concern is the instances in which humanity and nature meet, to define those terms most central to these occurrences: anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism.

Buell provides a useful definition of anthropocentrism, stating that it is "The assumption or view that the interests of humans are of higher priority than those of nonhumans [or nature]" (*Environmental Criticism* 134). Anthropocentrism stands in direct contrast to biocentrism, which Buell defines as "The view that all organisms, including humans, are part of a larger biotic web or network or community whose interests must constrain or direct or govern the human interest" (*Environmental Criticism* 134). The next important term is anthropomorphism, which Buell defines as "The attribution of human feelings or traits to nonhuman beings or objects or natural phenomena" (*Environmental Criticism* 134). As one sometimes finds that the terms anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism are (incorrectly) used interchangeably, Buell provides a useful distinction between the two concepts:

> Anthropomorphism implies an anthropocentric frame of reference, but the two do not correlate precisely. For example, a poet's choice to personify a bird or tree might betoken … a projection of human desire to make nature sympathize with humankind; or, oppositely, it might be done in the interest of dramatizing the claims or plight of the natural world. Often, both motives are at play in, say, animal stories and animal folklore (*Environmental Criticism* 134).

In terms of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, I will argue that it is unavoidable and, rather than fighting against it (as some critics are inclined to do as I will attempt to show in the next chapter), may, in fact, help establish more practical interconnections between nature and humans. This is especially true of anthropomorphism, which, as it manifests itself most overtly in art, may be helpful in establishing a more accommodating and productive attitude towards nature precisely because, and not despite, that it allows us to translate nature into more relatable human terms. However, when anthropomorphising nature, it is apparent that nature may take on several human forms, some of which may be more helpful than others, as I will demonstrate in discussing the central texts of this dissertation. That is why asking the question *What is nature?* is the wrong kind of question and should rather be replaced by *Who is nature?* Indeed, one may find that no two portrayals of nature are alike when analysing each of the primary texts. However, before any such analysis may take place, and given that my aim is to use ecocriticism as a means of examining mostly filmic texts, it is important to note that an ecocriticism suited to the study of film remains underdeveloped. Thus, much of Chapter 1 will be concerned with the ways in which the utilisation of ecocriticism to analyse written texts may be modified to analyse filmic texts, and, in relation to this, the consequences of doing so, especially as it relates to anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. However, before I do this it is necessary to provide a brief description of each of the texts I will be studying.

Terrence Malick's *The New World* takes place in Virginia in 1607 and begins as British sailors, led by Captain Christopher Newport, set foot on the New World in order to establish a colony. Captain John Smith, who begins the film imprisoned in Newport's ship, is given a chance to repair his reputation by being sent to live with the Native Americans for the purposes of establishing political and financial links with them.

However, Smith is captured and almost killed by the Algonquian leader, Chief Powhatan, father of Pocahontas. It is Pocahontas who saves Smith's life, and, in the aftermath, the two fall in love. Recognising this as a betrayal of her people, Chief Powhatan disowns his daughter in which case the British take her in and baptise her Rebecca. Due to the changes Pocahontas has undergone, Smith senses his relationship with her has changed for the worse, and, as a result, leaves Virginia and fakes his own death, which devastates the Algonquian Princess. Remaining in Virginia, Pocahontas then falls in love with John Rolfe, who owns a tobacco plantation. The couple move to England where they raise their son, Thomas, and Pocahontas is greeted by the English with open arms. Soon after her arrival, however, Pocahontas dies, at which point the film ends.

Unlike Malick's *The New World*, both of Werner Herzog's documentaries lack any kind of plot, and can, therefore, be summarised even more briefly than Malick's narrative. Herzog's *Grizzly Man* documents the life and death of American environmentalist Timothy Treadwell, who, as the film explains, spent the last thirteen summers of his life in Alaska in an attempt to protect its grizzly bear inhabitants, until he and his girlfriend at the time, Amie, die from a grizzly bear attack. Herzog mixes original film with Treadwell's own documentary footage as evidence to support his argument that Treadwell's perception of nature was unrealistically edenic, which played a large part in determining Treadwell's death at the hands of the bears he tried to protect.

The human relationship with nature also takes centre stage in Herzog's documentary *Encounters at the End of the World*. Herzog sets his film in Antarctica, spending some time in McMurdo Station, a small town comprised almost entirely of scientists and researchers. However, much of the film takes place in the Antarctic wilderness where Herzog films the landscape in ways that accentuate its sublime qualities, while also gaining a sense of the ways in which these scientists and researchers interact with their environment.

Lastly, there is Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* and the Jon Krakauer novel upon which it is based, which portrays the "true" story of Chris McCandless, a young American adult who set out for Alaska in the early 1990s but was found dead in the Alaskan wilderness in 1992. The film is told in a disjointed fashion and is structured much like a classic American road trip narrative in which the protagonist, while journeying to discover

himself, meets interesting characters along the way who influence and discuss the protagonist's motives. Both the film and the book depict McCandless's relationship with his parents as broken, which both texts give as the reason for McCandless's decision to destroy every trace of his identity in the human world, give up all his material possessions, and trek across America to Alaska, where he eventually went to settle. Upon reaching Fairbanks, Alaska, however, McCandless struggled to find food, may have accidentally ingested poisonous plants, and died soon thereafter (Penn; Krakauer).

It is clear, then, that all the texts I have selected are intent on describing attitudes towards nature that the artists I have selected either share with the protagonists depicted in their texts, or are vehemently opposed to what they would perceive as flawed attitudes towards nature. In the following chapter I will be providing a description and discussion of the theoretical framework I will be using in reading these texts.

Chapter 1
Ecocriticism: An Introduction

> Right now, as I see it, environmental criticism is in the tense but enviable position of being a wide-open movement still sorting out its premises and its powers (Buell *Environmental Criticism* 28).

Defining Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is commonly defined as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii). As one of the newest forms of literary criticism to emerge at the end of the twentieth century, ecocriticism was formalised as a literary theory in the late 1970s amidst concerns of human-induced environmental degradation, which has forced humans, especially artists, to re-evaluate their relationship with nature. Ecocriticism has since grown in areas previously untouched by literary theory. However, despite significant development within the last thirty years, ecocriticism still exhibits great potential for further growth and cultivation (Harrington and Tallmadge xv). An example of this would be the paucity of ecocritical theory which considers film as a medium of study. What would ecocriticism look like if tailored to the representation of nature in film, as opposed to the representation of nature in written text? How does representing nature in film inform or modify existing ecocritical premises? Further, and what is most important regarding the core concerns of this dissertation, how might film influence our theorisation of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism? These are some of the questions that will be considered for this dissertation, and this chapter more specifically. Certainly, ecocriticism has branched out into several factions, such as ecofeminism and deep ecology, both of which will be discussed in this chapter. However, to determine other ways in which ecocriticism may

develop, it is important that one is aware of ecocriticism's origins, and that I provide an evaluation and critique of these origins.

William Rueckert, the first to coin the term 'ecocriticism' in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (originally published in 1978), but by no means the first ecocritic, developed this landmark literary theory as a means to "experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (107). However, Rueckert's version of ecocriticism differs on quite a fundamental level when compared to how ecocriticism is currently used and understood. Rueckert seemed more concerned with reading texts *as* ecosystems, rather than reading texts *about* ecosystems, which is how ecocriticism is, to a large extent, practised today. Rueckert's main premise is that texts and humans create a kind of literary ecosystem, one in which poetry specifically acts as an infinite energy source from which culture is manifested: Rueckert claims that poems "help to create creativity and community, and when their energy is released and flows out into others, to again raise matter from lower to higher order" (111).

However, Rueckert's original conceptualisation of ecocriticism still shares commonalities with ecocriticism in its modern form. Rueckert was able to realise the importance of the pressing environmental matters that were, and still are, unavoidably linked to his theory: "[M]an's tragic flaw is his anthropocentric (as opposed to biocentric) vision, and his compulsion to conquer, humanise, domesticate, violate, and exploit every natural thing. The ecological nightmare … is of a monstrously overpopulated, almost completely polluted, all but totally humanised planet" (113). It is, thus, the literary representation of the interconnectedness between humanity and nature, and the examination of humanity's treatment of nature, which are among the main thrusts behind ecocriticism, both in its early and current conceptualisations. As the Rueckert quote suggests, anthropocentrism should be avoided (113), but there is no clear and definite consensus amongst ecocritics and environmentalists as to the validity of this argument, with some ecocritics arguing that humans can only ever place their needs first, and others arguing more biocentrically and stating that the importance of nature outweighs the importance of humanity (Buell *Environmental Criticism* 97-98). Thus, Rueckert laid the foundation for a new and relevant literary theory to which ideas and principles have

since been added, subtracted and modified. However, despite how contemporary formulations of ecocriticism differ from Rueckert's initial views of the term (such as present-day ecocritics developing a literary theory to study nature, rather than using nature to study texts), one of the few principles that remain constant is, in relation to anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, an earnest concern for the bettering of the relationship between humanity and nature, where human perceptions and interpretations of nature play a significant role in determining the success of this relationship (Kern 267). In ecocriticism's current guise, most present-day ecocritics use principles of ecology in order to examine the relationship between humanity and nature in text, a task that may be apparent in the very name of the theory: 'ecocriticism'.

The word 'ecocritic' is a portmanteau derived from the unification of the words 'ecology', derived from the Greek, *oikos*, meaning 'household', and 'critic', derived from the Greek, *kritis*, meaning 'judge' (Snyder 23; Howarth 69), which, as Howarth explains, signifies that we may think of an ecocritic as one who "'judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action'" (69). Howarth's definition of an ecocritic is *nearly* completely correct as it omits some vital information. If we are to believe Gary Snyder's supposition that ecology refers to "the study of biological interrelationships and the flow of energy through organisms and inorganic matter" (23), then an ecocritic, basing her or his theory on ecology, must study the textual representation of the ways nature affects culture, culture affects culture, and nature affects nature. Thus, Howarth's definition of an ecocritic as one who studies the "effects of culture upon nature", while true, is too narrow. Ecocriticism, then, recognises the interconnections between nature and culture and the ability of both to influence the other and itself. To represent the interconnections between nature and culture otherwise would be a disservice to the multiplicitous quality of the relationship between the two, an argument with which many ecocritics would agree. However, there are certainly some aspects of ecocriticism which make apparent the divide that exists in this budding literary theory, hence the existence of first-wave and second-wave ecocriticism.

First- and second-wave ecocriticism's differing theoretical standings can be verified in their contrasting use of the term 'environment'. Without acknowledging anything that lies outside of nature, first-wave ecocriticism takes 'environment' to mean *only* 'natural environment', which, as a result of ecocriticism's green endeavours, means that, even more so than second-wave ecocriticism, first-wave ecocriticism places a greater emphasis on the preservation and protection of the natural environment, and achieves these goals particularly through political action (Howarth 69). However, second-wave ecocriticism, in addition to observing the natural environment that has become a preoccupation of first-wave ecocriticism, casts its gaze on the human places that are comprised of concrete, tar, power stations and air-conditioning, while also taking into consideration the traces of nature in urban settings (Goodbody 12). Considering its political agenda, second-wave ecocriticism focuses on "displaced peoples and environmental racism" (Goodbody 13), which, briefly, as defined by Buell, refers to the "toxification of local environments and the siting of waste dumps and polluting industries that discriminate against poor and otherwise disempowered communities, particularly minority communities" (Buell *Environmental Criticism* 141-42).

When compared to first-wave ecocriticism, second-wave ecocriticism, if read in anthropocentric terms, takes a balanced and more realistic approach to human-nature relationships by considering the symbiotic, as well as parasitic, interaction of both humanity and nature, and recognises that neither of the two exist entirely independent of each other. Thus, *first*-wave ecocriticism presents itself as being anti-anthropocentric (or, perhaps even biocentric) by condemning any harmful human interference in the natural world, and prioritises the needs and protection of the natural environment over humans and the human environment. Whether or not it is feasible, or even possible, to take such an extreme biocentric approach will be examined in more detail when discussing deep ecology.

However, one must not look at first- and second-wave ecocriticism as two diametrically opposed ideologies as they do share common ground in, firstly, their concern for the well-being of the environment, and, secondly, from a literary perspective, for "what superficially seems an old-fashioned propensity for 'realistic' modes of representation, and a preoccupation with questions of factical accuracy of environmental representa-

tion" (Buell *Environmental Criticism* 31). This favouring of literary biological verisimilitude is used by many ecocritics as a means of promoting a green consciousness, which leads some ecocritics to believe that "ecocriticism's progress hinges significantly if not crucially on its becoming more science-literate" (Buell *Environmental Criticism* 14). Relatedly, in Rueckert's 1978 essay, in which he defines the term 'ecocriticism', Rueckert asks the following:

> How does one engage in responsible creative and cooperative biospheric action as a reader, teacher (especially this), and critic of literature? I think that we have to begin answering this question and that we should do what we have always done: turn to the poets. And then to the ecologists (113).

Rueckert certainly recognises the importance of science in a literary theory that would be far less successful without it, given that ecocriticism's goal is to critique the manner in which both humans and nature may live successfully in the world. Indeed, ecocriticism has certainly benefited from science as science debunks destructive myths and overt and indisputable inaccuracies in humans' perceptions of the interaction of humanity and nature, "such as that people were meant to exercise dominion over nature, or that nature is a passive receptacle of the fertilizing human mind" (Newman 2). However, Rueckert is also right in recognising that ecocriticism must first be considered a literary theory before it is considered a theory reliant on science, and must critique art before it does science. As Buell shows, "the terms of scientistic discourse have significant implications for environmental criticism of literature but do not serve as an authoritative model. The discourses of science and literature must be read both with and against each other" (*Environmental Criticism* 19). Thus, when Rueckert states that if ecocriticism is to work as a literary theory, and that we should first turn to art before science, he is not necessarily implying that we must prioritise art over science. While it is important that ecocriticism critique art before it does science (as it is first a *literary* theory), it must not *value* art over science, or vice versa, given that the strength of ecocriticism comes in its equal reliance on both. Art, then, as it is mostly in the business of anthropomorphising nature, and science, as it often purports to avoid any kind of anthropomorphisation of nature, may seem to be mutually exclusive and unable to occupy equal space in the same theory. However, as I will demonstrate and argue for throughout this dissertation, both science and art are needed in equal measure if we are to come to, firstly, success-

fully critique texts' anthropomorphic understanding of the interaction of humanity and nature, and, secondly, have a greater care for nature overall.

Including science and art, part of that which forms the theoretical foundation of ecocriticism is its conceptualisation of place and space. The environment is perceived and treated in most literature as something incidental, an obvious necessity in all narratives that is often taken for granted by writers and theorists alike. Eudora Welty, in her essay, "Place in Fiction", draws attention to the manner in which place is neglected in literature: "Place is one of the lesser angels that watch [sic] over the racing hand of fiction, perhaps the one that gazes benignly enough from off to one side, while others, like character, plot, symbolic meaning, and so on, are doing a good deal of wing-beating about her chair, and feeling, who in my eyes carries the crown, soars highest of them all and rightly relegates place into the shade" (116). Ecocriticism aims to rectify this by recognising the reality of place in text. Thus, ecocritics treat place as that which we should critique and analyse, as opposed to regarding it in such a manner that it becomes forgotten in the subconscious of literature.

Reading place in ecosystemic terms, ecocriticism emphasises that all living entities exist not only in a reciprocal relationship with each other, but with their nonliving environment as well. We would be nowhere without place, and ecocriticism sets out to give a place to place in fiction, especially by valuing the role place has unselfishly played in many great works of fiction. Is it possible to appreciate *The Grapes of Wrath* without being aware of the grave emptiness of a land, the Dust Bowl, that is no longer able to bear the means of supporting human life, which leaves the Joad family with little choice except to trek across the American south (Steinbeck)? Would E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* be held in the same high regard had it not been for the author's acute awareness and care in his descriptions of his fictional Indian city, Chandrapore, and, specifically, the Marabar Caves? When Adela Quested experiences her modernist existential trauma in the emptiness of the caves, the author elevates place in the reader's consciousness as a device capable of having as much impact on the characters as the characters may have on each other (Forster). The issue of place also plays a significant role in Wordsworth's writings on the Lake District to such a great extent that it is has allowed critics such as Jonathan Bate to claim that not only is Wordsworth a poet attempting to foreground his

environment, but that the extent to which he does this, and the ethical slant with which he handles the portrayal of the land, allows us to view him as "one of the begetters of environmentalism" (*Song of the Earth* 139). Hardy's Wessex is another prime example of a place, complete with a map, which shows how the author is "intensely responsive to the natural world and human relations with that world" (Kerridge "Ecological Hardy" 126). Wessex is quite famously featured in the novel *Far From the Madding Crowd*, where, in the novel's preface, Hardy describes it as a "partly real, partly dream-country" (4), which, despite this description, is nonetheless a place which feels just as fully realised as its characters. But what is place, and how does ecocriticism deal with the theoretical minutiae of the concept of place in literature? Many ecocritics look to Aristotle, one of the first theoreticians of place, to develop and expand their own understanding of how place affects, and is affected by, people, and how place may work in literature.

Aristotle asserts that everything has a natural place, and for humans "It is clear then that the state [or city] is … natural … to the individual" (61). It is from this ancient statement that we may see how far ecocriticism's definition of place has come. Reading this in terms of second-wave ecocriticism, we notice that Aristotle's definition of place, and of the city specifically, is far too limited as it does not account for the porous makeup of the city in which, as second-wave ecocriticism claims, nature cannot always be escaped. Aristotle's definition also implies a kind of separation between humanity and nature, a separation which Aristotle characterises as appropriate. Modern forms of ecocriticism, then, recognise that nature is untidy and far-reaching, and, because of this, humans' relationship with nature is inevitable. It does not help in believing that there are sanctuaries in which humanity can escape nature as this does not assist in the development in understanding more accurately the true characterisation of humans' relationship with nature, and, more specifically, how humans are placed in nature.

Ecocriticism recognises the gravity of place to the extent that the theorisation behind it forms an integral part of ecocriticism's core. Places, from an ecocritical perspective, are environments to which human value has been assigned, and are, therefore, strongly associated, and defined, by their connection to human culture (Larsen 349). Thus, it is humans, by definition, that construct and define a place as a place, the consequences of

which explain the inevitable and heightened emotional connection humans tend to have with places: "a place is concrete and particular. … A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered, enjoyed, or avoided" (Walter 142). While humans are the only species, by definition, that can define a place, we must not forget that humans also rely on the natural world to define a place. Thus, when Adela Quested, in Forster's *A Passage to India*, encounters her existential crisis in the Marabar Caves, the environment is given a meaning, a definition and a characterisation which it did not have before. It is the natural architecture of the caves, their hollowness and emptiness which echoes sounds which reflect the visitor back onto herself, which allows Adela Quested to view the caves as something frightening (Forster). Place, therefore, does not lie, anthropocentrically, in the hands of humans alone, but may, at times, be reliant on the natural environment to assist humans in defining it.

The definition of place possesses some premises which lie in contrast to the definition of space. Space, however, does not require place to exist (Buell *Environmental Criticism* 145). Anthropocentrically, space is an empty place. Space is place without any assigned human meaning (Carter, Donald and Squires xii). However, despite being untouched by human definition, space is able to impact on humans politically. An example of this can be seen in the act of colonisation, as Buell shows: "In colonisation of the hinterlands of the US, Australia, and elsewhere, the concept of *terra nullius* – the land as 'empty' or pure space – was historically used as a pretext for conquest and denial of aboriginal land rights" (*Environmental Criticism* 147), of which the same can be said of the historical use of the terms *terra incognita* and 'virgin land' (Buell *Environmental Criticism* 149; Kolodny 7). In other words, "What the first European settlers of North America saw as primordial or 'empty' space, and what their descendants persist in thinking of as 'wilderness,' has been somebody's else's place since the first humans arrived millennia before – and much longer than that, if we allow nonhumans to count as 'somebodies'" (Buell *Environmental Criticism* 67). Thus, there is a kind of selective anthropocentrism at play here in which colonising humans are willing to respect the integrity of an environment only to justify their changing of a place's definition. Similarly, one must also be made aware of the biological insensitivity that comes with the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic attitudes when defining an environment as a place or space. When humans define an environment, it is humans' preoccupations that

are used to determine how an environment may be conceived as space or place. This is an act which some ecocritics would see as problematic, especially considering that within this attitude towards the environment is a disregard for the fact that the environment is also a free and self-regulating entity that is able to exist independent of human interference. This also happens to be one of the kinds of qualities of a text that lends itself to an ecocritical reading, and is a quality that is valorised by ecocritics when implemented by an artist. Certainly, there are other factors which determine how well a text lends itself to an ecocritical reading, and Buell expands upon the one just mentioned, and also provides three other such factors.

Buell prefaces these qualities by stating that "broad sweep and cranky hyperfocus" are the twin engines driving the reasons behind his creation of this list (*Environmental Imagination* 7). Specifically, Buell's justification of these points is based on his observation of (mostly nonfiction) texts from what he calls the "American literary renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century" which included authors such as Henry David Thoreau, James Fenimore Cooper and his daughter, Susan Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Mark Twain (6). However, this does not mean that Buell does not recognise the occurrence of environmental texts in other parts of the world. Indeed, Buell's points are, in fact, global, as he states that "In the Cold War era, ecocide was always a more serious threat than nuclear destruction. In literary history since World War II, the resurgence of environmental writing is as important as the rise of magical realist fiction" (7). Buell, when referring to these criteria, provides many examples from English Romanticism and early twentieth-century Anglo-Indian literature to illustrate these points (7-8). In the four qualities of what Buell calls environmental texts, which are texts that easily lend themselves to an ecocritical reading, the first quality is that "*The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history*" (7 author's italics). Robert Kern provides a point that is similar, but not the same, as Buell's, stating that one of the primary tasks of the ecocritic is to "read in such a way as to amplify the reality of the environment in or of a text, even if in doing so we resist the tendency of the text itself (or of our own conditioning as readers) to relegate the environment to the status of setting" (260). Thus, where Buell's premise looks only to texts in which the environment is treated more than merely setting, Kern shows that elevating

the environment in a text is the responsibility of both author and critic alike. Thus, while nature is usually presented as a backdrop in most texts, and while most critics treat it as such, in environmental texts, and in the minds of ecocritics, nature has the power to influence the lives of characters on an individual, cultural and national level. An example of a text in which this occurs is Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. In this novel the control of people comes as a result of controlling the geographical qualities of the land as well.

The second criterion, as stated by Buell, is that "*The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest*" (*Environmental Imagination* 7 author's italics). Here, Buell is referring to texts in which concern and sympathy is given towards nature, and, in most cases, animals. It is also a view that is held by ecocritic Michael McDowell, who shows that one of the ways this can be achieved in fictional texts is by, quite literally, the author's assignation of voices to both the human characters and nature, and to allow these voices to play against each other, thereby exploring the different ways in which the relationship between nature and humanity may be evaluated (385-86). It is in this way that, by providing her equestrian protagonist with human speech, Anna Sewell allows Black Beauty to become as full-blooded as her human characters. In so doing, we are able to realise that humans share a planet with a plethora of other species attempting to survive with the same tenacity as we are (Sewell).

The third quality of an environmental text is that "*Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation*" (Buell *Environmental Imagination* 7 author's italics). Buell is referring to a sense of awareness on the part of the author that characters' actions on the environment have moral implications, as opposed to texts which treat human action on the environment with ambivalence. Buell's point may be illustrated by Blake in his "Auguries of Innocence" as he proclaims "A Robin Red Breast in a Cage / Puts all Heaven in a Rage" (5-6).

Buell's fourth and final criterion for an environmental text is that "*Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text*" (*Environmental Imagination* 8 author's italics). This refers to environmental texts which are sensitive to the environment's dynamic persona, as it were. Thus, it treats the environment just as it would its human characters in terms of its growth, development

and responsiveness to stimuli. This is certainly the case of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, in which the reader is briefly given a sense of an environment that was once able to comfortably sustain humanity, but has now turned into a drab and grey husk.

Buell's list of qualities in texts which lend themselves to an ecocritical reading is helpful as it provides consolidation and order, allowing discussions of such texts to be more productive. It is for this reason that I will make reference to this list as a basis for the texts I will be discussing. However, one of the dangers of constructing such a list is reading it prescriptively, thereby limiting the manner in which texts that do not fit these criteria can be read, a point recognised by Buell (*Environmental Imagination* 8), and also by Kern (260). Kern states that ecocriticism "becomes reductive when it simply targets the environmentally incorrect, or when it aims to evaluate texts solely on the basis of their adherence to ecologically sanctioned standards of behaviour" (260). By implication, Kern makes the point that we are still able to find value in texts which deviate from these qualities. Thus, while such a list may prove useful in my analysis, my aim is not merely to read my selected texts by evaluating them *against* this list, but to read them *alongside* this list. However, seeing that the primary texts to which I will refer are mostly filmic texts, it is imperative that we understand the implications, if there are any, of applying these principles to other media, in this case, film.

Ecocriticism and Film

Ecocriticism is a theory used mostly in the analysis of written texts, be they fiction or non-fiction. As a result, the application of ecocriticism to other artistic media, film in particular, has been lacking: "Rarely has cinema in general been viewed through an ecocritical lens, nor has there been much evidence in the main venues of ecocriticism of the sustained application of ecocritical strategies to film and cinema studies" (Ivakhiv 1). However, even though it is apparent that with critics such as Ivakhiv giving prominence to the use of ecocritical principles in studying filmic texts, the range of films that have been selected for such an analysis has been narrow, with critics concentrating mostly on films that "portray nature and its defenders positively" (Ivakhiv 1). Films

such as *Gorillas in the Mist* (Apted), *Never Cry Wolf* (Ballard) and *Erin Brockovich* (Soderbergh) fit such a description (Ivakhiv 1). Certainly, ecocriticism praises positive representations of nature in written texts, but Ivakhiv shows that reading *only* these qualities in texts, written or filmic, does a disservice both to the text being studied and the theory used to analyse that text (7). When giving an ecocritical reading of a *written* text, one observes the manner in which the environment is portrayed, to what degree the characters and the author exhibit anthropocentric characteristics (and to what degree this may be seen as advantageous to our understanding of humans' relationship with nature), how human characters act upon, and react to, the environment, how the characters and authors use place and space, how, and to what degree, nature is anthropomorphised, and so forth. These are the same qualities which ought to be observed when giving an ecocritical reading of a film. However, we must be aware that these tropes may actualise themselves differently when presented in a different medium such as film.

To begin with, it is important to understand the ontology of film, and the effects of seeing an image on screen, especially images of nature. Film's moving images are complex manifestations of photographic images; films, in essence, are a series of photographs presented in a manner in which the illusion of movement is created. Thus, in analysing the ontology of filmic images, it is imperative that we observe the basic unit of filmic images: the photograph. To begin with the obvious: a photograph is a *representation* of the thing that is depicted in the photograph. A photograph is not the thing itself. When we look at a photograph we are seeing things not present; we see things that are not *here now*, and observe representations of images that were *there then* (Cavell 23). All of this is true for film as well. However, there is one clear difference between the medium of film and the medium of photography. The main factor that distinguishes film from photography is film's illusion of a 'moving image', and photography's lack thereof. Further, in a film, the screen acts as a barrier between the audience member and the world depicted on screen, to which the audience member is invisible (Cavell 24). Thus, as when we think of a painting, the screen acts as a frame in that it provides limits on the world depicted (Cavell 24). This may have interesting consequences for the anthropomorphic depiction of nature on film.

When reading in written text about a horse, it is left to the reader to offer her own idea of what the horse looks like (provided no pictures accompany the text). When viewing a horse on screen, it is as if the horse becomes literalised for the viewer. This does not mean, however, that the horse depicted on screen is innocent of any kind of anthropomorphisation. It is apparent that the camera angle, soundtrack, the framing of the image, the colour palette, the movement of the camera, and so forth, are all contributing to the manner in which we view the horse, and is, therefore, not a horse divorced from deliberate human representation. It is a horse based on human interpretation. Thus, when giving an ecocritical reading of a filmic text, issues such as anthropomorphism are at play with consequences that must be considered in relation to the medium in which it is presented. Also, the appearance nature takes on film may be more potently anthropocentric when compared to its appearance in written text as the moving image gives one the impression of being more convincing and realistic. This may be because the thing being depicted on film is similar (in some respects) to the way in which we may view it in real life. The consequence of this is that the viewer may be more inclined to believe that she has exercised full control over nature, that she has, in some way, captured the essence of nature, a flawed belief given the high degree of manipulation and management that is present in every frame of every film. Thus, issues such as anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism are apparent in both written and filmic texts, but mould themselves to the medium in which they are presented, forcing us to analyse them accordingly.

If ecocriticism is to lend itself to the medium of film, another major trope that must be studied is the environment. Martin Lefebvre provides helpful definitions of setting and landscape as it pertains to film, showing, specifically, how the two differ. Landscape, as defined by Lefebvre, refers to an environment that is "*freed from eventhood*" (22 author's italics). Landscape refers to an environment to which no human meaning has been assigned. This is much like ecocriticism's conceptualisation of space, which refers to an environment humanity has not yet defined. Setting, however, especially as it pertains to film, refers to "the place where the action or events occur" (Lefebvre 21), which, as we have seen with the definition of landscape, is quite closely linked to the ecocritical definition of place, which, contrasted to the definition of space, is an environment which has been given human meaning. Thus, in theorising about the

environment, using ecocritical principles to analyse written texts and applying these principles to filmic texts is not an impossible academic pursuit. Further, when discussing issues pertaining to the environment, it is apparent that when comparing both kinds of media one uses terms that differ only in name and not in meaning.

In most examples of mainstream cinema, Lefebvre makes us aware, films relegate landscape to a backdrop to the action taking place (24). Notable exceptions to this in popular cinema include films such as *Lawrence of Arabia* (Lean), *Watership Down* (M. Rosen), *WALL·E* (Stanton), and *Blade Runner* (Scott). In Scott's *Blade Runner*, particularly, the director makes frequent use of lingering long-shots in which the human characters are dwarfed within their environment, implying, among other things, that the environment is unavoidably implicated in human existence, and will serve, to some degree, as a determining factor in the lives of the characters who inhabit it. These examples, however, are not representative of the whole of mainstream cinema in which landscape becomes subservient to the purposes of narrative, and where no reference is made to the interconnected and reciprocal relationship between the two, or between landscape and the human and animal characters that are displayed on the screen. Allowing the environment to be as equally important as the characters in the film is rarely seen in cinema. When this occurs, the environment moves from the background to the foreground, an occurrence to which Lefebvre refers as the autonomy of the landscape, which occurs in at least two ways in cinema (30; 51).

The first way in which the landscape can become, as Lefebvre puts it, autonomous, relies on the spectator's gaze, whereby, be it for a brief moment, the spectator recognises the landscape as separate from the narrative event (Lefebvre 30). The second way in which a landscape can become autonomous is through the cinematographic medium, whereby landscapes are filmed in a manner which wilfully divorces them from the narrative (Lefebvre 51). Time, it seems, is what determines the autonomy of a landscape, as autonomous landscapes, when represented in film, are subject to the temporality of the spectator's gaze as well as the temporality of the cinematographic medium. Landscapes remain autonomous for as long as the spectator recognises the landscape as autonomous while the particular scene lasts, and for as long as the camera wishes to have the landscape appear autonomous. Thus, if we are to distinguish an ecocriticism of written text

from an ecocriticism of filmic text, especially as it pertains to the artistic representation of the environment, then what we find is that both favour texts in which the environment is elevated in the reader's (or viewer's) consciousness.

When representing the environment on film, it appears that what concerns the ecocritic is not only the issue of whether or not the environment is given as much importance as the human characters, but also the issue of the authenticity of the environment that is being represented on film. All films, fiction or non-fiction, occur in some place, within some setting. Some films choose to, or are able to, use the real location depicted in the film, such as the Amazon jungle in Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*. However, I would imagine a director aiming to shoot her films on location would encounter great logistical problems if her story is set on, say Pluto, or in the human mind. Disregarding places that are difficult, or impossible, for a film crew to film, there are certainly instances, perhaps for aesthetic or economic reasons, that a director may choose to film, not in the actual location represented in the film's narrative, but in a location similar to it. Certainly, Ivakhiv states that substituting one location for another may elevate the place that is used in the film by providing jobs for the people who live there, and one may value "that particular landscape for the qualities which it may share with the landscape being referred *to*" (23 author's italics). However, Gayton points out that swapping locations, which Terrence Malick did in his *Days of Heaven*, whereby the narrative's setting, Texas, was substituted for Alberta, Canada (Morrison and Schur 60), reduces the non-real location being filmed to a product that can be purchased at the director's will (8). However, while Malick may have substituted one environment for another, it would be difficult to accuse Malick of doing this out of any disrespect for either the environment in which he shot his film, or for the one in which he did not shoot his film but was depicted in the narrative anyway. One of the achievements of Malick's film (or any other Malick film for that matter) is that he managed to give as much voice to the setting as he did the human characters. Gayton's point that directors should use the actual location should therefore be treated as a preference rather than an obligation, especially if the environment being filmed is, as Ivakhiv shows "capable of 'transporting' viewers in ways that other media are not, and can thereby elevate viewers' appreciation for the things and activities depicted" (Ivakhiv 24), thereby reducing the anthropocentrisation that may be present in the film.

That some films are able to elevate nature and the environment may be so, but Ivakhiv also makes us aware how notoriously non-eco-friendly the production of films may be, explaining that films' "reliance on a complex and integrated array of producers, artists, agents, actors, marketers, et al., an immense and sophisticated technological apparatus, colossal sums of money and capital, and the consumption of tremendous material resources (and production of waste) is unparalleled in all the arts" (22). This raises the likely possibility of the counterproductivity that may accompany films with the most honourable eco-friendly and anti-anthropocentric intentions. One would assume that a film with green intentions would exhibit a greater awareness of the logistical undertaking of its storytelling as it may contribute to the very ecological problems its narrative condemns, the effect of which is a polluted film disguised in green film's clothing (which may not necessarily be intentional, of course). However, the establishment of organisations such as the Environmental Media Association, founded in the 1980s to encourage more eco-friendly means of film production in Hollywood, and the Shambhala Ranch, founded for the protection of animals used in Hollywood films, aims at creating a more eco-conscious Hollywood (Ivakhiv 23).

Certainly, films with an increased eco-conscience may be evaluated not only in terms of their production value, but also in the manner in which the camera is used. Indeed, Ingram shows that we must be sensitive to representing nature in film as it may result in the domination of nature from the spectator (31-32). This may result from, either, the idea that the camera is inherently a domineering construct, or by the context of the film image (Ingram 31-32). Susan Sontag raises a similar point by explaining how the camera acts as a mechanism of domination (4). Using Sontag's argument and applying it to the act of filming nature, Ross shows that "camera technology can perhaps be seen as an embodiment of what ecologists have called the rationalist project of mastering, colonising, and dominating nature; a project whose historical development now threatens the global ecology with an immediacy that is all the more ironically apparent to us through those very 'images of ecology' that have become standard media atrocity fare in recent years" (173). Thus, Ross implies that it is particularly harmful when images of nature are depicted on film as it allows the viewer to read nature as a passive object of scrutiny that is at the mercy of the director's camera and, subsequently, the viewer's gaze. With nature cast in this light, it becomes easier for the director to read nature as she sees fit.

The consequence of this, in terms of anthropocentrism, and, especially, anthropomorphism, is that it presents a view of nature that is never innocent of interpretation and meaning. Nature can never, simply, be. That directors assign meaning onto nature can easily be seen in the fact that, for example, nearly all films about sharks depict these creatures as brutal monsters.

As the above discussion suggests, reading nature anthropomorphically is a characteristic not only of fiction films, but of documentary films as well. That most documentary films present footage, except footage that has clearly been re-enacted, as factual, may be so, but this does not exempt documentary films from manipulating images which may reflect the anthropocentric preoccupations of its director. Thus, when nature documentaries present nature to its audience, it may become apparent that what is being depicted is every bit a construction as a fiction film (Armbruster 231). One can never capture the truth of nature. An example of the manner in which nature documentarians manipulate images to depict a certain *kind* of nature can be seen in the contrasting depictions of Japanese macaques in the documentaries *Baraka* (Fricke) and *Life* (Morris). In *Baraka*, the macaques are portrayed as tranquil and peaceful creatures. However, *Life* paints a different picture, revealing a complex social system based on clear and distinct hierarchies. Those at the top of the hierarchy wallow in the warm spring of the Japanese Alps, whilst those at the bottom of the hierarchy have to sit on the outskirts of the pool and bear the icy weather. When the outcast macaques try to enter the warmth of the pool that those in command are enjoying they are met with hostility and violence, which reaffirms each member's position on the hierarchy.

We cannot, therefore, view nature documentaries as a means of giving their viewer nature in its pure form. Documentary films select and manipulate information for the purposes of giving a specific argument about nature driven by the choices of its director, a point better articulated by Michael Renov when he refers to the nature of documentary filmmaking: "Our attempts to 'fix' on celluloid what lies before the camera – ourselves or members of other cultures – are fragile if not altogether insincere efforts. Always issues of selection intrude (which angle, take, camera stock will best serve); the results are indeed *mediated*, the result of multiple interventions that necessarily *come between* the cinematic sign (what we see on the screen) and its referent (what existed in the

world)" (26 author's italics). Even more interesting is that this is a point also made by director Werner Herzog, a director whose documentaries *Grizzly Man* and *Encounters at the End of the World*, will be discussed at length in this dissertation. Herzog makes the following claim about the divide between fiction and documentary: "So for me, the boundary between fiction and 'documentary' simply does not exist; they are all just films. Both take 'facts', characters, stories and play with them in the same kind of way" (Cronin 240). Documentaries, then, are not exempt from the anthropomorphic depiction of nature any more than their fiction counterparts. The director's hand, though not visible, is always active in every frame of the film, putting forth her own interpretation of her subject, especially when that subject is nature. However, as I will attempt to convey throughout this dissertation, I am not concerned about the fact that every director puts forth his own anthropomorphic understanding of nature as much as I am concerned about the *type* of anthropomorphism put forth by each artist.

These general observations of the nature of an ecocriticism designed for reading film, heretofore known as celluloid ecocriticism, must only be taken as that: general. While what I have mapped out will be followed as guidelines, it must be made known that specific scenes in specific films may prove that these guidelines may not be generalised as easily as desired. Thus, no image exists in isolation, and to read an image in its entirety is to be aware of the context of the image (Ingram 34). Therefore, the differences between 'ecocriticism proper' and celluloid ecocriticism lie mainly in the nature of the respective medium each literary theory holds under scrutiny, but both factions of ecocriticism are interested in the same principles when studying a text: the author's awareness of place and space in her text, the manner in which the relationship between humans and nature is depicted, and, another of this dissertation's central concerns, the author's awareness of the degree and effect of her anthropocentric portrayal of nature, and the kind of anthropomorphism of nature the author portrays in her text. These ecocritical principles are applied not only in the different media for which ecocriticism is used, but are criticised and modified in other theory-based factions of ecocriticism as well. Two such theoretical factions are ecofeminism and deep ecology, two apples that have not fallen far from the ecocriticism tree, but far enough to be considered different – both from ecocriticism and from each other.

Ecofeminism

With the advent of ecocriticism came its variations, one of which is ecofeminism, a literary theory which is, very roughly speaking, an amalgamation of ecocritical and feminist studies (Berman 259; Zapf 51-52). The term was coined in the 1970s by Françoise d'Eaubonne, and the ecofeminist movement became widely known across the academic world in the 1980s (Buell *Environmental Criticism* 139). There are two broad camps of ecofeminists: social ecofeminists and cultural ecofeminists: "social ecofeminists, who stress the cultural construction of gender, have argued that the symbolic coding of nature as female which pervades Western culture has reinforced the domination of both women and nature. … [C]ultural ecofeminists, who are less wary of essentialism, have proposed that there is an inherent, not merely historically contingent, caring relationship between women and nature" (Goodbody 12). Considering the key premises upon which cultural ecofeminism is based, I am not sure that women have a more caring relationship to nature than men do, a view lucidly expressed by Carol P. MacCormack:

> [T]he link between nature and women is not a 'given'. Gender and its attributes are not pure biology. The meanings attributed to male and female are as arbitrary as are the meanings attributed to nature and culture. … [I]f men and women are one species and together constitute human society then, logically, analysis of intrinsic gender attributes must be made with reference to the same domain (18).

MacCormack presents a well-argued critique of fundamental cultural ecofeminist principles. Cultural ecofeminists perhaps forget that all of nature is connected, not only nature to nature, humans to humans, or even women to nature, but also men to nature. It is because of these reasons that I will give precedence to social ecofeminism, which will hereafter be referred to plainly as 'ecofeminism'.

Ecofeminists view nature, not as a hierarchy, but as an interconnected web, and in so doing celebrate diversity (King 19). This is a view of nature that is not shared by ecofeminists alone, but by ecocritics more generally. What sets ecofeminism apart from the rest of ecocriticism regarding their views on nature is that ecofeminists believe that

the subordination of women and nature are inextricably linked in that the oppression of one reinforces the oppression of the other (Gates 17; Murphy 48; Wallace and Armbruster 4). This leads to a kind of vicious downward spiralling of mutual subordination ignited by, firstly, harmful cultural constructs, and, secondly, multinational corporations, global capitalism, and constructed western dualisms instigated by patriarchy (Berman 261; Gaard and Murphy 2; Gates 17; Kerridge "Introduction" 6; Plumwood 2). Patrick D. Murphy, in his book *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques*, takes a position with which many ecofeminists would agree by stating the following: "To be an ecologist, one must also be a feminist, since without addressing gender oppression and the patriarchal ideology that generates the sexual metaphors of masculine domination of nature, one cannot effectively challenge the world views that threaten the stable evolution of the biosphere, in which human beings participate or perish" (49). The problems against which ecofeminists voice their opinions are the same problems which are born out of a patriarchal society, and are the same problems that present a threat to nature. Ecofeminists claim that under patriarchy, women are disempowered to the extent that they must take on their husband's name, are viewed as sex-objects, and are treated as literal objects in the legal system (Berman 261). Further, the result of a patriarchal society in which members of that society live by the false construct that women and nature are equated is that nature is objectified in that it is treated as material goods which can be sold for profit (Berman 261; Haraway 147).

Ecofeminists will show that in an androcentric and patriarchal society, women, and, as a result, nature, are rendered victims precisely because of western dualistic logic in which men, paralleled with culture, are rational subjects, and women, paralleled with nature, are irrational objects (Kerridge "Introduction" 6). These dualisms essentialise nature into an anthropomorphically feminised construct. This results in women being seen as territorial objects that can be conquered, exploited and tamed, as the existence of women is made relevant only insofar as they may serve the masculine subject (Berman 266; Kerridge "Introduction" 6). Reading nature through this feminised anthropomorphic lens is detrimental to both women and nature who are both stuck in a kind of catch 22: women are stripped of their human identity and are treated as natural objects, and, because of this, the treatment of nature as an object is legitimised because of the anthropomorphic reading of nature as female. Viewing the relationship between women and

nature in this anthropomorphic light may be seen as unhelpful and damaging in that it does not encourage a respectful relationship, firstly, between the human species with itself (especially towards its female members), and it does not encourage productive interconnections between humans and nature.

The flawed logic behind equating female humans with nature, apart from blaming this on dualistic thinking, may also be attributed to the (mis)use of language in the role it plays in formulating the constructs by which we live. Berman shows that in a patriarchal society these logocentric constructs are determined by men (259). In language and literature, ecofeminists aim to challenge the ways in which women have been represented in their relationship to nature, focusing on deconstructing the typical gendered metaphors that come with descriptions of nature. Drawing from this premise, Buell shows that "In adolescence, female protagonists become socialized away from nature, while the male continues to enjoy freer mobility and the option of questing and of conquest within nature, which is frequently and revealingly symbolised as female. Starting well before Thoreau, male narratives of self-reliant cabin-dwelling isolatoes are common, whereas the commonest counterpart in women's narrative is the story of the 'female hermit' who has not risen above society but fallen below it as a result of a disastrous love affair, usually extralegal, which has left her with a child, who usually dies" (Buell *Environmental Imagination* 46). Starting in, and as a result of, patriarchy, and skulking its way into literature, it is these kinds of limiting portrayals of women and nature which ecofeminists challenge. It is also these kinds of portrayals of women and nature upon which unhelpful and damaging feminised anthropocentric metaphors of nature are based.

Berman, in "Mother Nature", shows that the use of certain metaphors and expressions such as 'rape of the land', 'virgin forest', and 'Mother Earth', which do little in sealing the fissure between humans and humans, and between humans and nature, are part of the cause of the mutual subordination of women and nature (261-65). This type of scarring language may be, as Berman suggests, the very language that is, ironically, used by many environmentalists who are fighting for socioecological change (266). Berman explores the harm inherent in the use of the 'rape' metaphor that accompanies environmental discourse by pointing out that if it is true that humans tend to actualise

the symbols they create and use, then "we see that the rape metaphor sets up the exploitation of Nature as akin to the rape of a woman. If metaphors are not just arbitrary language use but a reflection of our physical, cultural and social realities which in turn structure our activities, the use of the rape metaphor has grave implications" (Berman 265). Even in using such seemingly wholesome anthropomorphic readings of the planet as 'Mother Earth', according to Berman, has the same effect in that it allows us to transfer the cultural baggage from the metaphor itself onto the thing for which the metaphor is used (263). This is particularly harmful when applied to the use of the 'Mother nature' metaphor in the context of a patriarchal culture, as the mother is the one who "satisfies all our needs, takes away waste, cleans and feeds us without any cost to us. While it is true that we have a certain dependence on our mother, we also have many expectations – it is unlikely that your mother will hurt you" (Berman 263). Basing her argument on similar principles, Louise Westling, another prominent ecofeminist, opines that "as we continue to feminise nature and imagine ourselves apart from the biota, we will continue to enable the 'heroic' destruction of the planet, even as we lament the process and try to erase or deny our complicity in it" (265), a point which is applicable to human-nature relationships both in the real world and in literature.

In challenging texts which, intentionally or not, uphold androcentric values whereby men are above both women and nature, ecofeminists aim to favour narratives in which the cultural and biological diversity that sustains life is celebrated, women's biological specificity is recognised, and where women are seen, not as objects of nature, but as both subjects and creators of history (Libby 257). However, while I agree that viewing females as being inherently closer to nature should be regarded as incorrect (which is what I have shown with my critique of social ecofeminism at the beginning of this section), I am also sceptical about the view that reading nature as female is necessarily wrong. Thus, one of my aims in this dissertation is to show that certain types of feminisations of nature may be helpful and productive. James Lovelock provides one such reading of nature as a woman.

Lovelock's recent popularisation of the term Gaia, from his Gaia hypothesis (*Revenge of Gaia; Face of Gaia*) has led some ecofeminists such as Berman and Murphy to challenge this feminisation of nature as it goes against the ecofeminist principles

they champion (Berman 263; Murphy 59). However, despite some ecofeminists being opposed to the practice of feminising nature, especially through the use of Gaia imagery, some artists and critics support it. In Terrence Malick's films, especially *The New World*, Malick presents a view of nature which is feminine, but occasionally undercuts this by demonstrating the retaliatory personality which nature sometimes displays. Also, critic Everett Gendler believes that "to reclaim the matriarchal spirit and our bond with the Earth Mother strikes me as necessary if we are to address at all successfully the ecological crisis confronting us" (143). Bruce Allsopp argues that "it was much better to conceive the earth as a mother goddess than to treat our environment the way we do" (30). However, Murphy, who has considered both arguments by Gendler and Allsopp, concludes that even though the use of Gaia imagery may create environmental awareness, it is not the best means of achieving respectful unity between nature and humans, as this ultimately perpetuates the assumed power humanity holds over nature (68). This, according to Murphy, unhelpfully creates infertile ground on which the bonds between humanity and nature may be repaired. However, in Chapter 5 of my dissertation I will attempt to challenge Murphy and Berman's view that the use of the Gaia metaphor is damaging, showing that their reading of Hesiod's text, upon which Lovelock's Gaia metaphor is based, is too simplistic. I will also attempt to show that not only is there no harm in the use of this particular feminised anthropomorphisation of the planet, but that it is in our best interest to do so at this particular point in humanity's fractured relationship with nature. Thus, we may use metaphors such as Gaia as a means of beginning to repair our relationship with the planet, which is, ultimately, one of the key objectives that lies at the heart of ecofeminism.

The objectives and premises upon which ecofeminism is based share many similarities with ecocriticism. However, as expected, ecofeminism deviates from ecocriticism by developing new premises altogether. The aims of ecofeminism, though, are not as bold as the aims of another similar eco-based theory, deep ecology, to which I now turn.

Deep Ecology

Deep ecology is a term coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss in his 1973 essay "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement". Deep ecology began as a philosophy of life but has subsequently been adopted by ecocritics as a means of reading texts as well. Despite its beginnings about five years before the advent of ecocriticism was formalised as a literary theory, deep ecology is generally seen as a kind of ecocriticism (rather than ecocriticism being seen as a kind of deep ecology). Deep ecology, as a literary theory, has similar premises to ecocriticism, but is different enough to be regarded as a separate theory. Further, deep ecology often exaggerates the principles it shares with ecocriticism and, as a result of these extreme positions, deep ecology becomes susceptible to irony, often having dire consequences for anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism.

As ecocriticism does, deep ecology takes the position that all life exists as an interconnected web with each life form occupying a node on the web, which deep ecologists take as an indication that we cannot "separate humans from the natural environment" (Capra 20). In other words, humans are seen as mere extensions of the natural environment and there is no ontological difference between the two. In taking such an extreme position, this premise of deep ecology has been criticised for the harmful consequences that are latent within this perception of the relationship between humanity and nature. Thus, it is made apparent that if humans are a part nature, then any way humans choose to treat nature cannot be deemed unnatural, even if this behaviour is destructive, which precisely goes against deep ecology's fundamental principle that nature must be protected and that humans must live in harmony with nature (Mathews 239). However, some deep ecologists lack an awareness of the ironies inherent in taking such an extreme position.

In an interconnected web of life in which no hierarchies exist, deep ecologists are also of the opinion that all life is equal, and no life is more important than another. Næss termed this "biospherical egalitarianism" ("Shallow and the Deep: A Summary" 151), which is also sometimes referred to as biological egalitarianism. The argument for biological egalitarianism is what makes the deep ecologist's philosophy 'deep', as opposed

to ‘shallow’, and this shallowness is characterised by the “Fight against pollution and resource depletion”, which is mainly for “the health and affluence of people in the developed countries” (Næss “The Shallow and the Deep” 467). As a result, deep ecologists claim to favour biocentric rather than anthropocentric behaviour (Bennett 177; Næss *Ecosophy*). The implications of living a life in which one abides by the principles of biological egalitarianism presents an impracticality which cannot be ignored. Harold Fromm explains this impracticality, and, in the process, exposes the irony within: “[T]he authentic inaugurating act of a would-be biocentrist should properly consist of suicide, since by staying alive he uses up another creature’s resources – even its very life. To be alive, it would seem, is to be against life, or at least everyone else’s life except one’s own” (Fromm 3).

However, it may be that these criticisms of deep ecology’s belief that all life is equal do not stand. Some critics seem to ignore the fact that Næss, when formulating his argument for biological egalitarianism, suffixed this point with the words “in principle”, explaining that “any realistic praxis necessitates some killing, exploitation, and suppression” (“Shallow and the Deep: A Summary” 151). Næss also later explained that “Our apprehension of the actual conditions under which we live our own lives … make it crystal clear that we have to injure and kill, in other words actively hinder the self-unfolding of other living beings. Equal right to unfold potentials as a principle is not a practical norm about equal conduct towards all life forms” (*Ecosophy* 167). However, despite the self-awareness Næss exhibits in this argument, I still find that living by biological egalitarianism “in principle” completely negates the fundamental premise upon which this philosophy is based, making biological egalitarianism an impossibility through and through.

In speaking of the effects of the interconnectedness of all life, Næss is also of the belief that humans cannot realise their full potential if their contact with nature is minimal. As a result, Næss favours a kind of ‘back to nature’ attitude, which does not necessarily mean compromising humans’ comfort of living, or one’s intellectual and technological advancements (*Ecosophy* 183). Næss explains that the effects of moving back to nature are at least twofold: one may develop a greater self-understanding – one may grow as a human, not at the expense, but as a result, of a relationship based on respectful mutual-

ity for the natural community (*Ecosophy* 164); and one may acquire a greater understanding and maturity in how one relates to, and interacts with, nature (*Ecosophy* 175). Næss claims that not only are we *from* nature, but we *are* nature; we are mere extensions of the natural community (Næss *Ecosophy* 165), a premise deep ecologists use to illustrate their belief that distancing oneself from nature may lead to a deterioration in one's self-respect (Næss *Ecosophy* 164).

However, some critics have faulted deep ecology for ignoring urban environments as a means of the development of the self (Bennett 297-98). Bennett, for one, argues that many of the ideologies that deep ecologists stand for, and the implementation of those ideologies, need not be specific to natural environments, and that by believing that one may acquire these qualities in a natural environment shows a kind of "wilderness fetishism", which sometimes goes too far as it manifests itself as arrogance (297). More importantly, though, is the belief that one cannot reach full happiness or actualisation if one removes oneself from nature and permanently settles in an urban environment. Bennett shows the harmful consequences of this deep ecological premise with which I agree: "And do we really want to exclude from 'essential humanness' the many people of colour and the gays and lesbians who are primarily urban dwellers in part because they have been chased away by the enlightened inhabitants of rural America?" (301). This is a point convincingly portrayed in the Australian film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, which shows that there is no place for homosexuality in the Australian Outback, and that it may only thrive in the city (Elliott). Bennett also shows that the reverse (that rural dwellers are all enlightened people) may also not have much truth to it: "[A]nyone who has spent some time in the great outdoors knows that there are plenty of unevolved, anthropocentric, close-minded folk residing in remote areas" (Bennett 301). However, Bennett's aim is not to entirely dismiss rural areas and embrace urban ones, as he acknowledges the impracticality and insensitivity in unyieldingly gravitating towards either end of the spectrum. It seems, then, that the deep ecologist presents a view of nature, and of what they believe humans' relationship to nature ought to be, that is ideological rather than actualisable. In their tendency to take such extreme positions, it seems that deep ecologists also lack a degree of self-awareness in their pursuits at harmony with nature, which is, ultimately, a lack of self-

awareness in the constructed nature of their beliefs. This is especially evidenced in deep ecologists' perceptions of the beauty and stability in nature.

In referring to one of the first well-known deep ecologists, Aldo Leopold, who was a deep ecologist more than forty years before the term existed, Fromm demonstrates the logical flaws inherent in Leopold's perceptions of nature, especially in Leopold's belief in nature's beauty and stability, which Fromm criticises for its narrow and uninformed anthropomorphism (6-7). Leopold makes the claim that "A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the community, and the community includes the soil, waters, fauna, and flora, as well as people" ("Ecological Conscience" 345). Fromm first addresses Leopold's belief in the stability in nature, claiming that nature may only be viewed as stable if one is to pursue a short-term examination of nature, as viewing nature in the long-term would certainly not lead one to such a conclusion (6-7). Nature is readily mutable and dynamic, and to keep nature 'stable' really requires human intervention (Ingram 20). Therefore, one can never truly exist in harmony with nature, as Leopold suggests, as perceptions of harmony are mediated through culture, and is reliant on human action. Further, with cultures' reliance on language in order to thrive, any interaction or perception of nature is necessarily, and anthropocentrically, mediated through language. This is an argument which can be made not only against the perception of stability in nature, but also against the belief in nature's 'inherent' beauty. Nash shows that humans' perceptions of beauty change over time (44-45), which is strong evidence for the claim that the qualities and values we assign onto nature (be they positive or negative) are unavoidably constructed.

Deep ecologists' claims that nature is beautiful and stable, their claims that it is in humanity's best interests to live a life in close propinquity to nature, and their championing of biological egalitarianism, are noble biocentric pursuits. However, this biocentrism has lead some critics, such as Luc Ferry, to accuse deep ecologists, quite understandably, of being far too biocentric, thereby ignoring any humanitarian issues in need of urgent attention, and, instead, favouring a kind of ecofascism (67). While it is common to argue against deep ecology's biocentrism, other critics, such as Eric Katz, show that the danger in deep ecology lies, conversely, in its overt anthropocentrism (33-

37). Katz singles out some of Arne Næss's deep ecological principles to illustrate this point.

As pointed out earlier, the reason Næss advocates a 'back to nature' attitude and a greater care for the environment is for one to achieve a greater connection with nature, and, primarily, to achieve a greater sense of self-understanding. Katz points out the anthropocentric nature of this claim: "Naess is arguing that humans ought to preserve the natural environment because it is in the human interest to do so – indeed, it is in the individual's interest to preserve the natural world because it will further the interests of the individual. … The identification and expansion of the Self are clearly anthropocentric in character, structure, and goal" (34). Katz is not alone in labelling deep ecologists anthropocentric. Bennett helps us realise that it is impossible to think as biocentrically as deep ecologists propose as humans are only able to make decisions based on human values, "so it makes little sense to speak of moving beyond human issues and adopting a biocentric viewpoint" (299). Fromm points out that even if self-professed biocentrists lived by a code which recognised the impossibility of extreme biocentricism, then what would result is a slightly anthropocentric picking and choosing of when to spare life and when not to, which, Fromm rightfully points out, bares little difference to how most people treat the environment anyway, by, say, choosing that taking medication is permissible, but shooting an endangered animal is not (4).

It is clear, then, that I have used poststructuralist principles in demonstrating deep ecology's unconscious reliance on language. In attempting to promote biocentric principles, poststructuralist theory has exposed deep ecology's ultimately anthropocentric leanings, which suggests a kind of, as I would like to call it, inevitability of anthropocentrism. It is quite clear, then, that poststructuralists would disagree with the following claim by Næss: "The own/not-own distinction survives only in grammar, not in feeling" (*Ecosophy* 175). However, it must not go unnoticed that poststructuralism tends to overstep the mark in that it is far too logocentric. While there is much to be valued in both poststructuralist and deep ecological approaches to nature, it seems that both ideologies have views that lack moderation, and, because of this, may be harmful to the tenuous connections between humans and nature.

Examining the effect of poststructuralism's take on nature, Jonathan Bate makes the best argument against the reading of nature as text, which, as a result, may imply that nature only exists in the abstract, in language, or as a construct:

> 'Nature' is a term that needs to be contested, not rejected. It is profoundly unhelpful to say '*There is no nature*' at a time when our most urgent need is to address and redress the consequences of human civilisation's insatiable desire to consume the products of the earth. … When there have been a few more accidents at nuclear power stations, when there are no more rainforests, and when every wilderness has been ravaged for its mineral resources, then let us say '*There is no nature*' (Bate *Romantic Ecology* 56 author's italics).

It may be argued that Bate misses the point in that he too readily literalises a metaphorical claim about the world. However, it seems he is rather pointing out the insensitivity, metaphorical or not, of some poststructuralists who claim that nature is merely a social construct that exists only in language, making claims that are dangerous, not because they are anthropocentric, but because they are logocentric. Some critics take the argument a little further by showing that, not only does nature exist outside of language, but that it is in the very nature of nature to resist the definitions, views or narratives that language attempts to impose onto it (Raglon and Scholtmeijer 251-52).

Thus, due to the inevitability of anthropocentrism, to place a value judgement *only* on the act of depicting nature through the vein of anthropocentrism would prove futile. It is, therefore, the *manner* in which these depictions take place, and the *context* in which they are situated, which will drive my analysis of the works of Malick, Herzog, Penn and Krakauer. That is, what concerns this dissertation is the specific metaphors and particular language used by these artists when portraying nature. Thus, while nature is understood *through* language, it remains clear that nature exists *outside* of language. It is because of these points that the relationship between language and nature remains a fascinating inquiry. In the next chapter I will attempt to show that, while nature and language *presently* exist as two separate and independent entities, this was not always so.

Chapter 2
Nature and Language

> Words and actions are not the attributes of brute nature. They introduce us to the human form, of which all other organisations appear to be degradations (Emerson 22).

> His whole face is contorted differently as he assumes each creature's voice. If he were to speak always as frog or hawk or wolf, the muscles of his throat and jaw might grow to fit the sound, so intimately are the creatures and the sounds they make connected, so deeply are they one (Malouf 87).

Structuralism

Ferdinand de Saussure, in his *Course in General Linguistics*, gives a description of language as a structure in which (any) language can be broken down into component parts. For De Saussure, the linguistic sign is composed of two parts: the signifier (the concept of a thing, or the thing's definition) and the signified (the sound-image, whose existence is made apparent when one mentally 'speaks' a word) (67). What is interesting about De Saussure's structuralist claims is that the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, which implies, then, that the linguistic sign is arbitrary (67). Thus, the sounds that make up the word 'tiger', and the sequence they are in, hold no bearing to the idea of 'tiger'.

De Saussure explains that the arbitrary nature of the sign "dominates all the linguistics of language" (68) and that "its consequences are numberless" (68), and, indeed, they are. One such consequence is the existence of an unbridgeable chasm that exists between language and nature: language did not grow out of nature and humans are the

lords of language. Thus, if we are to believe De Saussure's premise that the relationship between the signifier and the signified could have taken on any form in any language, then this implies that there is no natural source of language, that nature did not prescribe signs to humanity. Language is not a product of the animals, plants, insects, microbes, oceans and stars, but a thing of human culture. It is this premise, among others, that has dominated linguistics in the early twentieth century, and is a premise which has significant implications for both anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism.

Regarding anthropocentrism, another consequence of the arbitrary nature of the sign is that any language used to describe or explain nature (or anything else, for that matter) may be considered anthropocentric. Thus, if we are to take language as a product *only* of human culture, then this means that we cannot explain bees in bee-words, roses in rose-words, or the sun in sun-words. We can only use the language of humanity to explain, not only humanity itself, but bees, roses and the sun, as well. Ultimately, then, to explain nature through human language is to explain nature through human perception. Language is the anthropocentric tool which we use to construct the world around us. To speak of nature is to speak of a human understanding of the concept, which implies that our definition of nature can only be given in human terms. This also means that to represent nature through language is not to represent nature at all, but to represent an anthropomorphised version of nature.

Recognising this law of language, Ron Fricke, in his documentary, *Baraka*, directs a film which attempts to challenge and overcome language's anthropomorphisation of nature. Fricke's documentary is made up of scenes of the natural world, some scenes of the human world, and some of a mixture between the two. In most documentaries, one has the presence of a voiceover narrator, or talking heads, commenting on what the viewer has just seen or heard. What makes *Baraka* unique is that, except for a few tribal chants, the film does not contain voiceover narration, interviews, or dialogue from any of its human subjects (Fricke). In studying the scenes composed entirely of nature, we notice that Fricke attempts to leave nature in its pristine state, while his camera merely observes its natural subjects and no human voice can be heard commenting on or explaining nature. Thus, Fricke's distinct lack of comment on nature is Fricke's *only*

comment on nature. Nature, then, may speak for itself and is released from the anthropomorphic grip of human language.

However, noble as his pursuits may be, Fricke has either ignored, or is ignorant of, the irony inherent in his pursuit. The irony here is that Fricke, in intentionally avoiding speaking *for* nature, has, through his art, done just this. Art, a human construct, is the lens through which humans may view the world. Viewing the world through art means we view the world through anthropocentric preoccupations and desires. Film is not exempt from this rule. The rectangular frame of the picture indicates that information about the world has been selected by someone, and, consequently, everything outside of the frame has been consciously discarded. The audience is given a filtered and manipulated world. This segments, compartmentalises and categorises the world into manageable portions fit for human consumption.

Further, it must also be noted that the film, while devoid of any human language, especially on the part of its director, is not a silent film. Accompanying Fricke's images is the music soundtrack. Fricke has chosen to present his images with meditative and melodic music which, while subtle, is not subtle enough to suggest the absolute absence of a human presence. Fricke does not seem to realise, as this is not foregrounded, that he, like all artists, is giving an interpretation of the world that is stylised and deliberate, and is, to be sure, speaking *for* nature, rather than allowing nature to speak for itself. Any attempt to portray nature through artistic means, therefore, is to portray nature anthropomorphically. If read in structuralist terms, this suggests a kind of separation between language and nature, where language, the tool of humanity, can be used only to illustrate a *version* of nature, and not nature in its true colours, implying, therefore, that language is a medium through which humanity may come to understand the world on humanity's own terms.

Certainly, though, while language is predominantly a human endeavour, there are instances in nature in which rudimentary forms of communication through language occur. Take, for example, bonobos, primates that are able to "understand sentences that contain one verb and three noun phrases – 'Will you carry the M&Ms to the middle test room?' – but have trouble with conjoined sentences that require two separate actions. They have been known to spontaneously combine single words to create new words,

using ‘water’ and ‘bird’ as ‘waterbird’ for duck, for example” (Kenneally 33). Further, to remain with our bonobo example, “The fact that bonobos can acquire language skills equivalent to those of a 2½-year-old child shows that having a rudimentary language ability is not uniquely human” (Kenneally 33). However, it *is* only humans that have such a “superlative capacity for language” (Kenneally 33). No other species on earth uses language with such nuanced sophistication, and no other species has created a language as complex as the hundreds humans have created (Kenneally 34). However, all this would not mean anything if language was not aided by human societies to flourish. The study of feral children exemplifies this point. Thus, that feral children, in being surrounded completely by nature (in most cases), are not able to speak and understand language does not necessarily show that language does not come from nature, but that a community of communicators is needed to learn and adopt language.

It is this relationship between language and nature as epitomised by feral children that has brought certain artists to explore this theme in interesting and complex ways. As Evernden points out: “While the idea of a naive infant may be a fiction, it is at least a useful one for our purposes, for it allows us to imagine the encounter of a non-enculturated human with ‘nature.’ The point of this exercise is simply to consider what it must be like to encounter something without any conception of what it might be or mean, and perhaps even without the language that would encourage naming” (111). For example, in *Knowledge of Angels*, Jill Paton Walsh uses the feral child narrative to explore the nature of religion. After learning enough language, Amara, a feral child who was raised by wolves before being taken in by a group of nuns, is confronted to answer whether or not it is possible that there is a god, and makes the following claim:

> ‘Like wolf?’ she said. ‘Wolf in sky?’ She emitted her startling, barking laugh. ‘Nothing in sky’ (Paton Walsh 208).

Paton Walsh uses a feral child character to represent a kind of template of a human being who is then used to illustrate the constructed nature of religion. If a human who has had no contact with other human beings makes a claim that there is no god, then the concept ‘god’ must be constructed and unnatural, and therefore improbable. However, as language, or the lack thereof, is one of the defining traits of a feral child, many texts use this narrative to explore the relationship between nature and language for similar

reasons as we have seen Paton Walsh use it: to explore the human traits we take as natural, place them under a different light, and discover only their pretence of being natural.

The Wild Boy of Aveyron, or Victor of Aveyron, is one of the more famous examples that is used to examine the relationship between nature and language. This particular case has been dramatised in François Truffaut's *The Wild Child*. Victor was estimated to be twelve years of age upon first being discovered in 1797 (Candland 19). In Truffaut's film, Dr Itard takes Victor under his wing and attempts to teach the child language. In so doing, the film shows Dr Itard using wooden blocks (each with a letter of the Roman alphabet printed on it) as a means of teaching Victor language. The film portrays it as a great success when Victor manages to spell 'lait' (which is the French for 'milk') by arranging, in their correct order, the four wooden blocks which make up the word. However, as Candland reminds us, there was a one-in-twenty-four chance of getting the correct order of the letters (29), in which case the film was far too optimistic in presenting it as a legitimate victory. One of the things we learn from Victor's weakness at acquiring language is the necessity of human contact, and the necessity of human contact at the age of language acquisition, if one is to gain a sense of human language. If language was not at all an anthropocentric endeavour, then having Victor surrounded entirely by nature for the first few critical years of his life would have resulted in his acquisition of language. However, this was not the case.

None of my primary texts are concerned with the nature of feral children despite having many concerns regarding the relationship between language and nature. However, Herzog comes closest in exploring the concept of feral children in his film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, a biographical film concerned with the life of Kaspar Hauser, a German boy who grew up in the early 1800s, who had fleeting encounters with humans in his younger years as he was locked in a room for most of his early childhood. This story is particularly interesting as it gives us insight into the nature of a human, not only having had little contact with humanity as he was growing up, but also having had no contact with nature (Herzog *Kaspar Hauser*).

Despite the fact that one cannot acquire language after the age of seven years (Pinker 294), Kaspar Hauser, when he was found (at approximately the age of sixteen years) was able to learn language, which provides evidence for the assumption that his interac-

tions with humans in his younger years were enough to allow him to develop a sense of language. It is documented that the first word Kaspar had learnt was "horse" (von Feuerbach 27-28). However, Kaspar's first significant acquaintance with language, as also shown in Herzog's film, was through Julius, a boy in the village in which Kaspar made his first contact with a large community of people (Herzog *Kaspar Hauser;* von Feuerbach 39-40). In the scene in Herzog's film in which Julius is teaching Kaspar language, the two are inside of Kaspar's room, a rustic building made out of rough stone, with patches of hay on the floor (*Kaspar Hauser*). It is a room in which nature encroaches at the fringes, a subtle reminder of nature's inevitability. Kaspar recites what he has just learnt: "Finger, thumb, arm". After this lesson, Julius concentrates on Kaspar's face and points out, and names, the individual parts that make it up, namely, his nose, mouth and ear, while Kaspar is required to repeat the word and memorise the names of his parts.



Figure 1: Herzog *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*

Kaspar's first official introduction to language, then (as his brief education of the word "horse" at the beginning of the film can be taken as cursory), are of humanity, of himself. In the scene in which Julius teaches Kaspar language, Herzog seems to imply that language is entirely *of* humanity. When Kaspar learns language, he learns a language of which nature is not a part. Language is merely reflected back upon humanity, and, therefore, back upon itself. Herzog further emphasises this point when Kaspar's young tutor uses a mirror as a teaching aid (as seen in Figure 1). When the child points out the features on Kaspar's face, he reaches for Kaspar's ear and says: "Look, this is your ear" (Herzog *Kaspar Hauser*). Kaspar tugs at his own ear, as if feeling it for the first time, becoming accustomed to the connection between the thing and the word. The boy continues: "Look, I've even got a mirror! This, here, is your ear". Kaspar blinks forcefully, perhaps the mirror allowing him to become accustomed to his existence in the world. However, what concerns me about this scene is how the

mirror demonstrates Herzog's argument that there is a kind of circularity in the relationship between words and the world. The origins of language, therefore, Herzog seems to imply, is humanity. Language comes from a human mouth and is given back to humanity. It is apparent, then, that Herzog uses the feral child narrative to provide evidence for a structuralist attitude towards the relationship between language and nature. However, despite the pervasiveness and legacy of De Saussure's structuralist teachings, recent scholarship has offered a critique of this traditional linguistic understanding of the ways language and nature interact. One such critique has come from David Abram.

Referring to the work of De Saussure, Abram challenges the perception that language and nature are two incongruous phenomena by showing that De Saussure's tendency to "downplay the influence of mimicry, onomatopoeia, and sound symbolism within the life of any language [has been debunked, as] more recent research on the echoic and gestural significance of spoken sounds has demonstrated that a subtle sort of onomatopoeia is constantly at work in language: certain meanings inevitably gravitate toward certain sounds, and vice versa" (144-45). Abram's argument is that, contrary to what De Saussure may have theorised, language has its roots in nature (101), which may be evidenced by the presence of a "subtle sort of onomatopoeia" in all languages, meaning that nature's voice is able to speak through the structure and sound of every word in every language. Abram explains this point further. Referring to the Semitic *aleph-beth*, Abram shows that *Aleph*, "the ancient Hebrew word for 'ox'", was written as an upside-down 'A', resembling an ox's head, and that *mem*, "the Hebrew word for 'water' … which later became our own letter *M*, was drawn as a series of waves" (Abram 101). Thus, if Abram's point is to be believed, then we find that language and its implementation are not at all as anthropocentric as was once believed. Linguistically, nature is now a part of human culture, and the boundaries between the two are not as discrete as previously thought. Thus, in writing *about* nature, we also *write* nature. However, this is not to suggest that language is at the complete mercy of nature. Abram makes the tempered claim that while language is not an entirely abstract anthropocentric human invention, it is not a phenomenon that belongs entirely to nature either. Abram shows that while the

> letters of the early *aleph-beth* are still implicitly tied to the more-than-human field of phenomena … these ties to other animals, to natural elements like water and waves, and even to the body itself, are far more tenuous than in the earlier, predominantly nonphonetic scripts. These traces of sensible nature linger in the new script only as vestigial holdovers from the old – they are no longer necessary participants in the transfer of linguistic knowledge. The other animals, the plants, and the natural elements – sun, moon, stars, waves – are beginning to lose their own voices. In the Hebrew Genesis, the animals do not speak their own names to Adam; rather, they are given their names by this first man. Language, for the Hebrews, was becoming a purely human gift, a human power (101).

Thus, language certainly has its roots in nature, with words and letters coming directly from the earth, but through millennia of language's evolution, it appears that nature's presence in language is disappearing and humans may be using nature's gift irresponsibly, which may be evidenced in the use of certain words and metaphors that reflect a dangerous and destructive kind of anthropomorphism. This, in turn, may form part of the reason for humanity's poor standing with nature. Thus, if we are to believe Lakoff and Johnson's words, that "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (5), then perhaps it may be suggested that, given the poor relationship humanity shares with nature, humans, as I will argue, have not yet developed anthropomorphically responsible metaphors for nature. I will also attempt to demonstrate that while language has grown out of nature, it really belongs to humanity. However, there is still value in remembering and appreciating the origins of language: nature. Certainly, Terrence Malick, in his film, *The New World*, reflects this point.

Reading Nature in Language in *The New World*

Terrence Malick's views on the relationship between language and nature have developed and changed over his first four films. In Malick's first two films, *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*, it seems that the director was of the opinion that there was a distinct

disconnect between language and nature. Language, then, was a human affair. However, as we move to Malick's later films, especially *The New World*, we see that Malick has become much more optimistic about the relationship between the two phenomena, opining that nature's presence can be heard in the phonetics of language and that language is a shared experience between humanity and nature. In examining how Malick developed this change of opinion, let us begin with his 1978 film, *Days of Heaven*.

Writing on the films of Terrence Malick, James Morrison and Thomas Schur speak of Malick's idiosyncratic use of language in his *Days of Heaven* and make the following claim:

> A typical exchange, from the section of *Days of Heaven* when the itinerant workers are considering staying on with the farmer after the season's end, runs as follows: 'Are we gonna stay?' 'If she wants to.' 'You'd rather go?' 'I'd rather be the King of Siam. You put aspirin in this?' … The camera pivots around the two characters as they, in turn, rotate about each other with every line they speak, literalizing in space the back-and-forth rhythm of their speech, and a quick dissolve transports us from this halting, elided interval to a long, essentially wordless sequence of a kind of autumnal exaltation, as the migrants depart the farm. The abridgements and truncations of speech pronounce an awareness of language as symbolic action. Deprived of intrinsic meaning or sensory substance, words take on significance as objects in space, transmitted from body to body, decrements of the silences that swallow them (81).

That Schur and Morrison describe Malick's use of language as "symbolic action" and that language is "[d]eprived of intrinsic meaning or sensory substance", suggests a kind of disconnect between language and nature, and, therefore, between humanity and nature. From what Morrison and Schur demonstrate here, Malick is of the opinion that not only is representing nature through language an anthropomorphisation of nature, but to do so is not to represent nature at all: the two phenomena exist in independent worlds. Thus, Malick shows that language is an inappropriate tool with which to capture nature, that there is a kind of natural resistance from nature to be confined to human language whereby humanity is unable to exhibit any anthropocentric authority over its natural en-

vironment. Indeed, this is illustrated in the plague of locusts that attack the crops in *Days of Heaven*.

Throughout Malick's *Days of Heaven* the farm is shot in romantic hues at the magic hour, the time of day just before sunrise and just after sunset in which the landscape is given a mysterious glow whereby one cannot determine the environment's natural source of light, which is, of course, the sun as it lies just a few moments below the horizon. Thus, giving the farm an iridescent beauty, Malick seems to be making the point that the farm is the site at which nature and humanity exist in harmony. This perception of nature, however, is entirely that of the humans inhabiting the land. Indeed, while the workers are farming the land at the beginning of the film, huge tractors, shown as noisy and obtrusive constructions, dominate the land, cutting and tearing at it. In this scene the camera, by lowering itself to the ground, offers us the perspective of the rabbits and chickens. These creatures scurry away from the machines as they ravish the creatures' environment. To put it in ecocritical terms, Malick shows the insensitivity of the humans treating the land as their place, ignoring that the land was *nature's* place to begin with. That we see the farm from the animals' perspective suggests an awareness on Malick's part that the beautiful images of the farm that came before are mediated through a particular kind of anthropomorphism which reads nature in soft and inviting hues. Thus, Malick's self-awareness sheds a different light on the land. Malick challenges the anthropomorphic lens through which the farmers and workers view the environment by perhaps suggesting that humans will only believe they are in harmony with nature when they are in control of nature. However, this assumed control over the land does not last.

Towards the end of the film, the farm is plagued by a swarm of locusts (Malick *Heaven*). Malick's biblical reference seems to suggest that while the farmers perceived their environment as edenic, the reality is that nature, in decimating the land, proves it to be a rather flimsy construct. The attack is forceful and unrelenting as the labourers work well into the night attempting to kill the locusts by collecting them in baskets and throwing them into a fire. Humanity's control over nature, therefore, symbolically represented in the farm, is shown to be utterly futile and hubristic. In one telling shot, the workers, with the only source of light being behind them, are photographed against a backdrop of a burning amber sky, therefore appearing as silhouettes. The locusts, seen

as black dots, dart around the human characters and increase in number of biblical proportions, eventually completely obscuring the human characters' black outlines, giving the impression that nature is consuming them. Thus, attempting to define nature by anthropomorphic means demonstrates the futility of language to control nature, and it is nature that seems to have the final word.

However, as far as this particular film is concerned, we must not stray from the fact that Malick, in representing nature through the medium of art, is guilty of the same sins that he condemns. When Malick represents the locusts (especially, we must note, for the purposes of showing how an anthropomorphic view of nature is ultimately foolish) Malick, himself conceding to anthropomorphism, shows these insects to be a damaging and feared force. There is a note of doom in the music on the soundtrack as the locusts invade the farm, suggesting that the perspective of the events we are given is told entirely from that of the human characters (and certainly not the locusts', who are feasting 'happily' on their bounty). However, that there is a hint of self-awareness in this anthropomorphic portrayal of nature must not go unnoticed either. The locusts, both literally and narratively speaking, come out of nowhere. In deviating the plot, the locusts come to represent a challenge to any kind of anthropomorphic hold the human characters, and especially the director, may have had over the narrative. Thus, the human characters' preoccupations become secondary and are discarded. The locusts force the narrative to take on an unexpected shift. Also, considering the implications of Schur and Morrison's interpretation of Malick's argument for the disconnect between language and nature, specifically in *Days of Heaven*, it seems that Malick makes the point that it is not only through written or spoken language, but also through filmic language, that this disconnect between language and nature may be witnessed.

However, Malick, in *The New World*, shows a departure from the above and has become more optimistic about the linguistic relationship between humanity and nature. Malick demonstrates this newfound optimism by showing the manner in which the Algonquian characters, especially Pocahontas, utilise language. Further, Malick comes to illustrate that if language is able to sidestep anthropomorphism in its portrayal of nature, then we will be able to bring ourselves to live lives that are more respectful of nature, ultimately bringing humans closer to nature. Malick provides an interesting demonstra-

tion of this premise through the courtship between John Smith and Pocahontas. Part of Smith and Pocahontas's courtship is played out as they teach each other their respective language: Smith teaches her English, and Pocahontas teaches him Virginia Algonquian. As they stand amongst the wild foliage of Pocahontas's homestead, they add, in this order, the following words of each other's language to their respective vocabularies: "sky", "sun", "water", "wind", "eyes", "lips" and "ear". Interestingly, where Herzog, in his *Kaspar Hauser*, conducts the scene in which Kaspar learns some of his first words by using the human body as a symbol to illustrate his point that language comes only from humanity, Malick, as I will show, uses the body as a symbol to demonstrate the opposite, that there are some instances in which one can identify the inherent harmony between language and nature, the body thus acting as a kind of fulcrum which balances the two.

Pocahontas leads this lesson by giving Smith an Algonquian word, while she gesticulates and embodies the word, prompting Smith to respond with the English alternative. Pocahontas begins with the Algonquian word for "sky". However, Pocahontas does not merely point to the sky and call it by its Algonquian name, but opens up her arms, stretches them to the sky, tilts her head back, and moves her arms in synchronised circles as she says, "arahqat". She does not merely speak the sounds which indicate what a sky is, but becomes the sky herself. She invites nature to dictate her behaviour. This is similar to the way in which she speaks-demonstrates the word "nebi", which means "water". As she speaks the word, her arms are extended in front of her body, and she mimics the ebb and flow of a flowing river. Until now, we realise that the words "arahqat" and "nebi" are, phonetically speaking, arbitrarily linked to the things to which they refer. Pocahontas, however, in demonstrating the words viscerally, establishes herself as a mediator between humanity and nature, and, therefore, becomes a *symbol* of nature. However, with the next two words Pocahontas and Smith exchange, Malick demonstrates that the links between language and nature are sometimes obvious, and therefore less arbitrary.

When Pocahontas dictates the word for sun, "gizos", to Smith, she brings the fingertips of one of her hands together, and slowly raises her hand into the air, as if mimicking a rising sun. Once her arm is stretched out high, she synchronises the plosive, /g/, of the

word “gizos”, with the rapid opening of her hand, as if demonstrating how the word, “gizos” (sun), penetrates the atmosphere just as the sharp rays of the sun do. The relationship, then, between the sign and the thing itself is shown not to be arbitrary at all, but as being purposeful and particular, at least in some instances.



Figure 2: Malick *The New World*

A similar point is demonstrated when Pocahontas learns the English word “wind”. Upon saying the word, Pocahontas twirls and swirls in the ankle-high grass, swiftly waving her arms around, and weaving through the grass as the wind would (as can be seen in Figure 2). As she does this, the sound of a gentle wind can be heard on the soundtrack, and the leaves of nearby trees can be seen swaying in the breeze. However, what is most significant about her demonstration of having learnt the word “wind” is the manner in which she *says* the word. When Pocahontas learns this word, she constantly repeats the word, each time emphasising its breathiness by exaggerating its characteristic flowing out of the mouth without interruption or obstruction.

Malick, therefore, illustrates what Abram calls the subtle onomatopoeia of words, and shows that language is a result of the physical interaction of, both, the parts of one’s body that aid in producing spoken language (such as our lungs, voice box, throat, teeth, tongue and palate), and one’s surrounds. As a result, we mimic birdsong, animal growls, wind, and so forth, which confirms nature’s presence in language. In synchronising Pocahontas’s words, her body, and the environment, Malick characterises the links between humanity and nature as blurry and porous. Thus, Malick presents a direct critique on anthropomorphism by inverting it. When Pocahontas sways her hands in the air to represent the sky, or when she twirls in the grass to indicate the wind, she does not anthropomorphise nature, but allows nature to ‘naturalise’ her. Malick shows this to be one of the reasons for Pocahontas’s love, integration and interconnection with nature, which she achieves both linguistically and culturally.

Malick makes the point that Pocahontas, a Native American, is able to recognise the subtle onomatopoeia in the English word "wind" as she exhales forcefully, marrying word and concept, where John Smith is not able to recognise the same connection. Indeed, it is Pocahontas, and the Native Americans more generally, who are seen to live in close harmony with nature. The English, however, upon arriving in the New World, approach nature as an irritant (as Wingfield is seen batting flies away from his face) or as that which should be challenged and conquered, which can be seen in Malick's emphasis of the colonialists constantly chopping down trees and clearing away land for the purposes of establishing a colony. Thus, Malick shows that living in harmony with nature is a quality dependent on recognising nature in language, an ability which, according to Malick, may be a product of one's culture.

It seems, then, that Malick has changed his premise in his later work. Where he began arguing that language and nature should be recognised as two completely separate and mutually exclusive phenomena, as seen in his *Days of Heaven*, Malick later argues that there certainly exists in language a kind of subtle onomatopoeia (as David Abram would call it). Thus, to come to recognise this intimacy between language and nature is to make the claim that to represent nature through language is not as anthropomorphic as might have been believed. Further, as Malick seems to argue, once we recognise that language is not as independent as we once thought, we will be able to become more aware that we are speaking nature, and therefore speak *with* nature. Thus, according to Malick, living in harmony with nature begins with speaking in harmony with nature.

Distorting Nature in Herzog's *Encounters* and *Grizzly Man*

It is in Werner Herzog's *Encounters at the End of the World* that the director takes an approach to language which is not seen in the other primary filmic texts. In *The New World*, Malick made the argument that there exists an overt and distinctly recognisable connection between language and nature which is evident in the presence of nature in language. In *Encounters at the End of the World*, however, Herzog makes a different kind of comment on the relationship between language and nature in which Rueckert's

original description of ecology and language may prove useful in analysing Herzog's thesis on the matter.

In the film, Herzog meanders late at night across the grounds of McMurdo and walks into a greenhouse which Herzog describes as an "unobtrusive building", and encounters computer scientist and linguist, William Jirsa. Through voiceover narration, Herzog summarises Jirsa's work, explaining that, while attempting to document the dialect from one of the last remaining fluent speakers of the Ho-Chunk, Jirsa

> ran into new age ideologues who made insipid claims about black and white magic embedded in the grammar of this language. Hence, in this stupid trend of academia, it would be better to let the language die than to preserve it. He had to destroy his entire Ph.D research.

It is this incident which calls Herzog's attention to the concept of linguistic extinction, whereby the last speakers of a language die before any scientific recording or documentation of that language may take place. Herzog goes so far as to compare the extinction of a language to the extinction of a species in the natural world:

> It occurred to me that in the time we spent with [William Jirsa] in the greenhouse, possibly three or four languages had died. In our efforts to preserve endangered species, we seem to overlook something equally important. To me, it is a sign of a deeply disturbed civilisation where tree huggers and whale huggers in their weirdness are acceptable, while no one embraces the last speakers of a language.

Herzog does not explain what it is exactly he means when he calls a civilisation "deeply disturbed" when it neglects "the last speakers of a language", but we can infer from this the point Herzog is attempting to convey. This is a view of human culture which shares qualities with ecocritical principles regarding diversity. Thus, Herzog seems to say that the success of nature, and, now, the success of human culture, lies in the strength of the diversity found within it. Thus, as Rueckert does in his pioneering essay on ecocriticism in which he utilises ecological principles as a means of reading literature, so, too, does Herzog use the principles of diversity in the natural world to understand human culture and language. Herzog uses these principles to come to the conclusion that just as diver-

sity is necessary in order to sustain a flourishing ecosystem, it is also necessary if humans are to flourish as a species.

Another way of understanding Herzog's statement is by using principles of deep ecology. I am referring to deep ecology's favouring of biological egalitarianism, which states that every species has an equal right to life and an equal right to, as Næss would put it, unfold. Herzog, then, presents a kind of linguistic egalitarianism, meaning that all languages should be treated with equal respect and importance as they contribute equally, by definition, to the diversity of human language, and, consequently, would therefore have an equal right to unfold.

However, it seems that is where the parallels with deep ecology end. This is because where deep ecology favours biocentrism (or at least favours a worldview that is more biocentric than most ecological ideologies), an ideology which states that all other species must be placed in greater priority and importance in relation to humanity, Herzog states that language, and human culture more generally, is "something equally important" to nature. This can be seen as Herzog's attempt at a stance which is not quite biocentric, but, rather, anti-anthropocentric. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, I remain sceptical of the ability of humanity to take a stance that is not anthropocentric. However, it is in *Grizzly Man* that Herzog defends these points with more clarity, which he does, particularly, by referring to the relationship between language and nature.

In *Grizzly Man* Herzog confronts issues of structuralism, especially as it pertains to the manner in which nature and language interact. Abram, as previously noted, has shown that instances of nature are apparent in all languages, but not as overtly as they were at the inception of language (100-01). This implies that the structure and sound of words can be traced back to the soil, rocks and animals from where it came. In *The New World*, I have attempted to show how Malick uses this premise to provide evidence for a kind of harmony between language and nature. However, Herzog, through his portrayal of Timothy Treadwell, presents a counterargument to this as he shows that humans, as they possess full control of language, also have the power to corrupt and distort nature through language, making it apparent that there is a trenchant *lack* of harmony between language and nature.

In a particular sequence of the film, Herzog explores the ways in which Treadwell misinterprets nature, often criticising Treadwell for believing nature to be more beautiful than Herzog is willing to accept (*Grizzly Man*). In one particular scene (a still of which can be seen in Figure 3) we notice Treadwell observing a fox with the bottom half of its body completely missing. Leaning on his hand, Treadwell sits down on the ground next to the fox, gently and intermittently touching the fox's dead ear. Flies buzz around the fox and begin decomposing its body. Treadwell, narrating with a brittle and shaky voice, sometimes directs his speech to the fox as if expecting the fox to hear and understand him:



Figure 3: Herzog *Grizzly Man*

> Oh god. I love you. I love you and I don't understand. It's a painful world.
> …
>
> He wandered too far from the den, and the wolves last night, that I heard howling, screeching in glee and excitement – it was over the termination of one of the babies. Expedition 2001 has taken a sad turn, but it is a real turn, and I mourn the death of this gorgeous baby fox. Goodbye, little fox.

Treadwell's language usage is overtly anthropomorphic. Indeed, Treadwell's utterance, "I don't understand", may be taken as an indication of his reliance on anthropomorphism in a situation which proves to be far too overwhelming for him. This makes it apparent that reading nature as a phenomenon that is sometimes harsh, unpredictable and mercilessly cruel, does not fit into Treadwell's mediated view of the concept. Indeed, Treadwell uses the words "so good" in reference to his relationship with nature, especially when he speaks of Timmy the fox, a name for the animal which seems to have been inspired by Timothy Treadwell himself, a sign of Treadwell's tendency to read not only humanity, but himself, into nature. Treadwell's language, in the scene in which he discovers the body of the dead fox, is fraught with emotion, which may be ob-

served when he refers to the dead animal as a "bab[y]" and a "baby fox". Human infants are only ever referred to as babies. Animals are not babies, but puppies, chicks, calves or kits, as is the case of foxes. Treadwell's naming the kit a baby suggests an anthropomorphic partiality which foregrounds Treadwell's inability to realise that humanity's emotional and personal connection with nature is the product of humanity itself. Indeed, when Treadwell addresses the dead fox by saying "I love you", Herzog uses this statement as an indication that Treadwell not only uses language that is anthropomorphic and emotive, but also uses language that demonstrates a complete disregard for the potential for words to misrepresent nature. Herzog, therefore, makes the argument that humans, when in control of language, are free to assign meaning onto any aspect of nature, a phenomenon which is ultimately meaningless, suggesting that it is only through anthropomorphism that we may come to understand and define nature.

Thus, if Herzog's premise, that humans are in control of language, is true, then this implies that nature, while it has given us our language, has not prescribed to us how we must use our language. This only makes the disconnect between language and nature clearer, showing that when language is used by humans there is no reason why language may not be used to distort what is apparent in nature. Thus, even though Treadwell claims that the death of the fox makes for a "sad turn, but it is a real turn", that nature is a place of "death" (as he states in his opening monologue of the film), or that it is "very dangerous" (as he states in his confession to Iris the fox), there remains the subtle rhetoric of his language, coupled with his overt teary breakdown at the sight of the dead kit that suggests that Treadwell, perhaps, loses sight of several other ways nature may be read. Thus, Treadwell's intense reaction to the dead kit is only his response to a blinding construct of nature that he is unable to escape, an attitude towards nature of which Herzog is particularly critical.

Before Treadwell "mourn[s]" the death of the "gorgeous baby fox", we see Treadwell clutching the dismembered paw of a bear cub. In a voiceover, Herzog narrates the following:

> Perfection belonged to the bears, but once in a while Treadwell came face to face with the harsh reality of wild nature. This did not fit into his sentimentalised view that everything out there was good, and the universe in balance

> and in harmony. Male bears sometimes kill cubs to stop the females from lactating, and thus have them ready again for fornication.

Herzog correctly identifies Treadwell as someone who misinterpreted nature, who used highly anthropomorphic language to describe a phenomenon, nature, which could not be bound by such rhetoric. However, despite Herzog leading us to this point, with which I agree, it seems that Herzog may be guilty of the same errors he accuses Treadwell of committing.

When Treadwell claims that he does not understand the harshness of nature as he is caressing the ear of the half-eaten kit, Herzog interrupts Treadwell by claiming the following:

> Here I differ with Treadwell. He seemed to ignore the fact that in nature there are predators. I believe the common denominator of the universe is not harmony but chaos, hostility, and murder.

The language that Herzog uses here is just as anthropomorphic as Treadwell's. Herzog is correct to point out Treadwell's tendency to read nature in highly emotive terms, but Herzog, as the quote shows, is guilty of the same thing. When Herzog states that it is a kind of violent chaos that is nature's "common denominator", it may be assumed that Herzog takes his view of nature to be an impartial blueprint of the universe. It is a term which suggests a view of the universe which has no bearing in human concerns or influence, and is therefore independent of any flawed anthropomorphic understanding of nature. However, the terms "chaos, hostility, and murder" are clearly terms which come from Herzog, and not necessarily from nature.

Certainly, there are instances of killing in nature. While the documentary series, *Life*, teaches us of komodo dragons that poison their victims with saliva and wait days for their prey to die (Barrington), we also learn of kindness within nature and the lengths creatures are willing to go through to ensure the existence of a creature other than itself. In one instance, we witness a strawberry poison-arrow frog, no bigger than a fingernail, who must climb a tree, which, relative to the frog, is the size of the Empire State Building, in order to transport, one by one, its six tadpoles to their own leaf of the tree (Holmes). The mother poison-arrow frog does this not for itself, but for its young

(Holmes). It seems, then, that unlike what Herzog may believe, there are, indeed, instances of good in the natural world, an issue expanded upon in great detail by Richard Dawkins.

When Dawkins writes on the subject of altruism in his book *The Selfish Gene*, he defines the term as an instance in which a living entity "behaves in such a way as to increase another such entity's welfare at the expense of its own" (4). Dawkins also makes it clear that in talking about altruism (and selfishness) that the definitions are "*behavioural,* not subjective" (4 author's italics). Dawkins continues:

> I am not concerned here with the psychology of motives. I am not going to argue about whether people who behave altruistically are 'really' doing it for secret or subconscious selfish motives. … My definition is concerned only with whether the *effect* of an act is to lower or raise the survival prospects of the presumed altruist and the survival prospects of the presumed beneficiary (4 author's italics).

In observing the altruistic behaviour of vampire bats, Dawkins shows that these creatures have a tendency of sharing blood with other familiar vampire bats who, for whatever reason, have not managed to acquire any blood and may, therefore, starve (232). Dawkins explains that it is in the very nature of vampire bats to share their food, making sacrifices so that their fellow vampire bat may be fed (232). Realising that the vampire bat has become the icon of death and crazed blood-thirst, Dawkins comments on the distorted perception of the vampire bat in popular culture:

> Vampires are great mythmakers. To devotees of Victorian Gothic they are dark forces that terrorise by night, sapping vital fluids, sacrificing an innocent life merely to gratify a thirst. Combine this with that other Victorian myth, nature red in tooth and claw, and aren't vampires the very incarnation of deepest fears about the world of the selfish gene? As for me, I am sceptical of all myths. … But if we must have myths, the real facts about vampires could tell a different moral tale. To the bats themselves, not only is blood thicker than water. They rise above the bonds of kinship, forming their own lasting ties of loyal blood-brotherhood. Vampires could form the vanguard of a comfortable new myth, a myth of sharing, mutualistic cooperation.

> They could herald the benignant idea that, even with selfish genes at the helm, nice guys can finish first (233).

What Dawkins shows us is how easily and how inevitable it is that we slip into an anthropomorphic understanding of nature. That vampire bats may be viewed as both horrible and caring are merely two sides to the same coin. Thus, when Herzog claims that hostility and murder are collectively nature's "common denominator", the point must be approached with great caution. It seems that this view of nature is not a common denominator but only part of the many idiosyncratic personal and cultural interpretations of nature we have come to recognise. It is ironic, then, that Herzog uses Treadwell's rhetoric to make the argument that nature is merciless. Perhaps nature is not as loving as Treadwell makes nature out to be, but it is not as ferocious as Herzog suggests either. Herzog's criticism of Treadwell's perception of nature has allowed us to realise the irony in the inadequacy of language to represent its creator: nature. The point Herzog makes is that nature is not kind, but cruel, not heavenly, but horrible. The merits of this argument, however, as has been shown, are flawed. Thus, Herzog's view of nature is just as anthropomorphic as Treadwell's, making both views equally correct (and incorrect), despite being polar opposites. Their views of nature seem to fall on opposite ends of the same anthropomorphic continuum.

It is from this that I will conclude that when using language to describe nature, the only way to define nature is that it is indefinable. Thus, to place nature in the confines of human language is to anthropomorphise nature. It may be apparent, then, that not only is the anthropocentrisation of nature inevitable, but the anthropomorphisation of nature is so, too. Nature cannot be understood *accurately* using language, as language, a human tool, is far too susceptible to anthropomorphism. Thus, neither Herzog nor Treadwell can be criticised merely for anthropomorphising nature because any attempt to understand nature must be done through language, and any attempt to mould nature in the form of language is to anthropomorphise it. However, there is a danger in both Herzog and Treadwell's anthropomorphised views of nature which comes in the fact that it lacks any kind of self-awareness. Lacking this self-awareness means that Herzog and Treadwell do not recognise the millions of other forms nature is able to take. The danger in this is that it allows nature to be read only in one way, which limits the ways

in which we are able to treat nature in the process. This means that our treatment of nature would lack the dynamism necessary to treat a dynamic phenomenon. Penn and Krakauer make similar claims about McCandless regarding his tendency to veil nature in a particular anthropomorphic guise for the purposes of surviving nature.

"To Call Each Thing By Its Right Name": *Into the Wild*

In Penn's film, *Into the Wild*, and Jon Krakauer's book of the same title, the director and author imply that our understanding of the connection between language and nature is, quite literally, a matter of life and death. While this is also a theme which runs through Herzog's *Grizzly Man*, it is dealt with in more detail in Penn and Krakauer's respective texts.

Much like many of his ideas about several aspects of his life, McCandless's views on the issue of language and nature are inspired by literature he has read. In this case, it is Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. Among the final scenes of Penn's film, we notice McCandless, in a state of frenzied hunger, desperate for food and stabbing new holes into his belt to accommodate his reduced body mass. While in this state of anxiety we witness McCandless, shot with a handheld camera, pacing up and down his bus, softly reading out passages from *Doctor Zhivago* (Penn). One of the passages reads as follows: "For a moment she rediscovered the purpose of her life. She was here on earth to grasp the meaning of its wild enchantment and to call each thing by its right name" (Pasternak 75). The phrase "to call each thing by its right name" seems to strike at something visceral in McCandless (Penn). Immediately after the scene in which he reads from the book, there is a cut to a scene in which we see him, half-naked, crawling on his knees, identifying the flora in his environment in an attempt to call each plant by its right name (Penn). It is as though McCandless is attempting to bridge the divide between humanity and nature, or, more specifically, language and nature. McCandless is attempting to bypass the anthropomorphic quality of language, and, instead, use language as a tool for identifying and describing nature 'correctly'. McCandless seems to assume that if he is

to survive, then he must translate nature's purity, as McCandless would see it, into language.

After the scene in which we see McCandless frantically trying to define his environment, we notice McCandless sitting by a fire he had made in the bus's (presumably pre-installed) furnace, while he eats the berries, roots and shrubs he had picked during the day. Looking behind McCandless, the camera focuses on a written list of the plants he had identified in his environment, ninety in total, with the "WILD POTATO ROOT" being his last entry. That he has placed these items in a list speaks of McCandless's desire to gain a sense of control over the wild, or, to tame the wild. The scene also speaks of McCandless's desire to convert nature into something quantifiable, something that can be categorised, reasoned, and made sense of. This may come as a direct result of McCandless's loss of control over nature referred to in the previous paragraph. Thus, this linguistic control that McCandless attempts to exert over nature is a desperate attempt at survivalism. In trying to use language to define nature, especially for the purposes of survival, it seems that McCandless makes the assumption that there exists the potential for language to lose its anthropomorphic depiction of nature, and, in so doing, eliminate the divide between language and nature. Language and nature, then, as McCandless sees it, certainly have the potential for a harmonious existence. However, Penn seems sceptical of this ability of language to accurately represent nature, and, subsequently, to use this as a means of survival.

McCandless wakes up the next morning in a confused and delirious state (Penn). He tries to swallow water, but seems unable to hold it down. It is clear that McCandless is sick. As McCandless clutches his stomach he looks across his bed and we are able to identify the Priscilla Russell Kari book, *Tanaina Plantlore: An Ethnobotany of the Dena'ina Indians of Southcentral Alaska* (Penn). As McCandless pages through the book we are given a close-up of the page in which the inedible wild sweet pea is described (Penn; Russell). After this, there is a contrasting close-up of the edible wild *potato* (or Alaska carrot) (Penn). Turning back to the page in which the wild *sweet pea* is featured, McCandless reads the description of the inedible plant, and we are able to read that the wild sweet pea possesses "lateral veins" and is "poisonous". Indeed, when McCandless picks a sample of the plant from a bag, he observes that the wild sweet pea

has said lateral veins. As McCandless picks another plant sample from his bag, this time, we assume, a leaf of the wild *potato*, the words "plants resemble each other" may be read as it pans across the screen. The suggestion that Penn is attempting to make here, of course, is that McCandless mistook the inedible and fatal wild sweet pea for the edible wild potato. This mistake eventually leads to McCandless's death. Penn's tone is cautionary as he shows that language cannot represent nature with accuracy – a point I have made before. Penn introduces survivalism as a means of demonstrating the grave consequences in believing that nature can be accurately represented in language. Thus, Penn seems to be making the point that language alone cannot be used, firstly, as an adequate and accurate representation of nature, and, secondly, as a means of surviving in nature.

Penn's argument is a bold one. However, it is an argument which, perhaps, is based on premises that take too much artistic freedom as it strays too far from the facts that Krakauer, in his novel, makes plain. Referencing Kari's book, Krakauer establishes a few statements regarding the plants which led to McCandless's death: "Kari's book warns that because wild sweet pea is so difficult to distinguish from wild potato and 'is reported to be poisonous, care should be taken to identify them accurately before attempting to use the wild potato as food.' Accounts of individuals being poisoned from eating *H. mackenzii* [wild sweet pea] are nonexistent in modern medical literature, but the aboriginal inhabitants of the North have apparently known for millennia that wild sweet pea is toxic and remain extremely careful not to confuse *H. alpinum* [wild potato] with *H. mackenzii*" (190). It is from these facts that Krakauer concludes that McCandless could not have ingested wild sweet pea, and that he must have died due to the ingestion of the seed pods of the wild potato, which were

> not known to be toxic – indeed, he'd been safely eating its roots for weeks. … A person with a better grasp of botanical principles would probably not have eaten them, but it was an innocent error. It was, however, sufficient to do him in (193).

Krakauer prefaces his argument as speculation, but, as Krakauer also convincingly points out, it is certainly a much better evidenced view of what may have caused McCandless's death than the more popular views of the time (of which Penn is an advo-

cate), and was the conclusion arrived at by most journalists writing about the incident at the time (191). Thus, Penn's argument does not hold the same kind of clarity of reason that Krakauer's does. It is because of this flaw in Penn's argument that I certainly cannot be readily influenced by its implications for the relationship between language and nature either. In light of this information, the facts surrounding McCandless's death, then, can be read in a new light.

Thus, based on poorly evidenced facts, to be fair, Penn states that McCandless's death was due to an inability of language to grasp all of nature, making the point that the kind of deep interconnection McCandless attempted to establish with nature was doomed to fail. This may be evidenced by the point that, perhaps, due to western civilisation's increasing physical distance from nature it is no longer necessary for modern humans to remember the qualities and names of the plants and animals in the natural surrounds. Krakauer, however, is more optimistic on the matter. Certainly, Krakauer shows that McCandless's hubristic attempts at living in complete harmony with nature failed because of the inability of language to define nature, but Krakauer shows that the *most* significant factors which contributed to McCandless's death were, firstly, bad luck, and, secondly, that McCandless simply did not have the tools (179) and skills (180-81) necessary to accomplish such an extreme integration with nature. Thus, unlike Penn, Krakauer does not rule out the possibility that such an immersion into nature is possible. However, like Penn, Krakauer shows that it is certainly unwise for modern humans to attempt to develop such intense and overzealous interconnections with a concept to which humanity now struggles to relate (180).

Chapter 3
Nature on Culture and Character

> Oh, yes, those trees! How terrible what they did with the trees. Because the cottonwood suckles like a baby. Suckles on the mother water running under the ground. A cottonwood will talk to the mother water and tell her what human beings are doing. But then these white men came and they began digging up the cottonwoods and moving them here and there for a terrible purpose (Marmon Silko *Almanac* 117).

The British and Native American Perspective

As was established in my introductory chapter, 'nature' is a term impossible to define. Definitions of nature, then, are purely subjective and determined by culture (Grewe-Volpp 80), which implies that when asking for a definition of nature one should expect as many answers as there are cultures. Thus, with every culture attempting to define a concept which is, in fact, indefinable, each culture's definition of nature is interesting not because it provides a definition of nature, per se, but because it provides insight into how each respective culture defines the interconnections between humanity and what they perceive as nature. It is reasonable to believe, then, that because each culture differs from the next, every culture's definition of nature will also differ from each other in either type or degree. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be focussing mainly on the perceptions of nature that are prevalent within Americans, both Native and Anglophone, the two of which are juxtaposed most prominently in Terrence Malick's *The New World*.

Malick's film illustrates one of the first encounters between the Europeans (specifically, the British, who will later become American settlers) and the Native Americans (specifically, the Algonquian). Speaking in broad terms, Malick presents the Algon-

quian as having strong interconnections with nature, and the British not. The reasons for the British not having such strong interconnections with nature are severalfold. In some instances, this is due to the Christian beliefs upheld by the British, and in other instances it is due to their colonial disposition.

The British represent an idea of the New World which is, in more ways than one, constructed: it is constructed in language, and it is constructed in physical space. This is most clearly evidenced when Captain Newport addresses his fellow settlers by stating that they all have a duty to "prepare a land where a man may rise to his true stature" (Malick *The New World*). The notion that the land must be "prepare[d]" suggests that the British perceive nature as that upon which something must be built. The British, then, establish an identity for themselves which they, quite literally, build onto nature. However, Malick shows that the British also construct their cultural identity based on their contestation with nature, which may be shown as Captain Newport suggests that the sailors are "the pioneers of the world, the advanced guards sent through the wilderness to break a new path" (Malick *The New World*). This "break[ing]" of the wilderness suggests a warring sensibility in which the wilderness must be defeated for the British to believe themselves successful in their battle with nature. Further, that Newport believes that it is a "new path" that must be made shows that it is the development of the land which he considers constitutes this success. Indeed, as Rosen shows us, the first European settlers, upon arriving in the New World, believed that they "could make the land more productive [and, therefore,] had a superior claim to it" (D. Rosen 7). When the British are in battle with the Algonquian, Wingfield shouts angrily to his opposition, "How can you own land? This earth was made for such that shall improve it, and knows how to live!" (Malick *The New World*). Wingfield, implying that earth was created, which can be seen in his usage of the word "made", believes that the earth was made "for" a purpose, which is to improve the land. Wingfield's perception of the Native Americans is that they are living wasteful lives by not cultivating and developing the land that they have been 'given'.

The British characters construct their notions of nature based on the Christian idea of Eden. Indeed, Captain Newport is often heard describing the New World landscape as such (Malick *The New World*). However, since we have already established that the

British believe that the land must be conquered to establish successful interconnections between themselves and nature, it may be reasoned that the "Eden" to which the British refer is one in which the wilderness which surrounds them must be constructed and developed. This, in turn, demonstrates that the Britons' ideas of the wilderness (that is, what would generally be considered the 'natural' beauty of the landscape) and Eden exist as two separate constructs in the colonial mentality. Nash explains the manner in which these two concepts differ:

> Eden and the wilderness are juxtaposed in such a way as to leave no doubt about their original relationship. 'The land is like the garden of Eden before them,' wrote the author of Joel, 'but after them a desolate wilderness.' And Isaiah contains the promise that God will comfort Zion and 'make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord' (15).

However, that the Britons made this distinction between their constructed ideas of Eden and the wilderness does not necessarily imply that they considered what the wilderness offered was worthless. The Britons, arriving in America for the first time, anthropomorphically saw this bountiful New World as an opportunity for a new beginning (Kolodny 6; Marx 1). It is through John Smith that Malick symbolically demonstrates the liberating effect the New World had on some of its first European arrivals. The first images we see of Smith are of him shackled in a cell of the newly arrived English ship. Later, Captain Newport, releasing Smith of his bondage, explains the importance in taking opportunity of the second chance he has given Smith. Smith clearly recognises the potential in his new beginning in this new land:

> We shall make a new start, a fresh beginning. Here the blessings of the earth are bestowed upon all. None need grow poor. Here there is good ground for all, and no cost but one's labour.

That the wilderness, or natural landscape, has much to offer is a notion that is also corroborated by another sailor who reports to Captain Newport about the bounty he has found upon arriving in America:

> Captain Newport, sir, I found oysters. They're as thick as my hands. They're the size of stones, sir, and there's fish everywhere. … We're going to live like kings.

The British, then, perceive this new land in at least two ways. They see it as a blank slate upon which a new identity may be constructed, and they see it as a land of great bounty from which they may extract as much as they want, treating the land as a bottomless well. Malick, however, is critical of this kind of anthropomorphic understanding of the land, which he shows to be grossly utilitarian. Malick shows that the British believed nature to exist solely for the purposes of sustaining human, or, specifically, British, culture. It is also an attitude towards nature, Malick argues, which leads to the British pillaging and destroying the land. Malick contrasts these British sensibilities towards nature with the Native American treatment of nature, which Malick favours.



Figure 5: Malick *The New World*

Days after the British arrive, the sound of an axe (as seen in Figure 4) coming into forceful contact with a tree can be heard by some of the Algonquian who are close by to the British camp. The sound, as it is presented on the soundtrack, is of a distant and rhythmic dull thump. As the sound continues on the soundtrack, we notice an Algonquian man, shot from below, with only his head and shoulders in full view, steadily rising with his head turned and facing the direction from which the sound comes (as shown in Figure 5). Malick shows that the Algonquian approach the sound and its referent as an alien and obtrusive curiosity. Tanner may assist us in gaining a better understanding in reading this scene: "The sign of the axe most decisively destroys the scene of nature. It is the



Figure 4: Malick *The New World*

opposite of passive wonder; it posits and presupposes man against nature, a 'mingling' which is a violent attack, not a 'merging' of consciousness and object" (9). This is the kind of symbolic meaning attached to the axe as the Algonquian see it. Through implication, then, the Algonquian abide by the opposite of the meaning attached to this symbol. The angle from which the axe and the Algonquian man are shot, respectively, may also indicate where Malick's allegiances lie. The axe is shot from above, belittling an object of destructive power, while the Algonquian man, because he is shot from below, is *em*powered. Further, the direction to which the Algonquian man's head is turned as he listens to the sound of the thump suggests that the sound in being emitted from the sinister left. This indicates Malick's deliberate and partial imagery. Thus, the Algonquian, as Malick sees them, live lives in which nature is not shown any harm, whereas the British approach nature with a kind of malignant violence. It is the Algonquian who are presented as paragons of the type of interconnections between humanity and nature that Malick advocates. This sentiment is supported by several other scenes in the film, many of which revolve around the character Pocahontas.

Indeed, in the first few scenes in which we notice Pocahontas, we see her, naked, swimming in water, with her body constantly obscured by the darkness of the depths, which prevents the viewer from noticing the point at which her body ends and nature begins. In numerous scenes we also notice Pocahontas climbing trees, touching large stalks of corn, and playing in the rain. This type of close interconnection with nature may be seen in other members of the Algonquian as well, as we observe them with snakes dangling from their earlobes, or covered in feathers and reeds. Thus, the type of interconnections that Malick shows the Algonquian have with nature are characterised by an anthropomorphism in which nature is seen as peaceful, tranquil and accommodating. When Pocahontas is playing in the grass with her brother at the beginning of the film, they hold up their spread-out hands above their heads, pretending to be deer, or when some of the tribesmen act like chickens as part of Smith's initiation into the tribe, we see that the Algonquian are of the view that humanity, or at least their tribe, is a mere extension of nature. The Algonquian, therefore, perceive themselves to be, not above nature, but as existing on the same plane *alongside* nature. However, Malick takes many artistic liberties in his portrayal of the Algonquian's close and harmonious relationship with nature, often sidestepping historical accuracy.

The ‘ecological Indian’ is the term often used for the depiction, or the conceptualisation, of the Native American as being in peaceful cohabitation with nature. However, this concept of the ecological Indian, a concept to which Malick subscribes, is, at times, incorrect, and, at other times, too broad. Certainly, in many respects, the Algonquian, and the Native American population in general, do sometimes comply with the image of the ecological Indian. Frank G. Speck explains this in the Algonquian’s relationship to animals, showing that the Algonquian of the north-east of America often perceived that “hunting is a holy occupation and that game animals are holy as well” (10). However, as Speck makes plain throughout his book, the Algonquian treatment of animals was ultimately born out of self-interest. That the Native Americans held an anthropocentric relationship to nature is unsurprising since, as previously mentioned, an anthropocentric attitude towards nature is inevitable. What is perhaps surprising, however, is that, at times, the Native Americans’ treatment of nature was not only self-interested, but destructive as well.

In his book, the *Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, Shepard Krech, III, makes it known that the Northern Algonquian were not as harmoniously connected to nature as is popularly thought, which Krech specifically explains by means of the beaver trade (179). Krech explains that before the Europeans came to the Americas, the “Northern Algonquins found beavers a vital source of food and clothing, and also used their prominent orange-enamelled incisors as cutting, gouging, and sharpening tools, and their scapulas (stripped of their flesh) as instruments of divination” (179). However, Krech makes it clear that the Algonquian, for the sake of the beaver trade in the 1600s, would often “kill as many animals as they could find” (200) and that the tribe, between the 1700s to the 1900s, had “no interest whatsoever in [conservation]” (194). This demonstrates that perhaps the perception we have of Native Americans, especially the Algonquian of the seventeenth century, and especially in the way Malick has portrayed them, is inaccurate. Regarding the Native American use of fire, Krech also shows that the Algonquian, and the Native Americans more generally, used fire to such a large extent that

> By the time Europeans arrived, North America was a manipulated continent. Indians had long since altered the landscape by burning or clearing wood-

> land for farming and fuel. Despite European images of an untouched Eden, this nature was cultural not virgin, anthropogenic not primeval, and nowhere is this more evident than in the Indian uses of fire (122).

Thus, Malick's portrayal of the Algonquian in *The New World* is one that is an artistic construction based on a much larger popular construction. Malick's view of the Native Americans as 'noble savages' is one not unseen in popular American culture, and may be witnessed in works such as Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. Indeed, in the "Introduction" of Brown's book, the author foregrounds the fact that his portrayal will be one in which the Native Americans are people who exhibit "gentle reasonableness" (xxv). This is certainly a portrayal of Native Americans quite often seen in American film as well, *Dances With Wolves* (Costner) being a prime example. Malick is no exception to this Romanticisation of the indigenous. However, that Malick takes many artistic liberties in this portrayal is not without value. Certainly, in a time when humanity's interconnections with nature seem to be weakening, perhaps it is Malick's portrayal of the Algonquian's propinquity to nature that should be encouraged. There are, of course, problems with the type of anthropomorphic attitude towards nature that the Algonquian display. One such problem is that it is a kind of anthropomorphism that is not self-aware. The danger in lacking self-awareness in one's anthropomorphic understanding that nature and humanity exist in harmony, or any other kind of anthropomorphic understanding of nature which lacks self-awareness, for that matter, is that one may be susceptible to taking such a perception of nature literally. A literal understanding of this type, especially when it lacks any scientific understanding of nature, means that any idiosyncratic cultural interpretation of nature may not correlate with one's worldview of the relationship between humanity and nature. Thus, to believe, quite literally, that buffaloes are 'given' in an infinite amount from a cave in the ground, and can therefore be killed with abandon (as many factions of the Algonquian believed) (Krech 149), is a highly anthropomorphised, and dangerously unscientific, understanding of the world which may counter one's view that one's culture, as the Algonquian thought, lives in peaceful harmony with nature. This is a point upon which I expand in greater detail in Chapter 5. Thus, while Malick shows that the English characters' attitudes towards nature are more overtly destructive than the Algonquian characters', Malick neglects to show that, at times, the Algonquian attitudes towards nature were

equally so for similar reasons: both views of nature, both equally anthropomorphic and equally anthropocentric, lacked the self-awareness that ought to accompany anthropomorphism to be considered productive.

Nature and Morality

Culture, in an attempt to use nature as a means to define itself, also uses nature to provide a sense of morality. Thus, all cultures develop an anthropomorphic understanding of nature in order to gain a sense of right and wrong. Cultures do this sometimes because of, and sometimes despite, nature. Both these kinds of aspects on morality define key features of the Anglophone American's moral psyche throughout their history.

As has been discussed, the British exploring the New World at the beginning of the seventeenth century perceived nature to be something that should be conquered and used for the purposes of cultural expansion, as depicted in Malick's *The New World*. Thus, Malick's portrayal of the British is that they perceive nature as a phenomenon that exists solely for the purpose of humanity, an accurate portrayal of the western sentiment of the time. Indeed, Francis Bacon, writing at the same time in which the film is set, makes the humanist claim that "Man, if we look to final causes, may be regarded as the centre of the world; insomuch that if man were taken away from the world, the rest would seem to be all astray, without aim or purpose, to be like a besom without a binding, as the saying is, and to be leading to nothing. For the whole world works together in the service of man; and there is nothing from which he does not derive use and fruit" (747). This pre-Copernican view of the relationship between humanity and nature, in which humanity is the point around which all else revolves, leaves little doubt of its anthropocentric anthropomorphisation. The type of anthropomorphism that Bacon is advocating, ironically, will not do any good for humanity in the long run. Using up every last unit of fossil fuel, and chopping down every tree, would not allow for healthy interconnections between humanity and nature. Bacon's view, then, presents an attitude towards nature that is harmful to humans, earth and animals alike. This is a view of nature that, while popular at the time, eventually mutated and changed with the American

Puritans several decades afterward, defining their sense of morality in relation to their understanding of nature in the process.

Beginning in mid-seventeenth-century America (about two or three decades after Malick's *The New World* is set), one finds that the New England Puritans viewed nature, and, specifically, the wilderness, as a space which was not simply amoral, but *im*moral (Turner 46). The Puritans viewed the wilderness as a space in which nothing good existed, a space that would encourage and cultivate the evil that lay dormant in humans, who would run rampant if gone unchecked (Nash 86). However, it is the transcendentalists who, approximately two centuries later, would stand as the ideological antithesis to the Puritans.

The transcendentalists believed that one's being was made up of two corresponding entities: the body, which drew one to worldly materiality, and the soul, which gave one the ability to go beyond, or transcend, the material, and better one's spirituality (Nash 85). Transcendentalists emphasised that if one was able to observe nature correctly, according to how they defined this term, of course, then one would be able to use this ability to connect to a higher spiritual plane, which led the transcendentalists to believe that "nature was the proper source of religion" (Nash 86). Thus, one of the most famous transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson, would state the following:

> That which once existed in intellect as pure law, has now taken body as Nature. … [W]e can use nature as a convenient standard, and the metre of our rise and fall. … When man curses, nature still testifies to truth and love (84).

This is a view of nature which is predominantly found in most western cultures. Coates describes the manner in which people today, when they use nature to define their morality, see nature as something pure and good: "Nature is often presumed to be an objective reality with universal qualities unaffected by considerations of time, culture and place, an assumption especially evident in appeals to nature as a source of external authority (witness the ever popular saying 'Nature knows best')" (1). Chris McCandless presents a person highly influenced by this anthropomorphic mixing of morality and nature. Indeed, McCandless's journey into the wild was weighted significantly by a deep-seated sense of morality (Krakauer 28). Of the transcendentalists, McCandless was well-versed

in, and greatly influenced by, the moral teachings of Henry David Thoreau from whom McCandless learnt that the purist form of moral goodness may be found in nature (Krakauer 48).

One of the best examples of Thoreau's sentiments on the relationship between morality and nature are exemplified when he writes that "all good things are wild, and free" (*Walking* 35). Thoreau, like the Puritans who preceded him, uses nature as a moral compass, but, unlike the Puritans that preceded him, equates nature with goodness. It is in this quote that Thoreau also presents quite a narrow and specific understanding of nature and its relationship to morality. For Thoreau, it is not that all things wild and free are good (implying that there are other things that are *not* wild and free, but are good anyway), but that being good is equated with being wild and free. The implication of this, then, is that if a human were to live a life that is considered morally good, by Thoreau's anthropomorphically defined standards, of course, then one must live a life immersed in wild nature whereby one is not restricted by rules and order.

Chris McCandless, while greatly influenced by Thoreau's sense of nature-based morality, also lived by perceptions of nature based on his own construction. For example, well into his journey into the wild, McCandless etched the following onto the inside wall of the magic bus in which he resided before moving further into Alaska: "'NO LONGER TO BE POISONED BY CIVILIZATION HE FLEES, AND WALKS ALONE UPON THE LAND TO BECOME LOST IN THE WILD'" (Krakauer 162). What is interesting about this line is that it provides insight into McCandless's viewing of nature not only as something which is morally pure, but that it is morally pure because it stands in opposition to humanity. Humanity, for McCandless, is something by which one may be "'POISONED'". Thus, McCandless's idea of becoming a virtuous person is determined by, simultaneously, immersing himself into nature and divorcing himself from society, a kind of anti-anthropocentrism. Further, writing in the third person, McCandless's desire to escape from humanity is so extreme that he necessitates achieving this moral purity with escaping himself as well.

However, the irony and flawed reasoning of the argument cannot be ignored. What I am referring to is the fact that McCandless uses culturally determined tools and constructs to come to the conclusion that culture, itself, is that which poisons the purity of

nature. McCandless, then, in trying to sever himself from any kind of connection to the human world, only replaces one anthropomorphism with another. McCandless has not escaped the bonds of human culture as absolutely as he has come to believe. I am not suggesting, however, that it is wrong of McCandless to have an anthropomorphic understanding of nature. What I am criticising McCandless for is his lack of awareness in the irony that is embedded in his constructed view of the world whereby nature is equated with moral goodness. It is an irony that, perhaps if McCandless was aware of it, would have prevented him from fatally pursuing such a construct as dogmatically as he did. Another criticism of McCandless's view on the relationship between morality and nature, to which I now turn, is that his particular anthropomorphic view of nature is a view that is far too physically reliant on nature, and not reliant enough on humanity, to be productive for humanity as a whole. This is certainly the point made by Penn and Krakauer as well.

Krakauer reports that the last book McCandless read was Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (188). In the book McCandless marked the following passage: "And so it turned out that only a life similar to the life of those around us, merging with it without a ripple, is genuine life, and that an unshared happiness is not happiness. … And this was most vexing of all" (Pasternak 175). Next to this passage McCandless wrote a note which read: "'HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED'" (Krakauer 188). This annotation by McCandless is one that is emphasised in Penn's film as well, and shows that whatever kind of happiness one may derive from nature (or anything else for that matter) must be a happiness that is accompanied by some degree of anthropocentrism as it must be a happiness in which others are invited to partake. Thus, McCandless comes to learn that in keeping nature, his personal source of happiness, to himself, he has embraced other species to such an extreme that he has fatally abandoned his own. McCandless's annotation, then, demonstrates the necessity of anthropocentrism. Before McCandless annotates this note, he exhibits a type of anthropomorphism which, while it may be the absolute optimum for nature, is most certainly not so for humanity. It is an anthropomorphisation of nature which dangerously lacks any trace of anthropocentrism.

Exploring Nature

The attitude that Americans and, more generally, westerners, have had with nature is often examined and characterised by means of observing their relationship to exploration and the discovery, at least from the perspective of the explorer, of new landscapes. Indeed, it is in the very labelling of America as the *New* World which illustrates, in this case, the Eurocentric attitude European explorers had when first entering America, recognising that it was new for them. However, from the Native American perspective, America had been their home millennia before whites first set foot on their soil. The 'New' in the New World, or any 'newly explored' land for that matter, is defined by the person or culture that is doing the exploring. As in Malick's *The New World* it represents "a new beginning" as the aptly named Captain Newport articulates. However, Malick seems critical of the way the British view the New World as 'new' not only because it was a landscape that was discovered by another human race, but because the landscape can hardly be considered new from the perspective of *any* human culture. It is in Malick's opening credit sequence in which we are presented with Malick's argument that the first residents of the natural landscape of America were not the Europeans, or the Native Americans, but nature itself.

In *The New World*'s opening credit sequence Malick presents us with a montage of maps of the New World. In one of the first maps we see, which takes up all of the screen, the camera floats above the map, which is sporadically illustrated with the usual symbols we come to expect of maps: green blotches which represent trees, meandering lines representing rivers, brown triangles which represent hills, and so forth. However, soon after we are presented with the map, the symbols on the map become animate; they begin to come alive. On the soundtrack we are able to hear birds tweeting and wind blowing through trees. We are also introduced to an ocean in which we notice capsized ships, while, on the soundtrack, we hear waves gushing onto a shore. We also notice that the symbols representing rivers are colourised in blue. The animated blue runs from each river's source to its mouth, like blue blood coursing through the veins of the earth. It is in this way that Malick injects life into the map. Malick also uses the symbol of the map to show that in our attempt to explore the earth we can never truly come to an understanding of nature in its totality. Our anthropomorphic representation of nature,

especially on maps, according to Malick, means that we reduce nature into categories and symbols, and, in so doing, lose the detail and complexity of that which we may purport to know holistically. Thus, in our attempt to explore nature for the purposes of coming to understand all of nature, we only underline nature's tendency to evade symbolic representation and evade being truly known. Nature, then, as Malick argues, in this sequence, is alive in its own right, and exists independently of any human culture. Similarly, Werner Herzog's *Encounters at the End of the World* provides a critical stance on exploration.

Herzog's film investigates the matter of exploration and the manner in which this act determines a certain kind of destructive anthropomorphic relationship certain humans have with nature. In one scene in particular, Herzog uses old and grainy black-and-white footage of Antarctica which displays what must have been some of the first human encounters with the continent (*Encounters*). We are taken into the cabin of Ernest Shackleton, one of the first explorers of Antarctica, while his clothes, bed and empty food crates are on display. During this scene, Herzog narrates the following:

> Back in the days of [Roald] Amundsen, [Robert Falcon] Scott and [Ernest] Shackleton, scientific exploration of Antarctica began, and this opening of the unknown continent is their great achievement. But one thing about the early explorers does not feel right. The obsession to be the first one to set his foot on the South Pole. It was for personal fame and the glory of the British Empire. … [H]uman adventure, in its original sense, lost its meaning, became an issue for the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Scott and Amundsen were clearly early protagonists, and from there on it degenerated into absurd quests. A Frenchman crossed the Sahara Desert in his car set in reverse gear, and I am waiting for the first barefoot runner on the summit of Everest or the first one hopping into the South Pole on a pogo stick.

Herzog believes, then, that the ties between humanity and nature are severed in the act of exploration. However, it is a particular kind of exploration of which Herzog is critical. It is a kind of exploration in which the explorer anthropomorphises the earth as something whose only purpose is to anticipate the day when a human has finally set foot on it. It is an anthropomorphic view of nature in which humanity uses nature as a stage upon which to stand for the sake of self-aggrandisement (both individually and cultur-

ally). Herzog also touches on why some explorers may have felt the need to do this when he states that it was due to an "obsession to be the first". These explorers, then, according to Herzog, feel the need to implicate human history in natural history, to be the first to redefine and rewrite space as place. They wish to become authors, and thereby gain authority, before and over nature. Another problem of the type of exploration which Herzog condones is that it is usually practiced by explorers or adventurers who

> speak of their travels in such military terms. 'We've conquered the summit.' 'We returned victorious over Mount Everest' (Cronin 198).

It is in these ways that these explorers use nature in order to define themselves as above nature. Herzog is right, then, to show that this exploration of nature was only for the benefit of humanity. Further, when Herzog describes these quests as "absurd", he implies that humanity's relationship with nature, when committing these acts, becomes so as well. Thus, in trying to reach Antarctica on a pogo stick, or driving across the Sahara in reverse gear, one anthropomorphises nature as something which is ridiculous and can be mocked. Nature becomes an object of ridicule, which exists for the amusement of humanity.

In an interview with Paul Cronin, Herzog makes it clear that he is not against exploration, per se, but only the *type* of exploration (which he labels "adventuring" to distinguish between the two types) that makes a mockery of nature for the purposes of "self-promotion" (198). In fact, the type of exploration that Herzog advocates, and practices, is one in which the explorer is "curious" and is "searching for new images and dignified places" (Cronin 198). This is the kind of exploration which stands in direct contrast to adventuring which attempts to ridicule and overpower nature.

Thus, anthropomorphising nature as that which should be conquered, and over which human authority must be exercised, is a view of nature much like that of the New England Puritans of the 1600s, which is a type of anthropomorphism which may prove to be ineffective in establishing helpful and productive ties with nature. Indeed, it is an attempt to completely sever these ties. The kind of warring rhetoric advocated by this anthropomorphism forces humanity to think of nature as its enemy. It stands to reason

that it would be foolish to destroy or conquer that on which we depend for our survival. It is because of this that Herzog rather promotes an anthropomorphic understanding of nature in which nature's integrity is maintained: "Exposing the last unknown spots of this earth was irreversible, but it feels sad that the South Pole or Mount Everest were not left in peace in their dignity. It may be a futile wish to keep a few white spots on our maps" (*Encounters*). Perhaps, then, it is a characteristic of the American, and, more broadly, western, psyche, to conquer nature by exploring it. This is a sentiment dominant in American history both in the British 'discovering' America, but also white Americans 'discovering' every last corner of their own landscape, which may be seen in their relationship to Alaska, a land which many Americans consider their final frontier. It is in Penn and Krakauer's text, however, in which Alaska, and what it has come to symbolise for Americans, is not shown only as a landscape that constructs cultural identity, but personal identity as well.

Nature and Individual Identity

Alaska, with its plentiful timber, fishing and oil reserves, is "often regarded as a land endowed with tremendous natural wealth, a terrain offering unlimited commercial opportunities" (Kollin 43), which then increases the economic significance of the land. Chris McCandless does not fit into this tradition of the Alaska narrative. Also, McCandless does not see Alaska as a "a region whose history has yet to be written and whose 'virgin lands' have yet to be explored" (Kollin 25) as is so often the perception of Alaska in American culture. McCandless is not an adventurer who wishes to discover new landscapes for national glory. Rather, as he sees Alaska in private and intimate terms, McCandless is an adventurer of the self who wishes to discover new facets of his own being. Krakauer describes the type of perception of Alaska to which McCandless subscribes: "Alaska has long been a magnet for dreamers and misfits, people who think the unsullied enormity of the Last Frontier will patch all the holes in their lives" (4). Thus, despite the fact that McCandless refers to his journey into Alaska as his "'ultimate adventure'" (Krakauer 52), McCandless uses the identity of Alaska, and nature more

generally, in order to construct (and repair) his own identity. Krakauer, then, does not describe the ways in which McCandless defines nature, but how McCandless uses nature to define himself. Penn, in his film, takes much of the same approach.

In Penn's film, McCandless's exploration of the self is most clearly expressed in the scene in which McCandless first meets "rubber tramps" Jan and Rainey. In one particular scene, while McCandless and Rainey are sitting on a beach, McCandless confesses to Rainey his irrational fear of water. Concluding that he must overcome this fear, McCandless makes his way to the ocean. As McCandless dives into the water with Rainey's wife, Jan, he can be heard on voiceover narration stating the following: "The sea's only gifts are harsh blows, and occasionally the chance to feel strong. Now, I don't know much about the sea, but I do know that that's the way it is here, and I also know how important it is in life, not necessarily to be strong, but to feel strong, to measure yourself at least once, to find yourself at least once in the most ancient of human conditions, facing the blind, deaf stone alone, with nothing to help you, but your hands and your own head".

One of the things that is important about McCandless's words is his willingness to allow nature to define himself. In the first sentence, McCandless states that the sea gives "harsh blows" and "occasionally the chance to feel strong". Nature, then, provides McCandless with a sense of strength and self-worth. Indeed, McCandless states that the sea is able to provide a means by which to "measure" himself, and what he is measuring himself against is "the blind, deaf stone". McCandless, then, uses nature as a neutral backdrop against which he forges his identity. It must be made known, however, that McCandless makes a distinction by saying that nature allows one only to "feel" strong and not to "be" strong. I feel this is of little consequence as McCandless continues to use nature to define himself in *some* way. Further, what is interesting is that McCandless constructs his identity both *because of* nature, and *in spite* of humanity. It is McCandless's relationship with his parents which provides some indication of his love affair with nature, and how he uses nature, not only for the purposes of self-discipline, but also for self-repair.

McCandless's introduction into the world, as with most individuals, is through his parents. However, his relationship with his parents, as both Penn's film and Krakauer's

book show, cannot be described as being one of complete happiness. This may be due to McCandless's vehement disapproval of the life lessons his parents seemed to be advocating. In Penn's film McCandless characterises his relationship with his parents by reciting the poem "I Go Back to May 1937" to his sister, Carine, on their way to McCandless's graduation lunch with their parents:

> they are about to graduate, they are about to get married,
> they are kids, they are dumb, all they know is they are
> innocent, they would never hurt anybody.
> I want to go up to them and say Stop,
> don't do it – she's the wrong woman,
> he's the wrong man, you are going to do things
> you cannot imagine you would ever do,
> you are going to do bad things to children,
> you are going to suffer in ways you have not heard of,
> you are going to want to die (Olds 10-19).

The poem is apt in the manner in which it serves as a reflection of McCandless's attitude towards his parents. Based on his recitation of the poem, McCandless feels his parents to be the type to inflict "bad things" upon him. These "bad things", as Penn's film depicts, are partly characterised by McCandless's parents' inability to provide a stable and safe environment into which their son may grow. This sentiment is expressed overtly in a scene in which we witness McCandless role-playing a dialogue between his parents (Penn). McCandless recites his father talking to his mother:

> 'No, Billie. I told you once. Don't make me tell you again. Okay? Okay? You hear me? You hear me, woman? You hear me, woman? Huh? You hear me, woman?'

McCandless recites his mother's response:

> 'Sorry. Sorry, Walt. I'm sorry.'

It is this abusive behaviour which has characterised the McCandless household, and McCandless's willingness to recite it shows that Penn is of the opinion that McCandless has both internalised it, and is attempting to purge himself of its pathological side ef-

fects. Also, the Olds poem McCandless recites in the film indicates that the narrator is imagining a time in which her parents graduated and started their adult life together. McCandless is at precisely the same point in his life as the narrator's parents, and, based on his recitation of the poem, he reasons that it is the point in his life at which drastic changes are necessary if catastrophe and unhappiness are to be avoided. McCandless has decided that materialism is the cause of the rupturing core around which his family revolves.

In a scene in which McCandless is having lunch with his parents, after having just graduated, his parents suggest buying him a new car (Penn). McCandless responds:

> I don't need a new car. I don't want a new car. … These things, things, things, things.

It is in these lines in which McCandless displays an unremitting disgust in the material goods that surround him, and that his parents think he needs. Further, his repetition of the word "things" suggests, firstly, the abundance of the materiality which surrounds him, and, secondly, given the word's loose applicability to any*thing*, also implies that which is not meaningful or substantial. McCandless's antidote to this materiality, it seems, may be deduced from the literature which has inspired him to embark on his journey.

Among the books found among McCandless's remains was Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (Krakauer 67). Within the book was found the following highlighted passage:

> Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices (Thoreau *Walden and Other Writings* 348).

Indeed, at the beginning of Penn's film we are told that McCandless gave all the money in his bank account to charity, and we also witness him burning money on the road before he makes his trek to Alaska. Material wealth, then, to McCandless, is seen as an evil and malign hindrance on his path to spiritual and moral enlightenment. Interest-

ingly, when McCandless sets off for Alaska, he not only burns his money, but is shown cutting up any cards on which his identity is imprinted. Thus, McCandless, somewhat literally, loses his identity. It is to Alaska that McCandless turns to escape humanity, and he perceives Alaska as a canvas onto which he can paint and repair his identity. It is Roderick Nash who explains with greater articulation why people look to the wilderness as a means of healing:

> Wilderness appealed to those bored or disgusted with man and his works. It not only offered an escape from society but also was an ideal stage for the Romantic individual to exercise the cult that he frequently made of his own soul. The solitude and total freedom of the wilderness created a perfect setting for either melancholy or exultation (47).

Thus, like his British forefathers, McCandless uses a seemingly blank canvas as a means of constructing a new persona, a persona of which humanity is not a part. Timothy Treadwell uses Alaska in similar ways.

Herzog ponders at the reason why Treadwell (like McCandless) chooses to become lost in the wild:

> What drove Timothy into the wild? We visited his parents in Florida. Timothy grew up with four siblings in Long Island in a solid middle class family where the father worked as the foreman of a construction team for a telephone company. There must have been an urge to escape the safety of his protected environment (Herzog *Grizzly Man*).

Treadwell's father explains that Treadwell "change[d] his name to Treadwell to be theatrical, and it was a family name" (Herzog *Grizzly Man*). Coincidently, McCandless changed his name to something quite similar: Alexander Supertramp (Krakauer 22-23; Penn). The "Alexander" part may be inspired by one of the characters from the copious amount of Russian literature that McCandless has read. The "Supertramp" part is likely to have come from *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, written by Welsh poet W. H. Davies. It is in this book in which the author provides an account of his journeys, not only throughout America, but across the world, living an adventurous vagrant life (Davies), a life which may have inspired McCandless to do the same. It seems that both

McCandless and Treadwell have chosen names for themselves which establish their deep physical connection to their environments as both their names have perambulatory connotations. Most importantly, though, the changing of their names signifies a need for a change of identity. Their newfound identities are implicated in their willingness to tramp and tread both *into* new environments and *out* of others.

In the case of Treadwell, when Herzog interviews his parents, they reveal facts about their dead son which help us understand why he was so intent on leaving humanity, which Treadwell's father supposes was due to his unsuccessful pursuits in the human world. Treadwell's father explains:

> And he tested with the actors to get the bartender job on *Cheers*. And allegedly he came in second to Woody Harrelson. How close a second? I don't know. But that is what really destroyed him (Herzog *Grizzly Man*).

Also, while confessing to his camera, Treadwell admits to not having much success with women in sexual relationships: "I always cannot understand why girls don't wanna be with me for a long time, because I really have a nice personality". In a scene that follows shortly thereafter, Treadwell can be seen confiding in Iris, a fox:

> I used to drink to the point of, erm, that I guess I was either going to die from it, or break free of it. … I did everything that I could to try not to drink, and then I did everything that I could *to* drink, and it was killing me, until I discovered this land of bears, and realised that they were in such, such great danger that they needed a caretaker. They needed someone to look after them, but not a drunk person, not a person messed up (author's italics).

In not being able to find success both in love and his career, Treadwell has not managed to comply with the constructs of the human world, and has, therefore, developed constructs for himself by which he is able to live. Thus, Treadwell turned to nature to gain a sense of purpose and has used nature to construct a reason for him to be alive. Treadwell's anthropomorphic understanding of nature, then, is that it is beautiful, but in need of protection, which necessitates his constructed persona as nature's "caretaker". Nature, by Treadwell's own initiation, has given him an identity.

The identities of both Chris McCandless and Timothy Treadwell are reliant on an anthropomorphically constructed idea of nature which, for both men, is self-serving. When discussing the relationship between nature and morality, I was critical of McCandless as he constructed his sense of morality in *spite* of culture and *because* of nature, which, ironically, was a sense of morality which relied on *cultural* constructs of nature to be formulated. The same is true both for Treadwell and McCandless here. They both use cultural constructs of nature (whereby nature is perceived as pure, spiritually fulfilling and enlightening) in order to formulate an identity that resists any kind of human influence. Thus, the same ironies are at play. Herzog, Krakauer and Penn, however, point to other criticisms regarding their respective protagonists' interpretations of nature.

These artists seem to criticise Treadwell and McCandless, respectively, for journeying too far into the wild. They had confided in, and relied so extensively on, nature in constructing their lives that Herzog, Krakauer and Penn seem to say that, as a result, their subjects began hating humanity, which, ultimately, led to their respective deaths. In the case of Penn's *Into the Wild*, as has been shown in the previous chapter, Penn makes the case that McCandless had driven himself so far from society, and so far into nature, that it was McCandless's lack of knowledge of nature, which came as a result of his extreme immersion into nature, that resulted in his death.

In the case of Treadwell, Herzog, when commenting on Treadwell's documentary footage, makes the claim that he

> discovered a film of human ecstasies and darkest inner turmoil, as if there was a desire in [Treadwell] to leave the confines of his humanness and bond with the bears. Treadwell reached out, seeking a primordial encounter. But in doing so, he crossed an invisible border line (Herzog *Grizzly Man*).

Indeed, Treadwell corroborates this in a letter he sent to his friend, ecologist Marnie Gaede, in which he states that he needed to "'mutually mutate into a wild animal to handle the life I live out here'". Thus, Treadwell's death gives strong evidence to suggest that perhaps Herzog's criticism of Treadwell stands on good ground. Treadwell's relationship with the bears, which was close both emotionally and spatially, can hardly be described as accidental. Even though his intention was to mutate into a bear, he, ul-

timately, could never do this, and this kind of anti-anthropomorphism, or, perhaps, reverse-anthropomorphism, proved to be the reason for his downfall.

Chapter 4
Romanticism

He thought about himself, and the whole earth,
Of man the wonderful, and of the stars,
And how the deuce they ever could have birth;
And then he thought of earthquakes and of wars,
How many miles the moon might have in girth,
Of air-balloons, and of the many bars
To perfect knowledge of the boundless skies;
And then he thought of Donna Julia's eyes (Byron Canto 1, stanza 92).

An Introduction

Among the core characteristics of most Romantic artists, like the pastoralists who preceded them, is their affinity for employing nature as the central subject of their poetry, prose and paintings. While I will be drawing on the works of Ruskin, Blake, Rousseau, Darwin and Swift, amongst many others, to give a sense of Romanticism, it is possible that there may be difficulty in classifying many of these artists and thinkers as Romantics in the purist sense of the term. Conversely, it would also be unwise to deny these artists' and thinkers' artistic and philosophical contributions to Romanticism as a whole, no matter how tangential their affiliations to the era may appear. However, what concerns me most about these artists and thinkers is not their classification to Romanticism, per se, but their contribution to Romanticism's use and theorisation of anthropomorphism. That art is a medium whereby an understanding of the universe is filtered through the human mind means that Romantic artists were by no means an exception in the practise of assigning human qualities onto nature. However, the Romantics, especially John Ruskin, displayed a great deal of sensitivity to this tendency to personify

nature. Ruskin was among the first of the Romantics to formalise and theorise about the anthropomorphisation of nature. Ruskin referred to the assignation of human qualities onto things clearly not human (such as natural structures, animals, manmade objects, and so forth) as the 'pathetic fallacy'. However, Ruskin also recognised four different classifications of this fallacy, or four different types of poet who commit this fallacy: "the men who feel nothing, and therefore see truly; the men who feel strongly, think weakly, and see untruly (second order of poets); the men who feel strongly, think strongly, and see truly (first order of poets); and the men who, strong as human creatures can be, are yet submitted to influences stronger than they, and see in a sort untruly, because what they see is inconceivably above them" (209). Being able to see truly or untruly, for Ruskin, depended on the artist's awareness in committing this fallacy, and, based on Ruskin's classification, those who make their awareness of their use of the fallacy apparent make for better poets. Indeed, those artists who are unaware of their use of this fallacy are described by Ruskin as possessing a "morbid state of mind, and comparatively of a weak one" (218). This describes an artist whose emotions have gotten the better of her, and, as a result, produces lesser art because she is unable to see the truth within nature (205). It is only under these conditions where the fallacy committed by the poet is described as "pathetic" by Ruskin. However, as Abrams and Harpham warn us, "Ruskin's contention would make just about all poets, including Shakespeare, 'morbid'" (242), and that the term 'pathetic fallacy' is now generally used "as a neutral name for a procedure in which human traits are ascribed to natural objects in a way that is less formal and more indirect than in the figure called *personification*" (242 author's italics). Thus, contemporary critics generally ignore the morbid aspect of the pathetic fallacy, which is the way I intend to use it here.

Ruskin was not the only Romantic to consider the anthropomorphic tendency of art. Indeed, Blake, in his poem, "A Fly", highlights the problems of thinking of animals in human terms:

> Am not I
> A fly like thee?
> Or art thou not
> A man like me? (5-8)

In this poem Blake considers, firstly, the possibility that humans are merely extensions of nature, and, secondly, the possibility that nature may have more human attributes than previously considered, which shows Blake deliberately confusing the boundaries that define human and animal ontology. This issue of anthropomorphism (or, in some cases, as evidenced by Blake, reverse-anthropomorphism) is one of the major philosophical strands which is, at least, latent in all Romantic works that ponder the relationship between humanity and nature. It is this relationship between these two phenomena which has made itself apparent in both Romantic aesthetics and Romantic philosophy.

One of the major philosophical contributors to Romanticism, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, based much of his arguments on the nature of nature, that is, to be sure, on his anthropomorphised understanding of nature. Rousseau, commenting on the culture of the time in which he was writing, made the claim that society is corrupt due to the gross amount of inequality that is harboured in society. Rousseau distinguishes between two types of inequality: "natural or Physical [inequality], [which is so termed] because it is established by Nature" and is brought about by the seemingly unavoidable tolls that nature takes on the body through natural processes such as aging or illness (Rousseau 138) and "moral, or political inequality", which describes inequality that is manmade, and therefore based on the conventions and constructs inherent in society (Rousseau 131).

Writing to the King of Poland of the time, King Stanisław Laszczyński, Rousseau explains the genealogy of human evil, stating that evil begins with human inequality, and "from inequality arose riches … . From riches are born luxury and idleness; from luxury arose the fine Arts, and from idleness the Sciences" (45). Thus, Rousseau makes the claim that it is the development of science and art which stands as evidence of society's corrupt soul (9). It must be made known, though, that it is only a certain *type* of art and a certain *type* of science to which Rousseau is referring that he believes are the causes of a corrupt society. In reference to art, Rousseau believed that the artists of his time were prevented to create anything truly artistic because they were surrounded by corrupt morals (19). Also, science, according to Rousseau, "taken abstractly, deserves all our admiration. The foolish science of men deserves nothing but derision and contempt" (97). This "foolish science", as explained before, grew out of idleness, but it is

also science which, as it grows and spreads, makes life more convenient, and, in so doing, allows people to become more idle (20). This, then, creates a kind of circle of immorality in which time is wasted on seemingly meaningless pursuits.

Science as a meaningless task was a view popular at the time, as can be seen in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, written just over two decades before Rousseau published his "First Discourse". In the novel, Swift, who is strictly not a Romantic but occasionally exhibits Romantic sentiment, describes how, upon arriving in Laputa, Gulliver comes upon a scientist attempting to extract sunbeams from cucumbers:

> The first man I saw was of a meagre aspect, with sooty hands and face, his hair and beard long, ragged and singed in several places. His clothes, shirt, and skin were all of the same colour. He had been eight years upon a project for extracting sun-beams out of cucumbers, which were to be put in vials hermetically sealed, and let out to warm the air in raw inclement summers. He told me he did not doubt in eight years more he should be able to supply the Governor's gardens with sunshine, at a reasonable rate; but he complained that his stock was low, and entreated me to give him something as an encouragement to ingenuity, especially since this had been a very dear season for cucumbers. I made him a small present, for my lord had furnished me with money on purpose, because he knew their practice of begging from all who go to see them (165-66).

Satirised, this scientific experiment is presented as being utterly futile. Science is portrayed as an endeavour in which time and money are lost into a black hole where there are no returns. With "sooty hands and face", scientists are seen as society's dirt, just as Rousseau saw them. The difference between the two authors, however, lies in the tone of Swift's satirical humour as opposed to Rousseau's earnest seriousness, the significance of which is that, for Rousseau, the 'evil' of science presents a more dire threat to humanity's existence than Swift would suggest. However, it is *both* science and art, for Rousseau, which renders a society corrupt, and it is a corrupt society which stands in contrast to the moral purity of nature in which inequality does not exist (159).

In claiming that people should live a life of less convenience and, therefore, live a life closer to nature, Rousseau contains his statement by making it clear that he does not

mean to live a life with no conveniences at all. Rousseau claims that he "[does] not suggest reducing men to making do with the bare necessities" (84). It is still hard, though, to pinpoint exactly where a life of excessive convenience begins and ends for Rousseau. Regardless of this, Rousseau remains adamant that nature is humanity's salvation, especially in its ability to curb the evils of science: "Peoples, know, then, once and for all, that nature wanted to preserve you from science as a mother snatches a dangerous weapon from the hands of her child; that all the secrets she hides from you are so many evils from which she protects you, and that the difficulty you have in learning is not the least of her favours" (14). Rousseau likens nature to a mother, which is telling of Rousseau's understanding of nature, which he sees as that from which we may come to learn morality. Humanity, of course, is the child who lacks any moral intelligence and must be taught right from wrong. However, the most provocative metaphor Rousseau uses is his portrayal of science as a "dangerous weapon", implying that nature (as a mother) "hides" evils from humanity, and in so doing "protects" humanity. This, of course, gives the impression that 'nature knows best', that humanity, given free reign, would become corrupt because it does not have moral knowledge, and that the secrets we would discover in the universe would lead us to become corrupt. It is not only the personification of nature as "mother" which shows Rousseau's anthropomorphic view of nature, but also his view of nature as the source of all good moral knowledge. However, Rousseau unwittingly, and ironically, taints nature by assigning human qualities to it, thus taking away nature's 'purity', which is why he valued it to begin with.

Rousseau sees nature as a space in which no vice can ever exist. Inequality can only exist in the human world, where humans are flawed and have the propensity for evil. However, ironically, with the aid of science, we are able to notice the flaws in Rousseau's argument. In his book, *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins, discussing selfishness, points out that, in one particular species of ant, the honey-pot ants, members of that species use other members of the same species, essentially, as slaves: "In the 'honey-pot' ants there is a caste of workers with grotesquely swollen, food-packed abdomens, whose sole function in life is to hang motionless from the ceiling like bloated light-bulbs, being used as food stores by the other workers. In the human sense they do not live as individuals at all; their individuality is subjugated, apparently to the welfare of the community" (181). What is significant about this example is that it shows direct

evidence against Rousseau's claim that nature is the site of pristine and pure morality. The ants "subjugate" members of their own community and so are treating them, essentially, as slaves. Rousseau's anthropomorphic reading of nature, then, proves to be very selective as he fallaciously generalises a very *specific* aspect of nature to the *whole* of nature. Further, unlike Dawkins's reading of nature "In the human sense", Rousseau's reading of nature lacks an awareness of his anthropomorphisation of nature, which may have contributed to Rousseau's inability to recognise that there is more than one way to read nature. Indeed, that there are several ways of interpreting nature, many of which are contradictory, is testament to the fact that a single person's anthropomorphic interpretation of nature says more about the interpreter than about the thing being interpreted. However, despite Rousseau's flawed perception of nature, his influence on the Romantic psyche cannot be ignored.

Just as Rousseau believed that nature was the greatest teacher of life and morality (98), so, too, did many Romantics believe the same thing. For example, Wordsworth, in his "Tintern Abbey", states the following:

> well pleased to recognise
> In nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being (*Collected Poems* 107-11).

It is clear here that Wordsworth perceives nature as the source of all moral knowledge. It is that which is able to give him moral guidance. As a result of this stance, Wordsworth advocates living a life closer to nature, and, for Wordsworth, this meant living in a rural space. In his preface to his *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth argued that he had chosen the "Low and rustic life" in his poetry precisely because "in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; … and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature" (*Complete Poetical Works* 7). It is apparent, though, that not all thinkers during the Romantic era viewed nature in such warm and inviting ways.

In his *Origin of the Species*, Darwin, who has contributed greatly to the latter end of Romantic philosophy without himself carrying the Romantic label, manages to challenge these views of nature as a site of moral goodness. By explaining the brutal struggle of survival between species, Darwin, with scientific accuracy, contradicted the popular notion that nature was the site of all moral virtue, and, essentially, implied that nature could also be read to be vicious. This view of nature was shared by poets such as Tennyson who, in the fifty-fifth verse of his "In Memoriam", called nature "red in tooth and claw" (15), and the Marquis de Sade (reiterated here by his disciple, Algernon Charles Swinburne) who questioned those who found nature to be the site of moral purity: "Nature averse to crime? I tell you nature lives and breathes by it; hungers at all her pores for bloodshed, aches in all her nerves for the help of sin, yearns with all her heart for the furtherance of cruelty" (158).

It may be apparent that these anthropomorphic readings of nature, as was the case with Rousseau, explain, not nature, but the person attempting to describe nature. It may be argued, then, that in providing such readings of nature, the Romantics made an attempt to explore, not nature, but the self *through* nature. Thus, when Wordsworth, in his sonnet, "XIV", writes "With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climbest the sky, / How silently, and with how wan a face!" (*Poetical Works* 1-2) it is apparent that the sadness is not the moon's, but Wordsworth's, who is anthropomorphising the moon as a means of self-exploration and self-understanding. This is a use of nature that may not be self-aware, but Coleridge, like Ruskin, as mentioned before, is one such Romantic poet who was certainly conscious of the implications of his actions every time he translated nature into language: "In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dimglimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing any thing new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have always an obs~~eure~~cure feeling as if that new phenomenon were the dim Awaking of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature" (*Coleridge* 2546 author's italics). However, that the Romantics explored nature for the purposes of self-exploration should not be read as a cynical indication that the Romantics did not express any care for nature. This is the argument made by Jonathan Bate of Wordsworth, an argument that could possibly be generalised to many other Romantics as well.

Making reference to the eighth book of Wordsworth's "The Prelude" Bate explains that "[Wordsworth] is not interested in the shepherd but in what the shepherd provides him by way of both inspiration and admonition" (Bate *Romantic Ecology* 30). Bate also points out that the point of the eighth book is that "love of nature leads to love of mankind" (Bate *Romantic Ecology* 31). It seems, then, that this utilitarian love for nature acts only as an anthropocentric means of developing a love for humanity. However, Bate defends Wordsworth by stating that the high quality of life that Wordsworth is trying to achieve "is dependent on integration with, not subjugation of, nature" (Bate *Romantic Ecology* 33). This love of nature is also expressed in several instances of Romantic art. For example, William Cowper, who, in "Book VI" of "The Task", states that he would not consider a friend "the man / Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm" (563-64). Coleridge, in his "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", describes the Mariner's killing of an albatross in value-laden anthropomorphic diction: "'With his cruel bow he lay'd full low / The harmless Albatross'" (122-23). Also, in Coleridge's "To a Young Ass" he expresses a sense of camaraderie with nature when, addressing the young ass, he exclaims "I hail thee Brother" (*Poetical Works* 26). Thus, that the Romantics used nature to explore the self may only be half the story, as in so doing the Romantics expressed a care for nature and often regarded nature's denizens as their ontological equals. This is the quality that characterised many Romantic works from poet and painter alike, and are qualities which found their way across the Pond and have been adopted by many American artists, especially those working during the nineteenth century.

One of the great cultural imports the New World adopted from the Romantics was a love of nature. Certainly, much of the Americans' love of nature came as a result of their need to establish a new identity as a new nation, not only independent of Europe, but *better* than Europe. As a result, records circa 1700 showed that Americans were intent on using nature as a means of certifying their greatness. For example, "[Thomas] Jefferson, on a visit to [French naturalist Count Georges] Buffon, dismissed European ungulates such as reindeer as puny alongside the New World's moose, pointing out that the former could easily pass under the latter's belly" (Coates 105). Also, the Americans used the giant sequoias and redwoods, "the biggest faunal representatives on earth (and an American world exclusive)", as indicative of their greatness as a nation (Coates 105).

However, despite the occasional belief that American nature was better than European nature, what remained the same was a great and sincere care for nature, which, during the 1800s, especially manifested itself in American literature. Indeed, even in American Romanticism the kinds of metaphors and meanings assigned to nature greatly resembled those of the European Romantics. Certainly, the relationship between nature and morality is a clear example of this.

While specifically classified as American transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau contributed greatly to American Romanticism as well. Emerson and Thoreau's understanding that nature may be equated with moral goodness has already been established in Chapter 3. However, the following quote by Thoreau is not significant solely because of its stance on the relationship between nature and morality, but is interesting also because of what we may come to know of Thoreau's anthropomorphic understanding of the relationship between nature and art more broadly:

> May we not *see* God? Are we to be put off and amused in this life, as it were with a mere allegory? Is not Nature, rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely? (*Concord and Merrimack* 403 author's italics)

Certainly, Thoreau is reading nature in moral terms, but what is equally important is that the above quote shows Thoreau's wilful anthropomorphism. Thus, when Thoreau suggests that nature can be "read", or that it may be taken as a "symbol", the author highlights his propensity to seeing nature as that which stands for something, as opposed to seeing nature in and of itself. This bears little difference to the way in which the European Romantics anthropomorphised nature, who, with some exceptions, also did so with little or no self-awareness. Reading nature in such anthropomorphic terms was not unique to Emerson or Thoreau, but can be found in a slew of other American Romantics as well. Thus, in "I Sing the Body Electric", when Whitman writes that he sees his "soul reflected in Nature" (71), or when Emily Dickinson compares a mountain to a "Grandfather" (7) and the seasons to "children" (6) in her poem numbered "LXXII", it is evident that reading nature in human terms, as is evident in European Romanticism, was fairly ubiquitous amongst American Romantics. Also, when comparing these New World Romantics to their European cousins, it is evident that they

resembled each other in the *type* of anthropomorphisms used in their works. Thus, nature was sentimentalised in similar ways.

Like their predecessors, the American Romantics imbued nature with a sense of kindness, serenity, order and purpose. Certainly, poets such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow occasionally showed the darkness within nature, especially in a poem such as "Nature" in which nature is that which "Leads us to rest" (11), but, in the same breath, acts as "a fond mother" (1), much in the same way that Rousseau, as described earlier, maternalised nature. In an equally Rousseau-like maternal and sentimentalised tone, there is the work of Emily Dickinson who, in her poem numbered "I", believes nature to be "the gentlest mother" (1) who supplies humanity with "infinite affection / And infiniter care" (21-22). However, while many of these writers and poets I have linked to American Romanticism had some temporal overlap with their European counterparts, it is evident that they were writing at a time when European Romanticism was dwindling, that is, around the 1850s (Yorke 18). Thus, while it may be argued that the birth of Neo-Romanticism kept the flame of Romanticism burning in Europe during the Second World War (Hockenhull 21), it is Romanticism 'proper' which was practised by American poets such as Robert Frost during the first half of the twentieth century. This endurance of the genre may be attributed to the European settlers gradually coming to feel at home in the American landscape. This prominence of American Romanticism during the beginning of the twentieth century may also have contributed greatly to America's love of the natural landscape in contemporary American culture, the likes of which we are only beginning to see in contemporary American film. Indeed, the influence of American Romanticism, and Romanticism more generally, is evident in my primary filmic texts, especially in the films' use of Romantic aesthetics, namely, the picturesque, the beautiful and the sublime, to which I now turn and attempt to describe.

One of the major contributors to our understanding of the beautiful and the sublime is Immanuel Kant. Kant describes the beautiful thus: "The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation [and the beautiful] seems to be regarded as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of understanding" (*Judgement* 61). The understanding, for Kant, is the part of the mind, along with the senses, which enables us to compare and combine concepts with each other, thereby giving rise to

knowledge of that object (*Pure Reason* 79). Thus, when Kant shows that the beautiful relates to the understanding, what he means is that objects that are termed beautiful are objects, under normal circumstances, which one may determine as being *universally* beautiful (*Judgement* 56-57). This implies a kind of objective aesthetic evaluation, and is one which differs in many ways to that of the sublime.

It is interesting that Kant claims that the theoretical underpinnings of the sublime are "not nearly so important or rich in consequences as the concept of the Beautiful" (*Judgement* 63). Despite this, however, Kant infuses his conceptualisation of the sublime with rich complexity. Kant shows that there are two kinds of sublime: the mathematical sublime and the dynamically sublime. The sublime, overall, however, can be found "in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of timelessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality [and the sublime is] a presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason" (Kant *Judgement* 61). For Kant, then, part of understanding the sublime is also to understand how it relates to reason. The mathematical sublime is characterised by reason's superiority over nature, and, by extension, its superiority over the imagination (*Judgement* 66), which allows us to understand stimuli from the world through our senses (*Pure Reason* 87). Thus, when we are faced with an object so large that the imagination is unable to contain or understand it, it is reason, because of its ability to conceptualise infinity, that surpasses our senses so that we may come to understand it.

In terms of the dynamically sublime, Kant states that instances of nature may be considered such when we are able to perceive nature as a force that "has no dominion over us" (*Judgement* 74). Kant explains that the dynamically sublime in nature comes into effect when nature provokes in a human subject a sense of fear without the object exhibiting any *real* reason for the human subject to fear it (*Judgement* 74). It is important to note, however, that, in relation to both the mathematical and dynamic sublime, Kant showed that calling an object in nature sublime was not strictly correct, as the sublime "does not reside in anything of nature, but only in our mind" (*Judgement* 77). Examples of objects which may be considered sublime, for Kant, are those in which we are able to perceive nature's might, which include volcanoes, cliffs and hurricanes (*Judgement* 75). However, while Kant offers great insight into his ideas of the beautiful and the sublime,

it is Edmund Burke's definition of the same concepts which are much more obvious in their description of these aesthetics.

Burke, like Kant, defines the beautiful and the sublime in relation to the other, allowing us to see these terms dialectically. For Burke, beautiful objects are those which are "small" (237), and, further, "beauty should be smooth and polished" (237) and should "shun the right line" (237). In opposition to this, some of the main proponents of the sublime, for Burke, are: vastness (127), infinity (129), magnitude (136) and magnificence (140). Also, astonishment is that aspect of the sublime which has the greatest emotional impact on the viewer (95). Referring to the spiritual aspects of the sublime, Burke claims that "astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (95). However, this degree of horror can only be sustained if the object being viewed is, to a degree, obscured, by, for example, darkness (145), because, according to Burke, "When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes" (99). It is also for this reason that Burke describes eternity and infinity as sublime attributes because, as Burke reasons, "perhaps there is nothing of which we really understand so little" (105). Burke also reasons that the sublime effect can be found mostly in wild nature as it evokes a sense of danger in the observer (155-56). It is through these definitions of the sublime and the beautiful, of which Burke's will take precedence in this chapter, that we may come to an understanding of the picturesque.

The picturesque is an aesthetic that takes its inspiration not as much from nature as it does from pictures based on nature (Trott 73). As a result, the picturesque aesthetic "claims both to imitate, and to correct" nature (Trott 73). It is the picturesque that is somewhat of a hybrid between the beautiful and the sublime, and often uses landscapes as the subject of its image, or, more specifically, eighteenth-century gardening (Trott 74). However, because of the "meticulously ordered gardens at Versailles, so attractive to the Enlightenment mind, [most Romantics] turned to the unkempt forest" (Nash 47). In Malick, Herzog's and Penn's respective films, then, it is mostly wild nature which these directors place under scrutiny. These artists also use typical Romantic aesthetics of the beautiful and sublime in their cinematography, occasionally for the purposes of irony, and, sometimes, to bring to our attention the current ecological crisis.

The Sublime in Herzog's *Encounters* and *Grizzly Man*

The sublime is the most overt Romantic trope which has dominated almost every frame of Herzog's documentaries, particularly the ones discussed in this dissertation. However, it is a trope which has influenced not only his artistic choices, but his personal views of nature as well. Herzog's reliance and championing of the sublime may be seen in the very first scene of his *Encounters at the End of the World*.

Herzog's opening narration to the film informs us that the images are of Antarctica. However, the images we see do not suggest this at all. The film's first scene defamiliarises Antarctica. It is in this way that Herzog challenges popular images and, indeed, popular films, of the continent. What we typically see in filmic depictions of Antarctica involves vast white landscapes covered in snow, such as in the popular *March of the Penguins* (Jacquet). However, Herzog inverts his viewers' expectations by first presenting Antarctica's technicolour *seascape*, as opposed to its monochromatic *landscape*. Part of this defamiliarisation of Antarctica is based on our terrestrial makeup. As terrestrial beings we often forget that life also happens elsewhere, and not just on solid ground. Thus, in presenting us with an image of the ocean, from within the ocean, we are poised for a (re)new(ed) Antarctica by going beneath its surface, as it were.

Herzog's opening shot displays an image of the ocean shot just below Antarctica's icy surface (as may be seen in Figure 6). However, the whitish brown of the ice (shot from underneath) gives the impression of clouds, the bluish layer just beneath this seems like the sky, and the brown at the bottom is, of course, earth. Thus, with the ice above our heads, as opposed to beneath our feet, we are presented with a defamiliarised and inverted Antarctica.

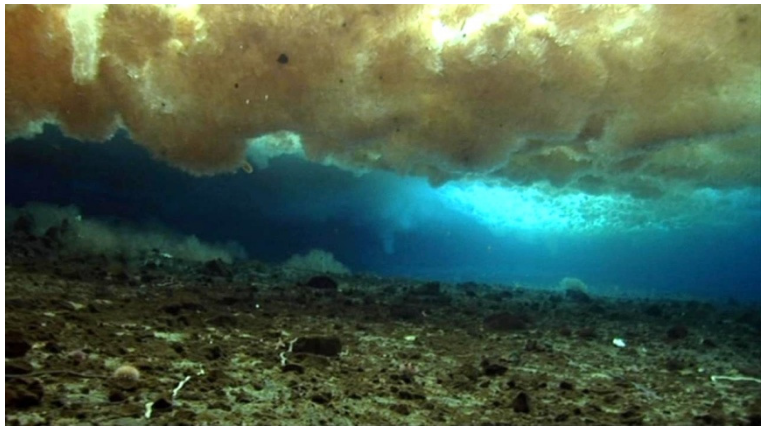


Figure 6: Herzog *Encounters at the End of the World*

Herzog's realisation of a defamiliarised continent is reliant on a centuries-old technique: the sublime. Specifically, Herzog emphasises an aspect of the sublime, the unknown, which comes into effect by depriving our senses. The image is dark as the only source of light comes from the sporadic shafts of sunlight cutting through solid white clouds of ice. This limits what we are able to see below the ice, creating a sense of mystery about this environment. The camera moves steadily through the water, sometimes stopping to focus on small but indistinguishable objects dangling from the ice ceiling. The camera (and, by proxy, the viewer) is searching for something. Anthropomorphically speaking, with this seascape offering nothing particularly unique or special (at least from what we can see from the selected information given to us by the camera), we realise that what we are searching for is nothing specific. Instead, what we are searching for is, essentially, what we have already found, the seascape itself. However, we continue observing despite this. The camera moves around this space for approximately forty seconds, and with each passing second we come to realise that this is an environment, a space, which does not have any trace of humanity, save for Herzog's wandering camera. As was established in Chapter 1, Lefebvre would show that Herzog's lingering camera transforms the environment from a setting into a landscape, thereby showing Herzog's ability to display the landscape's autonomy. It is through the Romantic sublime that Herzog creates this effect.

Herzog's panning camera also emphasises the vastness of the area. However, all we are able to see in the distance is a deep blackness, giving the viewer a sense of an infinite seascape. This darkness carries with it a sense of mystery and wonder, but also of danger. We are unsure what lies within the blackness, making the unknown threatening. However, there is also the realisation that we are, in a way, trapped in this environment as well. There is the ground below us and the icy sky above, which allows us to feel as though our heads are narrowly missing each inverted puffy protrusion while we meander about the environment. The effect this has is one which is quite oppressive and claustrophobic, with our only escape a seemingly infinite and foreboding dark hole, adding a sense of obscurity and danger. Anthropomorphically speaking, Herzog creates a sense that nature is harbouring a malignant force beneath its surface.

In the next scene, Herzog takes us out of the water and into the air. We find ourselves on a plane with dozens of researchers, who, as Herzog's narration explains, are travelling to Antarctica. While the camera moves about the inside of the plane, observing the passengers reading, working on their laptops, and, mostly, sleeping, Herzog narrates: "We flew into the unknown, a seemingly endless void". Firstly, that they are flying "into" the unknown signifies steadfastness in their actions. They are not circumventing the landscape, but are submerging themselves in it, and, in a way, are willingly becoming part of it. Further, that they are flying "into" the "unknown" implies an intention, at least unconsciously, to *make* it known, to discover it. However, Herzog utilises Burkean sublimity and, specifically, obscurity, to characterise Antarctica as a space, a "void", in which there is nothing. Thus, they are flying into an "unknown" nothing. Burkean obscurity, then, is still at play. The word "endless" also carries the weight of the sublime, indicating to the viewer a kind of infinity. Antarctica, then, permeates with an anthropomorphised sense of sublime danger in the mystery surrounding it. Herzog, until now, has given us the air and the sea of the continent, but we are still unsure of what the land looks like. In deliberately omitting this information from us, Herzog presents a landscape deeply embedded in the Romantic sublime.

However, to turn back to the previous quote, Herzog's use of the word "seemingly" is telling. This is a qualifier which signifies caution in that which follows it, forcing us to attend to all that comes after. The manner in which Herzog uses the qualifier, though, is ambiguous, and enriches the reading of the line. It could be read in at least two ways as it may refer either to the adjective "endless" or to the noun "void". If we are to read it as qualifying the word "endless", it suggests Herzog's anthropomorphic understanding of the landscape as an infinite space. With some difference, a similar thing can be said if we are to read "seemingly" as qualifying "void". That it is seemingly a void signifies Herzog's willingness to *recognise* and foreground his anthropomorphic view of nature. Thus, to describe it as a void, and an infinite void at that, and as a space in which nothing exists, means to describe it as a space in which nothing exists for *humans*, and to realise the rich biological diversity that is prevalent, but not always obvious, throughout the landscape. This marks the *very* few instances in which Herzog becomes aware of his anthropomorphic interpretation of nature. Certainly, as has been argued in Chapters 2

and 3, in most cases Herzog's anthropomorphism is distinctly lacking in any kind of self-awareness.

Returning to Herzog's use of the sublime, it is evident that elements of the Romantic sublime are also apparent in the title, *Encounters at the End of the World*. Firstly, the title of the film signifies earth's last outpost, so to speak, where Herzog places us at the planet's precipice. We are located at the very point at which there is no more place to go. It is implied that what exists beyond this place is, as the previous quote has shown, an endless void, an eternal and infinite nothingness. However, and more importantly to Herzog, the phrase "end of the world" also has apocalyptic connotations, a theme which the film explores quite extensively, especially in its latter parts, as Herzog narrates:

> For this and many other reasons, our presence on this planet does not seem to be sustainable. Our technical civilization makes us particularly vulnerable. There is talk all over the scientific community about climate change. Many of them agree the end of human life on this earth is assured. Human life is part of an endless chain of catastrophes, the demise of the dinosaurs being just one of these events. We seem to be next.

The film takes us to the sublime brink of death, and, as this quote shows, makes the end of human life on the planet more terrifying by suggesting its meaninglessness. Thus, the title instils in us a sense of danger, both in its implication of a kind of vertigo as we stand at the point at which the ground beneath our feet is no more, and in the sense that all life on the planet will finally collapse.

There is also another ambiguity latent within the title, which stems from the word "*Encounters*" (Herzog *Encounters*). Firstly, the word may refer to Herzog encountering the people in Antarctica, the place at the end of the world. His intention of doing this is contained in his narration in the first scene in which he states that he plans to intimately investigate the psyche of the characters he will meet: "Who were the people I was going to meet in Antarctica at the end of the world? What were their dreams?"

However, while the title may be read as Herzog wanting to encounter human nature more generally, it also implies coming into contact with the land itself and the creatures that inhabit it. Herzog makes this point in his narration:

> My questions about nature … were different. I told [The National Science Foundation] I kept wondering why is it that human beings put on masks or feathers to conceal their identity. And why do they saddle horses and feel the urge to chase the bad guy? And why is it that certain species of ants keep flocks of plant lice as slaves to milk them for droplets of sugar? I asked them why is it that a sophisticated animal like a chimp does not utilise inferior creatures. He could straddle a goat and ride off into the sunset.

Herzog has, therefore, been able to strike a happy medium between culture and nature. He seems intent on observing ants and chimps in their own environment, in their own place, and on their own terms. However, he also expresses interest in studying humanity and their relationship with nature. Herzog recognises, then, the inevitable interaction of humans and nature, but is also willing to recognise nature's integrity in existing without the necessity of human definition. However, in Herzog's two documentaries concerned in this dissertation, it is apparent that it is also the *artistic* representation of nature which interests the director.

In *Grizzly Man*, we are able to see Herzog's appreciation of original artistic representations of nature. The most telling instance of this comes across in a particular scene in which Herzog explains Timothy Treadwell's passionate and methodical approach to his filmmaking, which, as Herzog observes, becomes an obsession, and, to a large extent, *self*-obsession, as Treadwell, in his own film, has "himself as the central character" (Herzog *Grizzly Man*). Treadwell becomes obsessed with the filmmaking process and recognises that, other than the bears, *he* is also a protagonist in his film: "There's going to be a number of takes I'm going to do. … We're going to do several takes of each where I'll do it with the bandana on, maybe a bandana off, maybe two different coloured bandanas, some without a bandana, some with the camera being held". In one particular scene in which Treadwell is fussing over the technicalities of his film, he flits in and out of the frame, trying to find the best entrance into the scene, which is composed of thick leafy bushes. When Treadwell moves out of view, behind bushes, preparing for his big entrance, Herzog leaves us with the image that Treadwell has created, an image which invites us to contemplate nature's mystery. We are presented with thousands of green leaves that occupy most of the frame with only a tiny portion of sky visible in the top right corner of the frame. In the middle of the frame there is a barely

distinguishable path of rocks which Treadwell has used to move in and out of the scene. The scene looks chaotic with branches jutting out every which way. However, for a brief moment, a wind sweeps across from the right of the screen moving swiftly to the left, compelling every leaf of every branch of every bush to point in a singular and uniformed direction, giving a false impression of order in the landscape. The wind continues, more wildly, to jostle and jolt the bushes in unpredictable directions, countering the order which passed as quickly as it came.

While the wind blows through the bushes, Herzog narrates: "In his action-movie mode, Treadwell probably did not realise that seemingly empty moments had a strange secret beauty. Sometimes images themselves develop their own life, their own mysterious stardom". That Herzog describes this scene as a "seemingly empty moment" shows his willingness, as an artist, to view nature not merely as a backdrop for action (that is, as a setting), but as a subject of film which should be studied with just as much importance as the humans with which it shares the screen (that is, to observe it as a landscape). Indeed, it is when the scene's only human subject, Treadwell, walks out of the shot that Herzog invites us to admire nature as a subject of the narrative. The "moment" is certainly empty, as Herzog has described it, in the sense that it merely involves Treadwell setting up a shot and passing through the set, but is only "seemingly empty" as nature takes centre stage showing off its "own mysterious stardom."

In another scene we see Treadwell sitting in a field, narrating about his experiences with the bears. However, Herzog is not interested in what Treadwell has to say, but is more interested in the surprising magic which nature brings to the last few seconds of the scene. As Treadwell sits in the grass, after he has finished his monologue, and waits for nothing in particular, a fox trots across the screen. Herzog narrates:

> Now the scene seems to be over. But as a filmmaker, sometimes things fall into your lap which you couldn't expect, never even dream of. … There is something like an inexplicable magic of cinema.

Herzog's fascination with this unique unstaged moment is explained by Herzog in an interview with Paul Cronin: "When I look at the postcards in tourist shops and the images and advertisements that surround us in magazines, or I turn on the television, or if I

walk into a travel agency and see those huge posters with that same tedious image of the Grand Canyon on them, I truly feel there is something dangerous emerging here. Television kills our imagination and what we end up with are worn-out images because of the inability of too many people to seek out fresh ones" (66). Further, when speaking about the beauty of the environment of Antarctica in his *Encounters at the End of the World*, Herzog claims that "For most of our time here, we had postcard-pretty weather conditions. This was frustrating because I loathe the sun both on my celluloid and my skin". That Herzog perceives the "postcard-pretty" images as "frustrating" is testament to the kinds of images that Herzog wants to find in this landscape. In the beginning of the film, while looking at the sublime underwater images of the Ross Sea, Herzog states the following: "These images taken under the ice of the Ross Sea in Antarctica were the reason I wanted to go to this continent" (*Encounters*). It is the look of nature, and how the continent appears on film, that interests Herzog most.

When considering that the Romantics saw sublime images as "dangerous", it is ironic that Herzog claims "postcard-pretty" images as "dangerous" as well. The irony, here, comes from the fact that pretty images have nothing at all dangerous about what they are depicting. Thus, for Herzog, the kind of danger that these images bring holds political weight. However, Herzog's extensive use of sublime imagery does not necessarily imply a love for nature in the same manner in which the Romantics demonstrated a love for nature. Indeed, Herzog claims that he should not be considered a Romantic at all (Cronin 135-36), and, certainly, his attack on Treadwell's over-sentimentalisation of nature is testament to this point. However, it is clear that Herzog, despite his refusal at being labelled a Romantic, certainly appropriates Romanticism's aesthetic, especially that of the sublime, a point made also by Prager (99). However, in being against Romantic sentiment, but endorsing Romantic aesthetic, Herzog seeks out unusual and sublime imagery for entirely different reasons to that of the Romantics.

Returning to Herzog's comment on his dislike for beautiful images, in his interview with Paul Cronin Herzog likens the effect of these images to the "over-crowding of the planet" or "being without memory" (66). Thus, where the Romantics used their artistic medium to instil in humanity a greater appreciation for nature, Herzog seeks unique images (especially sublime ones), not only to propel the artistic medium, but also for the

purposes of ensuring humanity's existence alongside nature. Certainly, with the beginning of Industrialisation, the Romantics had similar sentiments but to a lesser degree, only because the decimation of nature was not yet as much a reality as it is now in the time in which Herzog directs. Herzog, then, uses the sublime to a greater effect because of the urgency of the changing climate. Thus, while it is true that Herzog unknowingly anthropomorphises his sublime images in a kind of, at least as Herzog would see it, vicious warning against the dangers of sentimentalising nature, this does not mean that his anthropomorphic images are without value. To dismiss Herzog's use of the sublime solely on the grounds of it lacking, for the most part, a sense of self-awareness in its adherence to anthropomorphism would be to lose sight of the fact that Herzog is ultimately doing it for the benefit of human-nature relationships. However, whether or not Herzog's use of these particular metaphors for the planet are the best kinds to use for this purpose will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Redefining the Sublime: *The New World*

In *The New World* Terrence Malick is able to redefine the Romantic sublime, and, in so doing, manages to redefine a particular kind of anthropomorphic perception of nature. Malick utilises sublime imagery predominantly in the final scenes of his film, but instils in these images a different meaning to what we have traditionally come to expect from sublime images, such as the suggestion of danger or the overwhelming sense of trepidation anticipated from images suggesting death. In the film's final scene we are presented with the death of Pocahontas (or, at that stage of the film, Rebecca). However, the manner in which Malick films the death mimics the Romantic sublime aesthetically, but not tonally.

The scene in which Pocahontas dies begins as Pocahontas is playing a game of hide-and-seek with her son, Thomas. Mother and child are shot against a backdrop of the green hedges of their vast garden; we notice that it is Pocahontas's turn to seek. However, Malick manages to make a skilful and subtle change in the game in a scene in which it is Thomas's turn to look for his mother, whom we see hiding from her son. In



Figure 7: Three combined stills from Malick's *The New World*

one particular moment of this scene, we notice that Pocahontas, shot from the waist up, is standing in the foreground with her back to a hedge, smiling as she anticipates her son. At the same time, we see Thomas cautiously walking along the long hedge, unknowingly approaching his mother (a moment which is pieced together in Figure 7). As soon as Pocahontas goes off-screen, Malick cuts to a shaky close-up of Thomas, impatiently playing with his long sleeves, who begins to call out for his mother, "Mamma!". As the child continues his search, John Rolfe, Pocahontas's husband, begins to narrate:

> Thirteenth of April, 1616. Dear son, I write this so that some day in the future you might understand the circumstance which will be but a far memory to you. Your dear mother, Rebecca, fell ill in our outward passage at Gravesend. She gently reminded me that all must die.

Thus, Malick draws parallels between Pocahontas's death and the game of hide-and-seek she plays with her son. Death, therefore, is made to seem trivial and ordinary, a simple matter which is seamlessly woven into life's ordinary incidents.

Further, at the beginning of the scene of Pocahontas's death, we hear, on the soundtrack, Richard Wagner's "Vorspiel" to *Das Rheingold*. The track begins with a low and foreboding drone (Wagner). As the track progresses, however, violins gently pierce this

deep monotony, softly easing into the presence of the track. By the end of the track, the string instruments have taken near-complete control, the monotonous drone only being heard in the background, as if the string instruments are using the drone as a pedestal upon which to stand. The sound that is created is one that seems chaotic, mad, and frenzied, as the string instruments create a sense of euphoria. Since this elated music occurs as we witness Pocahontas's death, the music, then, also acts like the game of hide-and-seek in that it disarms the severity of the death. Malick seems to portray death not at all in its usual guise: sinister, ominous and gloomy. Instead, Malick seems to imbue death with a sense of jubilation and excitement.

After we are made aware of Pocahontas's death, we are presented with images of Pocahontas playing on the bank of a river. Thus, we are given the impression of a spirit at play. Pocahontas, shot with a handheld camera, caresses the knots of a tree, and spins around as her green dress fans out around her legs. She runs along the river, performing cartwheels, constantly moving in and out of the camera's frame which cannot always seem to fully capture her, and tries to keep up with her bursting vitality, which only seems to underline the reality of her death. We are also presented with a montage of natural images: a bird, shot from below, flying high up in the air; a still river, shot from on top of the water, looking onto the bank in the distance; close-ups of a wild stream with water gushing over rocky protrusions; the camera moving forward, looking up into sun, which is directly overhead, as it cuts through the spaces between a forest's leaves. The images are beautiful and filled with movement. If the camera is not moving, tracking these natural subjects, then it is still, capturing the wild movement of its natural subject. These images serve to glorify and praise nature. However, regarding the images of Pocahontas's death, and the montage that follows, Malick manages to challenge the traditional use of death in the Romantic sublime.

Romantic artists would often imbue their sublime images with the suggestion of death as their human subject faces the danger of nature. Indeed, this is one of the ways in which one may read Caspar David Friedrich's 1817-1818 painting, "Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog" (shown in Figure 8). In this painting we observe the human subject at the centre of the image with his back facing the viewer as he stares across a foggy mountaintop, himself precariously perched on jagged rocks (Friedrich). The subject

stands confidently upon the rocks, and unwaveringly faces the prospect of death. However, Malick approaches death not as something foreboding, but as an occurrence filled with uncontainable delight. Death is not something to be feared, but something which should be embraced, perhaps even enjoyed. It is in the scene in which we are presented with a montage of nature that Malick reworks and challenges typical Romantic aesthetics (*The New World*). Malick manages to present his audience with images that are, in Romantic terms, beautiful, but undercuts these beautiful images with sublime subject matter: death. This reworking of the sublime may also be witnessed in the film's final shot (*The New World*).



Figure 8: Friedrich "Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog"

At the end of this montage of movement in nature, Malick presents the viewer with a deceptively still image of large and tall trees. These trees are shot from below with the camera positioned at the base of the tree, giving one the impression that he is looking up at the great and imposing structure, feeling dwarfed in its presence (as seen in Figure 9). That the



Figure 9: Malick *The New World*

tree is shot from below triangulates the structure, giving the impression that it is sturdy and immovable. As a result, the entire structure fills up the screen, the trunk of the tree closest to the screen taking up about a quarter of the image (and is placed right at the centre of the image), with its canopy, and the leafy canopy of its neighbouring trees, taking up much of what is left of the image. This image is sublime in that it takes up all of one's vision (and, therefore, all of one's mind). The trees occupy so much of the image that they block out an even larger sky. It is an image which overwhelms the viewer in its sublime magnificence.

However, with the benefit of the medium of film (that it is, by definition, a medium of *moving* images) we begin to notice that the trees are swaying, very slightly, from left to right. We are first given the impression that we are observing a still image; but as we look closer we realise that, with the gentle sway of the trees, the image is not as static as we had initially thought. What was once thought of as a sturdy and strong structure, we now think of as dangerous and unstable. On the soundtrack, as Wagner's music has faded away, we are able to hear the trees creaking and cracking, as if they are overwhelmed by their own weight. We are given the impression that if these assumedly strong structures were faced with an even stronger wind, they may topple over, creating a sense that one is at the site of imminent catastrophe, that is, at the site of potential death.

However, despite Malick creating a sense of nature's awe and danger, it is when we consider the context of these images that we realise that Malick renders death a toothless tiger. Before, it was established that Malick's view of death is that it is trivial, playful, light and joyous. Malick invites us to rethink the ways we perceive death, but, because of his use of natural imagery to convey this point, to also rethink the ways we perceive nature. Romantics, exemplified by Friedrich, portrayed the sublime by using images of nature which suggested the danger of death. However, Malick, in characterising his sublime images with a sense of euphoria, redefines the anthropomorphic perceptions of nature that many Romantics had. Also, in characterising images of nature's beauty with a sense of death, Malick challenges Romantic aesthetics in similar ways. Nature, then, can be both beautiful and dangerous simultaneously. Malick mixes two dichotomous anthropomorphic depictions of nature (as the Romantics would have

seen it) to create a new anthropomorphic image of nature. This view of nature is that it is as beautiful as it is dangerous, and is a view which is gaining increasing prominence in contemporary depictions of nature, a point upon which I will expand in Chapter 5.

Living By the Sublime: *Into the Wild*

Much like Herzog and Malick, Penn is critical of Romantic aesthetic and Romantic sentiment. Penn also manages to use Romantic aesthetics to criticise Chris McCandless. McCandless, in addition to being influenced by Romantic artists such as Emerson and Thoreau, is also influenced by Russian realists such as Pasternak and Tolstoy. Both Krakauer and Penn are critical of the ways in which McCandless seemed to internalise these writers' sentiments. Specifically, Penn manages to utilise sublime imagery to convey this criticism, and, in the process, highlights the dangers of this Romantic aesthetic.

Well into his journey into the American wilderness, McCandless befriended Ronald Franz, an octogenarian living in Salton City, California (Krakauer). In a letter which McCandless wrote to his friend, McCandless explained the danger in living a life of false comfort and urged Ron to immerse himself more into the wild (Krakauer 58). It is wild nature which, for McCandless, allowed for a truer sense of self and a greater understanding of the universe (Krakauer 182). In his letter to Ron, McCandless writes the following:

> *So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun. … Don't settle down and sit in one place. Move around, be nomadic, make each day a new horizon. You are still going to live a long time, Ron, and it would be a shame if you did not take the opportunity to*

> *revolutionize your life and move into an entirely new realm of experience* (Krakauer 58 author's italics).

The language which McCandless uses here is reminiscent of a bygone Romantic era. Like many of the Romantics, McCandless attempts to discover himself through nature. However, it is a certain kind of nature which characterises McCandless's quest for character. In attempting to have Ron live a bolder life, a life brimming with vitality, McCandless describes wild nature in quite provocative and appealing language. In this letter, McCandless makes it clear what he does and does not value in life. The kind of wisdom he espouses to the eighty-one-year-old Ron is radical and unconventional. McCandless accuses Ron of living "*a life of security, conformity, and conservatism*". McCandless, then, by implication, seeks a life of uncertainty, individuality, and liberation. These are the values we can assume to which McCandless is referring when he encourages Ron to live a more "*adventurous*" life. Indeed, in one particular scene from Penn's film, after discovering from an official that he would have to wait at least twelve years for a permit to kayak down a river, we see McCandless, the camera facing him, while he stares at a wild and rough river. There is a look of concern and doubt on his face as he does this. With wild notes from an electric guitar heard on the soundtrack, we cut immediately to McCandless paddling furiously down the gushing body of water. After the scene's excitement, we are able to hear McCandless on the soundtrack, quoting from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*: "If we admit that human life can be ruled by reason, the possibility of life is destroyed" (890). It is reason, then, which McCandless finds to be the deterrent to living a life more meaningful and adventurous. This is also a sentiment which McCandless uses in developing a specific anthropomorphised view of nature upon which Krakauer expands, and of which he is sympathetically critical.

Krakauer shows that "when the boy headed off into the Alaska bush, he entertained no illusions that he was trekking into a land of milk and honey; peril, adversity, and Tolstoyan renunciation were precisely what he was seeking. And that is what he found, in abundance" (x). I have already argued that McCandless, in his attempt to live a life in nature that is untainted by culture, in fact, bases these views of nature on a highly anthropomorphic and enculturated view of nature. However, as we see from Krakauer's

quote, what may also be a point of concern is that perhaps McCandless has chosen a construct far too dangerous by which to live.

Krakauer shows that McCandless's perceptions were characterised by an "impractical fascination with the harsh side of nature" (85). Indeed, then, the use of the word "impractical" shows Krakauer's belief that McCandless's relationship to nature was only suited to fantastical pursuits, which shows an anthropomorphic understanding of nature that simply cannot exist in the real world. Penn directs similar criticisms towards McCandless, using images of the Romantic sublime to challenge, firstly, McCandless's worldview, and, secondly, Romanticism itself.



Figure 10: Penn

One of the first striking and most significant images of nature that we find occurs at the beginning of the film in which the camera, as if perched high up in a tree, in an extreme long-shot, looks across an open and snowy vista of white (as depicted in Figure 10) (Penn). What we observe is a landscape largely covered in snow, a horizontal line of trees far up into the landscape, and at the very top of the screen (which is the furthest part of the landscape) there are bluish grey mountains. Clouds, of much the same bluish grey as the mountains, rest heavily on the mountaintops, blocking out any trace of sky. The title of the film then appears on the screen. That there is no sky in the shot makes the landscape seem imposing and oppressive: once you enter into the landscape there is no real chance of escape. The image is dominated by a landscape which suggests an inability to sustain human life. However, this is clearly not the way McCandless feels towards the landscape as we see him willingly walking into the landscape after being dropped off by a man kind enough to drive him to what would be McCandless's last destination. Also, later in the film, while talking to Wayne Westerberg, McCandless speaks passionately about his planned Alaskan trip:

> Alaska, Alaska. I'm gonna be all the way out there. All the way fuckin' out there, just on my own. … You know, big mountains, rivers, sky, game. Just be out there in it, you know. In the wild.

These are not the words of someone afraid to walk into the wild. The prospect of encountering nothing, and having no one on whom to rely, does not present itself as a danger to McCandless, but presents itself as that which should be embraced with excitement. Thus, based on McCandless's dialogue with Westerberg, it is clear that the shot at the beginning of the film in which we see McCandless entering a forbidding wilderness is not McCandless's perception of nature. It is more likely to be Penn's interpretation of the natural world. Penn, therefore, does not allow his opinion to go unnoticed. We 'hear' Penn's voice come through in the particular framing of the image. Since the image is filmed with the mountaintops only just touching the top of the frame, Penn uses sublime obscurity to show that, while McCandless may look at this landscape and see the prospect of adventure, Penn looks at the landscape and sees the prospect of death. It is also because of this that Penn manages to provide a reinterpretation of sublime imagery. Penn uses the sublime not as the Romantics used it. While the Romantics used the sublime as a means of being in awe of the power of nature, Penn uses the sublime to show how nature sometimes carries with it the certainty of death, especially if one approaches nature with the same kind of all-consuming wonder as demonstrated by McCandless. Thus, Penn shows that McCandless embraces the sublime in nature, but it is a sublime circumstance from which the protagonist cannot escape, especially as his anthropomorphic understanding of nature is that it should be delved into alone.

A Brief Conclusion on Romanticism

It is evident, then, that each of these directors are critical, to varying degrees, of some aspect of Romanticism (whether it is Romantic aesthetics, as is the case with Malick, or Romantic sentiment, as is the case with Herzog). However, despite these sometimes vehement criticisms against this literary period and style, these directors' debt to Romanticism cannot be ignored. The use of the beautiful and the sublime for environ-

mentally political ends is a practise made popular by the Romantics, and is adopted with great enthusiasm by Malick, Herzog and Penn (even though, at times, these directors use these Romantic aesthetics with a sense of irony attached to them). Thus, the same underlying care and concern for nature that so inspired the Romantics can be found in the films in question. It stands to reason, then, that it is not a disagreement over the *value* of nature that has prompted these directors to critique Romantic aesthetic and sentiment. The issue, rather, is the directors' disagreement with the Romantics' anthropomorphic depictions of nature, which they seem to feel are in need of change and updating for contemporary society if we are to elicit the same kind of care for human-nature relationships that was inspired by the Romantics two hundred years ago. Indeed, this may be a justified critique. Part of the reason this is so is because European and American Romantics used a particular aesthetic as a comment on their own environmental standing with nature at the time, which is, needless to say, much different to the earth's current physiology and how we view it, and, as the directors in question would agree, how we *ought* to view it.

Certainly, part of the Romantics' love of nature was born out of opposition to the destructive effects of the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, it was during the Romantic era that the artists of the time "took the word ['pollution'] … and applied it to what we now call environmental pollution" (Brimblecombe 83). It was the Romantics' response to the Industrial Revolution which spurred on such a vociferous praise of nature, and such a vicious attack on mechanisation. This was the sentiment which was the motivation behind Blake's characterisation of factories as "dark Satanic Mills" (8) in his "And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time". It is also what led Wordsworth, in his sonnet "On the Projected Kendall and Windermere Railway", to "Battle the threat" (*Poetical Works* 9) of industrialisation and to call on the forces of nature to "protest against the wrong" (*Poetical Works* 14). However, as Bate suggests, the environmental problems witnessed in the Industrial Revolution represent only the beginning of the environmental problems experienced today, and were problems, comparatively, which were experienced on a much smaller scale (*Song of the Earth* 24). Today, as Bate shows, humanity has entered an era in which the destruction of nature has reached terrifying proportions:

> Carbon dioxide produced by the burning of fossil fuels is trapping the heat of the sun, causing the planet to become warmer. Glaciers and permafrost are melting, sea levels rising, rainfall patterns changing, winds growing stronger. Meanwhile, the oceans are overfished, deserts are spreading, forests shrinking, fresh water becoming scarcer. The diversity of species upon the planet is diminishing (*Song of the Earth* 24).

It seems that it is this onslaught on the natural world that has motivated Malick, Herzog and Penn to adopt the Romantics' care for nature, but adapt this same care into aesthetics that are more relevant to contemporary culture. As a result, the artists in question make use of different metaphors for nature, and thereby anthropomorphise nature differently to their Romantic foreparents. However, it remains to be seen whether or not the metaphors with which these artists imbue nature are appropriate to how they wish to define successful interconnections between humanity and nature, a question to which I now turn.

Chapter 5
Anthropomorphism: A Discussion

> For men only began to understand Nature when they no longer understood it; when they felt that it was the Other, indifferent towards men, without senses by which to apprehend us, then for the first time they stepped outside of Nature, alone, out of a lonely world.
>
> And this was necessary, if man was to be an artist in dealing with it; the artist must not think of it any longer in its practical significance for man, but look at it objectively as a great, present reality (Rilke 80).

> The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit, – not a fossil earth, but a living earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic (Thoreau *Walden and Other Writings* 332).

> The aim of art is the beautiful, not over but through the true (Burroughs 208).

The Importance of Science

What interests Malick, Herzog, Penn and Krakauer in their respective texts is the manner in which humanity establishes (or breaks) their bonds with nature. It seems that, in their own ways, each artist wishes to demonstrate how we should be treating nature. Malick shows that establishing these interconnections with nature can be done by being sensitive to the instances of nature in language, by not needlessly destroying nature, and by living lives that are physically closer to nature. Herzog, on the other hand, argues that nature is cruel and vicious, and that strengthening the bonds between humanity and

nature means not to be swayed by what Herzog sees as deceptive kindness in nature, as Herzog explains: "Mother Nature doesn't call, doesn't speak to you, although a glacier eventually farts. And don't you listen to the Song of Life" (Cronin 301). Penn and Krakauer have similar views to Herzog but certainly do not view nature in such harsh terms, and rather argue for the view that it is in humanity's best interest to approach nature communally, always keeping in mind that one cannot know or understand nature completely. I have attempted to point out the various strengths and weaknesses of each of these anthropomorphic understandings of nature, prefacing my argument by first stating that any attempt to make an argument 'for' or 'against' nature is unavoidably mediated through human consciousness, and, thus, claiming to 'save the environment' must always be followed by 'for humanity'. As Bernard Williams reminds us:

> What many conservation interests want to preserve is a nature that is not controlled, shaped, or willed by us, a nature which, as against culture, can be thought of as just *there*. But nature which is preserved is a definite, delimited, wilderness. The paradox is that we have to use our power to preserve a sense of what is not in our power. Anything we leave untouched we have already touched. It will no doubt be best for us not to forget this, if we are to avoid self-deception and eventual despair. It is the final expression of the inescapable truth that our refusal of the anthropocentric must itself be a human refusal (240 author's italics).

Williams's quote is important for many reasons, not the least of which is his point that not recognising one's anthropocentrism, especially in an attempt to save the planet, will lead to "self-deception" and "despair". Williams implies that these consequences come as a result of one's lack of awareness of the inevitability of one's anthropocentric understanding of the world, especially if one's intention is to view nature on its own terms. Looking at nature through anthropocentric eyes (which is the only sort) has a definite impact on the way in which we anthropomorphise nature, how we characterise nature. However, while the *manner* in which we perceive nature may be mediated through human consciousness, this does not imply that we are unable to recognise certain facts about nature, facts which may assist in making more informed decisions on how we anthropomorphise the planet. It is science which greatly assists in determining what these facts of nature are.

In terms of filmic representations of nature, Disney, more so than any other film production company, has been responsible for the most overt anthropomorphism of nature, assuming, of course, it is possible to speak of degrees of anthropomorphism. To take a single example, *Bambi* showcases the impact Disney's films have on influencing humanity's anthropomorphised view of nature, while the film also shows the dangers of what its particular kind of anthropomorphisation of nature may do to the public's scientific understanding of the planet decades after the film's production. In the film, Bambi, a cute and large-eyed anthropomorphic deer, is threatened by a raging and ferocious forest fire (Algar et al.). At the time the film was first screened, scientific knowledge suggested that forest fires were to be condemned, because, as David Ingram shows "according to utilitarian conservationism, fires were unnatural and a waste of valuable resources. In 1944, the Wartime Advertising Council used the image of Bambi in its fire prevention campaign, thereby appropriating the movie for its conservationist agenda" (19). However, ecologists in the 1960s proved that the film's attitude towards forest fires was flawed, as scientists

> began to understand the ecological usefulness of fire in renewing forest habitats. Regular burning releases minerals into the soil, and clears out old or diseased timber, thereby encouraging new growth and diversity. Some nuts and seeds actually need fire to sprout. … Forester Paul Schullery thus criticizes *Bambi* for perpetuating outdated ideas on the role of fire in nature, and asserts that the public reaction of horror to the National Park Service's policy of letting the 1988 fire in Yellowstone National Park burn itself out had 'a great deal' to do with *Bambi* (Ingram 20).

Giving some insight into general American attitudes towards the Yellowstone fires of 1988, environmental historian Roderick Nash, quoted by Conrad Smith, shows that *Bambi* did "'more to shape American attitudes towards fire in wilderness ecosystems than all the scientific papers ever published on the subject'" (57). With these statements in mind, one is able to see how a raging fire threatening the life of an adorable creature who, quite literally, speaks the same language as we do, may have ignited feelings of anger and anxiety in an American public witnessing how the 1988 Yellowstone fires were handled. Interestingly, despite the American people's strong reaction against Yellowstone's officials' decision to allow the fire to burn itself out, scientists claim that

"about the same number of acres would have burned even if all the 1988 fires had been fought immediately" (Smith 56).

Certainly, that manmade forest fires are bad and should be prevented, the message the public took from *Bambi*, was the scientific attitude at the time, but it was not the scientific attitude during the 1988 Yellowstone fires. *Bambi*, at least at the time it was originally released, is an example of the instances in which art is able to comply with current scientific knowledge, but is also an example of the lasting impression, sometimes for the worse, that art may have on the public. Thus, the specific depiction of nature that was utilised in *Bambi* can leave no doubt of the power behind this anthropomorphism, and the responsibility that comes in the employment of this power, a quality of art upon which James Lovelock comments: "We live at a time when emotions and feelings count more than truth, and there is a vast ignorance of science. We have allowed fiction writers and green lobbies to exploit the fear of nuclear energy and of almost any new science, in the same way that the churches exploited the fear of Hellfire not so long ago" (*Revenge of Gaia* 16). Lovelock cites the film, *The China Syndrome* (Bridges), which hyperbolically and sensationally portrays the horrors of nuclear power: "In [*The China Syndrome*], a badly constructed reactor disastrously goes wrong and a character in the film imagines its fissioning core melting its way through to the centre of the Earth, then continuing on miraculously until it emerges in China. Even as metaphor, this was a wholly absurd image, but it did its job of titillating public panic and fear and set the scene for endless misinformation and lies" (*Revenge of Gaia* 124). *The China Syndrome*, then, seems to be a film which is more well-intentioned than it is well-informed. While Lovelock shows that this is a case of art confusing science fact with science fiction, Lovelock concedes to the power of art to sway public opinion.

To be sure, though, science has its faults and cannot alone explain the infinite complexity of the universe. There is the tendency of science to engage in reductionist thinking, whereby, for the purposes of 'accuracy', only certain variables of the world are observed to, ironically, gain a greater understanding of the universe on the whole. Certainly, as Lovelock explains, reductionist thinking had its major contributions to science through physics and chemistry, but reductionist thinking must take "its proper place as a part and not the whole of science" (*Revenge of Gaia* 10). Reductionist meth-

ods of experimentation are not at all the means of research used presently. As Lovelock explains, this is the science of the past: "science itself was handicapped in the last two centuries by its division into many different disciplines, each limited to seeing only a tiny facet of the planet, and there was no coherent vision of the Earth" (*Revenge of Gaia* 6). Thus, science alone cannot come to understand all of nature all of the time. However, ideal as it may be to achieve such omniscience, especially in the face of climate change, there are steps that may be taken in order to curb this shortcoming. Certainly, Lovelock's scientific inquiry of the planet, in which the earth is viewed as a whole and singular system, aims to address this weakness in science. Also, a science such as Earth Stewardship is a movement (among others) that recognises an issue such as climate change as a multi-faceted problem, and, because of this, sees the need for it to be addressed by taking an interdisciplinary approach (Chapin et al.).

Another potential problem of the scientific method is the cold neutrality with which it sometimes treats nature in the name of research, a treatment of nature which may sometimes be damaging. This is an issue which may be witnessed in the very language utilised in scientific discourse. Referring to a scientific study in which researchers aimed to investigate ways of 'controlling' coyote populations for the safety of livestock, Kahn shows that "in the language of field biology, coyotes and other wild animals are not victims of research to be caged, poisoned, manipulated, and possibly killed. Instead, they are 'test animals' which are 'housed,' 'dosed,' and 'processed' – rather like an innocuous manufacturing process" (243). Certainly, most, if not all, modern humans have benefited from this scientific method, which implicates modern society as being part of the cause of the problem. In the next section of this chapter I will attempt to show how anthropomorphism may be able to remedy the misuse of language when speaking of nature. It is my view that the use of (the right kind of) metaphors may assist humanity in thinking of nature as something that should be valued, as opposed to thinking of nature as that which merely exists, and is, therefore, not susceptible to any damage perpetrated by human action.

However, returning to science's strengths and weaknesses, there are, of course, some critiques of science that do not hold much weight. One such critique, using deconstructionist principles, claims that "scientists are subject to fashion, bias, and ambition just

like the rest of humanity, which is evidenced by the frequent exploitation of scientists by industrialists, militarists, and other elites … [which] undermines any claim of objectivity and neutrality. Thus it is tempting to conclude that the scientific enterprise is biased and value-ridden and that, as a project that seeks knowledge, is no better than astrology" (Soulé 153). However, Michael Soulé reminds us that

> such a critique of modern science is shallow. It is easy to confuse the behaviour of individual scientists with the behaviour of the institution of science. Science, as an institution, is self-corrective. Science episodically but ultimately undermines the interests and even the beliefs of its own adherents. Thus the post-modern premise that individuals cannot escape from their values or from their expectations about reality is fair, but it sticks only to scientists, not science (154).

Further, it is important to note that the argument that scientists are prone to errors in their own scientific method is an argument that comes not only from deconstructionists, but from scientists themselves. Indeed, with the advent of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in 1927, long before the development of deconstruction in the 1960s and 1970s, the scientific community discovered that, due to quantum mechanics, any experiment is prone to inaccuracies of measurement and limitation of functional possibilities, thereby suggesting the fallibility of both tools and scientist in an experiment. However, scientists have managed to quantify these uncertainties, which implies an awareness on the part of scientists of the inherent limitations of the scientific method (Heisenberg).

It is important to note, then, that science, with its imperfections, remains a system of acquiring knowledge about the world which should be seen as an aid in allowing us to develop stronger bonds with the planet, especially since science itself is becoming increasingly responsive to nature. Thus, science may be seen as a discipline that should complement humanity's anthropomorphic understanding of nature. However, science alone cannot fully develop stronger interconnections with the natural world, and art plays an equally important role.

The Importance of Art: The Living Earth

Thinking about nature in anthropomorphic ways is inevitable. It is inevitable for the same reasons that thinking about nature anthropocentrically is so: we are only able to view the world through human eyes. Thus, the manner in which we attempt to establish better interconnections with nature can only be done through an anthropomorphic understanding of the planet. In recent years, chemistry expert James Lovelock has promoted his characterisation of the earth as Gaia, a name inspired by the Greek goddess who has stood as a symbol of the earth as female. The term 'Gaia' was suggested to Lovelock by author William Golding during the late 1960s as a means of describing and perceiving "the Earth as in certain ways alive, at least to the extent that it appeared to regulate its own climate and chemistry" (*Face of Gaia* 129). Lovelock's Gaia theory gives a scientifically unconventional understanding of the earth in that he views it in its totality and postulates that the earth, both in its living and nonliving components (from its organisms, oceans, surface rocks and atmosphere), 'attempts' to regulate its own chemical makeup. Gaia theory "sees this system as having a goal – the regulation of surface conditions so as always to be as favourable for contemporary life as possible" (Lovelock *Face of Gaia* 166). However, Lovelock, in commenting on his overt anthropomorphisation of the earth, suggests that seeing the earth in human terms should be used advantageously: "I know that to personalize the Earth System as Gaia, as I have often done and continue to do in this book, irritates the scientifically correct, but I am unrepentant because metaphors are more than ever needed for a widespread comprehension of the true nature of the Earth and an understanding of the lethal dangers that lie ahead" (*Revenge of Gaia* 188). Thus, setting aside, but not ignoring, the scientific aspect of his argument, what interests me is that Lovelock uses a metaphor to come to a better and more rounded understanding of the earth. Why does Lovelock bother with metaphor to explain scientific phenomena, and what value could Lovelock be adding to our understanding of the earth by humanising it?

When Lovelock uses the metaphor of the earth as alive, he prefaces this by stating that he is not "thinking of the Earth as alive in a sentient way, or even alive like an animal or a bacterium" (*Revenge of Gaia* 24). Thus, Lovelock warns against a literal interpretation of the concept implying, then, that the metaphor exists purely as metaphor

for Lovelock. However, Lovelock also explains the metaphor's real-world consequences since this image of the earth promotes a greater scientific understanding of nature: "My reason for persisting in calling the Earth Gaia and saying it is alive is not a personal foible; it is because I see this as an essential step in the process of public, as well as scientific, understanding" (Lovelock *Face of Gaia* 128). However, using metaphor in order to understand and give more depth to scientific fact is certainly not unique to Lovelock.

In *The Origin of Species*, one of the most important scientific works ever produced, Charles Darwin uses metaphor in similar ways to Lovelock: to allow the public to grasp complex scientific ideas, and to gain a greater understanding of scientific fact. One of the more famous metaphors used by Darwin is that of a tree, which he uses to explain how life evolves and branches off into different directions, but where, upon observing a node on the tree, one is able to identify the point from which a species has evolved (113-14). Darwin also explains the value in using metaphor to elucidate and inform a complex scientific concept: "The affinities of all the beings of the same class have sometimes been represented by a great tree. I believe this simile largely speaks the truth" (113). From this quote it is evident that Darwin is aware that the metaphor he uses is no more than a metaphor as it is "largely" representative of the truth, but is not the truth itself. However, that the metaphor he uses "speaks the truth" is indicative of the power of art, especially in its ability to anthropomorphise nature, to grant us a greater understanding of scientific fact.

As far as my primary texts are concerned, this is also a point illustrated in Herzog's *Encounters at the End of the World*, in which scientists comment on global warming by assigning human qualities to the planet. When Herzog interviews Douglas MacAyeal, a glaciologist studying the melting ice of Antarctica, MacAyeal describes the icy landscape in human terms:

> I'd be happy to see Antarctica as a static, monolithic environment, a cold monolith of ice, sort of the way the people back in the past used to see it, but now our comfortable thought about Antarctica is over. Now we're seeing it as a living being that's dynamic, that's producing change, change that it's

> broadcasting to the rest of the world, possibly in response to what the world is broadcasting down to Antarctica.

It seems that MacAyeal personifies the landscape not just as a way of having the layman understand the scientific information he is imparting, but also as a way of allowing himself to get a sense of the *feel* of the continent, as a means of understanding the broader and global implications of the complexity of the situation. Also, in personifying the continent, MacAyeal manages to imbue the landscape with a personality, and, in so doing, give it some kind of value, by which I mean human value, forcing us to change our attitude to the environment. Instead of seeing it as, in MacAyeal's words, "a cold monolith of ice", we are now seeing it as something that is "living", implying, metaphorically of course, a kind of consciousness, which allows humanity to think twice about the ways in which we treat something we once before thought of as inert and lifeless. Thus, when the continent is "broadcasting to the rest of the world" in response to our messages to it, MacAyeal rightfully implies that our communication with the continent should be one of kindness and respect. Thus, an equal mixture of both science and art may prove beneficial for the purposes of anthropomorphising nature in ways which enable humanity to treat nature with such kindness and respect.

Lovelock is certainly of the same opinion of a balanced use of science and art in influencing our perceptions and treatment of nature. Thus, where Lovelock advocates metaphor in informing our *scientific* understanding of the earth, he also explains metaphor's other purpose: its ability to promote greater *sympathy* for the earth. Using art for this purpose, is, for Lovelock, the most important implication of viewing the earth in anthropomorphic terms: "Perhaps the greatest value of the Gaia concept lies in its metaphor of a living Earth, which reminds us that we are part of it and that our contract with Gaia is not about human rights alone, but includes human obligations" (*Face of Gaia* 104). Lovelock elaborates on this point in another text:

> Metaphor is important because to deal with, understand, and even ameliorate the fix we are now in over global change requires us to know the true nature of the Earth and imagine it as the largest living thing in the solar system, not something inanimate like that disreputable contraption 'spaceship Earth'. Until this change of heart and mind happens we will not instinctively

> sense that we live on a live planet that can respond to the changes we make, either by cancelling the changes or by cancelling us. Unless we see the Earth as a planet that behaves as if it were alive, at least to the extent of regulating its climate and chemistry, we will lack the will to change our way of life and to understand that we have made it our greatest enemy (*Revenge of Gaia* 21-22).

While, for the most part, Lovelock uses the image of a female as a means of characterising the planet, this is not the only image which Lovelock ascribes to nature. When Lovelock speaks of the earth, there are times when he uses the metaphor of an animal. For example, Lovelock uses the image of a camel to explain the manner in which the planet regulates its temperature, stating that camels, when it is hot during the day, increase their temperature so that they do not lose water by perspiration, and during the night time, when it is colder, decrease their body temperature because they would lose heat trying to stay at their warmer daytime temperature (*Revenge of Gaia* 21). In the same way, as Lovelock explains,

> Gaia, like the camel, has several stable states so that it can accommodate to the changing internal and external environment. Most of the time things stay steady; as they were over the few thousand years before about 1900. When the forcing is too strong, either to the hot or the cold, Gaia, as a camel would, moves to a new stable state that is easier to maintain. She is about to move now (*Revenge of Gaia* 21).

It is interesting that Lovelock uses a metaphor (a camel) to explain another metaphor (Gaia). He explains the literal earth using the Gaia metaphor, which is then explained by the image of a camel. However, it is ultimately the Gaia metaphor that Lovelock uses and promotes. I suspect that Lovelock's use of the Gaia metaphor predominates in his characterisation of the earth because thinking about the earth as a camel would not have elicited the same level of empathy for nature from humanity as would a human metaphor, which, as explained, is ultimately Lovelock's purpose. This is also the reason why Lovelock seems to advocate both science and art in equal measure, because to place science before the metaphor may result in a lack of compassion for the earth. To place science before art means to first view nature as an object of scrutiny that may be observed and studied in whatever ways seem ap-

propriate to a potentially fallible human scientist. Lovelock, then, rightfully shows that science and art, in their ability to inform our perceptions of nature, must come both equally and simultaneously, a process, represented by the label "Gaia", which Lovelock advocates for the purposes of forming better interconnections with the earth: "The ideas that stem from Gaia theory put us in our proper place as part of the Earth system – not the owners, managers, commissars or people in charge. … This way of thinking makes clear that we have no special human rights; we are merely one of the partner species in the great enterprise of Gaia" (*Face of Gaia* 6).

Malick, Herzog, Penn and Krakauer, however, when compared to each other, each present their own unique interpretations, and anthropomorphisations, of nature for the purposes of what they believe constitutes a productive and beneficial relationship with nature. However, with each artist's attempt to establish better interconnections with nature through a particular kind of anthropomorphism of nature, I will show that some artists, more so than others, use metaphors more appropriately suited to their cause.

Krakauer, Penn and Herzog on Nature

Penn, in his film, shows that if one is to establish interconnections with nature, then one has to do so with the support of a larger community. However, Penn also shows that perhaps one cannot achieve the degree of immersion into nature that characterised McCandless's willingness to do so, especially in the manner in which McCandless severed himself, not merely from humanity, but also from the conveniences that humanity brought. For the most part, I feel that Penn successfully comes to a valid conclusion: to achieve the kind of immersion into nature pursued by McCandless is an act which requires a degree of knowledge of nature that is simply impossible to achieve, at least for modern humans. These are the premises Penn establishes which point to a unique anthropomorphisation of nature not seen in the other texts. Penn seems to characterise the earth as an elusive and mysterious figure, which he does as a means of showing the unexpected dangers that lie in nature. This is a similar point made by Krakauer in his text.

Through his examination of Chris McCandless, Krakauer presents an interesting perspective on the ability of humans to integrate into, and establish strong and productive interconnections with, nature. However, as has been shown, Krakauer is more optimistic than Penn regarding the ability of humanity to survive solitarily in the wilderness. Krakauer, in his text, shows that, provided one has the right knowhow, and does not take foolish risks, the kind of integration with nature that McCandless attempted to pursue is possible, even though this kind of lifestyle may not necessarily be desired. Krakauer does demonstrate, however, that any attempt to come to know nature, especially as intimately as McCandless had attempted to do, must be foregrounded with a sense of self-awareness that the kinds of images of nature on which one bases these interconnections must be perceived as a construction.

Krakauer strongly warns against the metaphors and images on which McCandless based his anthropomorphised view of nature, which, subsequently, characterised McCandless's belief in his 'ability' to come closer to nature. One of the examples Krakauer uses to illustrate this point is McCandless's literalisation of the kinds of images fabricated by American environmental writer Jack London:

> Mesmerized by London's turgid portrayal of life in Alaska and the Yukon, McCandless read and reread *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, 'To Build a Fire,' 'An Odyssey of the North,' 'The Wit of Porportuk.' He was so enthralled by these tales, however, that he seemed to forget they were works of fiction, constructions of the imagination that had more to do with London's romantic sensibilities than with the actualities of life in the subarctic wilderness. McCandless conveniently overlooked the fact that London himself had spent just a single winter in the North and that he'd died by his own hand on his California estate at the age of forty, a fatuous drunk, obese and pathetic, maintaining a sedentary existence that bore scant resemblance to the ideals he espoused in print (45).

Thus, Krakauer makes an important point as he draws attention to the dangers in taking literally an anthropomorphised view of nature and, therefore, implies that any anthropomorphisation must be accompanied by a sense of awareness. Certainly, part of the reason why Penn's portrayal of nature as a mystifying entity works is because he carries with it a sense of self-awareness. Penn's filmic demonstration that nature can be per-

ceived in other ways (and not only in the ways McCandless sees it) may act as proof of this. However, turning to my other central texts, both Herzog and his protagonist Timothy Treadwell in Herzog's *Grizzly Man* may be criticised for lacking this self-awareness in endorsing their respective anthropomorphisations of nature. Also, what is important to consider in the films of Herzog is not only his lack of awareness in his anthropomorphised view of nature, but the type of characteristics with which he imbues nature.

Throughout his films Werner Herzog has endorsed a perception of nature which characterises nature as iniquitous. Herzog's perceptions of nature are best summarised in Les Blank's documentary *Burden of Dreams*, a documentary based on Herzog's experiences while filming his *Fitzcarraldo*. In *Burden of Dreams*, we find Herzog standing amongst the wild foliage of the Amazon jungle (in which the film is set and filmed), where Herzog narrates the following:

> [N]ature here is vile and base. I wouldn't see anything erotical here. I would see fornication and asphyxiation and choking and fighting for survival and growing and just rotting away. Of course there is a lot of misery but it is the same misery that is all around us. The trees here are in misery and the birds are in misery. I don't think they sing, they just screech in pain. …
>
> Even the stars up here in the sky look like a mess. There is no harmony in the universe. We have to get acquainted to this idea that there is no real harmony as we have conceived it (Blank).

Herzog presents a particular view of nature in which nature is anthropomorphised as chaotic, destructive and violent, which is a perception of nature that runs throughout his documentaries I have considered in this dissertation. That is not to say, however, that it is a view of nature that is devoid of any kind of scientific reasoning. Indeed, using science to confirm one's reading of nature is a process that Herzog portrays in both films examined in this work. In *Encounters at the End of the World*, it has been shown how scientists manage to use science and metaphor to portray a certain attitude towards the planet. Also, in *Grizzly Man*, Herzog shows how his protagonist, Timothy Treadwell, was incapable of using fact and fiction simultaneously in order to construct a certain view of nature. In one particular scene Herzog interviews Larry Van Daele, a bear biologist, wherein Herzog makes the discovery that the bears which Treadwell was

claiming to protect from poachers were in no real danger from poachers to begin with (*Grizzly Man*). Further, in living among the bears for as long as Treadwell did, Sven Haakanson, Ph.D., shows that, perhaps, Treadwell did more damage than good, as Treadwell habituated the bears to humans and may have allowed the bears to believe that all humans were harmless. Treadwell, then, may be seen as an example of the dangers of using metaphor to inform science, but not using science and metaphor to inform each other. Treadwell has dangerously compromised scientific fact for an anthropomorphic reading of nature that Herzog shows to be inappropriate and dangerous. However, Herzog may be guilty of the same thing.

Interestingly, Herzog utilises science as a means of justifying his anthropomorphised view of nature as violent and cruel. In a particular scene in *Encounters at the End of the World*, Herzog speaks to cell biologist Samuel S. Bowser who explains his perception of the oceans, on a microbial level, as a place that is "horribly violent". Herzog, agreeing with Bowser's perception of nature as a violent place, asks Bowser if, through evolution, "mammals fled in panic from the oceans and crawled on solid land to get out of this." Bowser responds: "Yeah, I think undoubtedly that's exactly the driving force that caused us to leave the horrors behind; to grow and evolve into larger creatures to escape what's horribly violent at the miniature scale." Thus, while it is evident that Herzog takes the necessary steps in recognising the importance of science in understanding nature, the process in which Herzog does this is questionable. Like Timothy Treadwell in *Grizzly Man*, Herzog seems to place metaphor before scientific fact, as opposed to placing them alongside each other. Thus, Herzog comes to certain conclusions about how nature must be read before he uses facts to support these claims. This points to another flaw in Herzog's argument about the 'inherent' hostility is nature, an anthropomorphised reading of nature which is rooted far too firmly in the 'negative' aspects of nature to be practical.

If Herzog's intention is to establish better interconnections between humanity and nature (as has been shown in Chapter 4) by means of characterising nature as a hostile and cruel place, then perhaps the metaphors he uses do not justify his cause. The problem, it seems, in the metaphors used by Herzog is that it may justify a kind of subduing or taming of nature, which was the manner in which the American Puritans treated na-

ture since they employed similar anthropomorphisations of the earth. It is clear that Herzog's goals for the treatment of nature lie, quite apparently, on the opposite end of those of the American Puritans, but it is evident that Herzog characterises the planet in similar ways. This seems only to underline the disconnect between the manner in which Herzog personifies nature and the sincere care he has for the longevity of the planet. Terrence Malick, however, may present more suitable metaphors to justify the manner in which he believes humanity should repair the bonds between itself and nature.

Nature's Vengeance

Werner Herzog, in his documentaries, tends to paint nature in few but bold colours. It is an image of nature that, while striking, is often monotonous and loses the complexity of a complex system. I find Malick's anthropomorphism of nature to be more successful simply because it thrives on the intricacy that Herzog's portrayal lacks. I also find it to be more successful than Penn's perception of nature as Malick characterises nature in clearer and more defined ways, thus leading me to believe that Malick's earth is, as it were, more alive than what Penn's depiction suggests. Thus, while Penn certainly makes interesting and valuable observations about the planet, it is Malick's portrayal of nature, as I will argue, which is more important and urgent in our current standing with nature.

As we are introduced to the New World, we hear Pocahontas, in her voiceover narration, calling out to "Mother" to "help us sing the story of our land" (Malick *The New World*). Also, in the beginning stages of Pocahontas and John Smith's courtship, Pocahontas, once again in voiceover narration, addresses "Mother":

> Mother, where do you live? In the sky? The clouds? The sea? Show me your face. Give me a sign.

Finally, by the end of the film, Pocahontas, before she dies, narrates the following: "Mother, now I know where you live." It is apparent that Pocahontas establishes a connection between "Mother" and nature since, from the given quotes, we are told that

"Mother" is knowledgeable of the land's history, and that it is likely that "Mother" considers nature as the place in which she dwells. It is never made clear exactly *what* "Mother" is, but, based on the above quotes, it is safe to assume that it is, effectively, 'Mother Nature' to whom Pocahontas is referring. It is also significant that it is a *female* that comes to represent nature. Thus, for all intents and purposes, Malick puts a female face to nature, much in the same way that Lovelock does (*Revenge of Gaia; Face of Gaia*).

However, the qualities that Malick assigns to this feminine anthropomorphisation of nature are by no means stereotypical. For example, Malick shows that nature does not hesitate in taking action when being threatened. In one particular scene early on in the film, a scene in which John Smith is becoming more accustomed to the New World's landscape, Smith becomes lost in a marsh (Malick *The New World*). In Smith's disorientated and confused state, the Native American characters, who are, significantly, out of the frame, begin to shoot arrows at the intruder. The absence of the Native American characters from the frame gives the impression that it is Smith's natural environment that is retaliating, perhaps giving Smith a warning that he is not welcome. This kind of imagery is also apparent in another of Malick's films: *The Thin Red Line*.

In *The Thin Red Line* American soldiers fighting in the Second World War are assigned the task of taking over Hill 210 in Guadalcanal. However, there are instances in the seizing of Hill 210 in which the soldiers seem to be battling, not only the Japanese, but nature as well (Malick *Red Line*). For much of the battle on Hill 210, the Japanese soldiers remain hidden within the vast ebbing and flowing of the grass on an immense hill, in some instances hiding in holes that have been burrowed in the hill. However, as the American soldiers inch their way up the hill, we see the flash of the Japanese guns emitted from the greenery. This gives the impression that it is the hill that is attacking the Americans and not the Japanese. Malick, then, characterises nature as that which actively resists domination, and will retaliate if threatened. There are several ominous encounters with nature which also take place on the hill that prove the same point. As a soldier is lying low in the long grass, assuming he is safe from the human violence above him, he is confronted with a snake poised to attack him, forcing the soldier to realise that, in war, one must not only anticipate the aggression of humanity, but the

aggression of nature as well. Thus, in both *The New World* and *The Thin Red Line*, Malick makes the point that nature will attack its attacker, violently, if necessary.

Throughout this dissertation I have made reference to the beauty with which Malick imbues nature. However, now we find that nature, according to Malick, can also be vicious. Nature, then, is not a docile creature with a single characteristic. It is dynamic and it changes (seemingly willingly) in order to protect itself. It does not passively accept abuse, but retaliates as if to remind us, its inhabitants, that we are merely its guests. The earth, then, as Malick shows, is not an object, but a female, within whose beauty one may revel, but is a woman willing to strike when struck. This kind of anthropomorphisation proposed by Malick is based on metaphors for nature which seem properly suited to the kinds of interconnections Malick proposes humanity establish and maintain with nature. This is because the kinds of interconnections with nature Malick attempts to promote are those in which humans may enjoy the riches and beauty nature may offer, but, also, where humanity approaches this natural wealth with an awareness of the risk we face when taking too much.

It is apparent, though, that Malick's anthropomorphism of the earth is based very loosely on the myths and legends of the people which he portrays in his film, the Algonquian (*The New World*). The Algonquian creation myth states that the Earth, a woman, gave birth to twin sons, Glooskap, who was a trickster and looked upon favourably by the Algonquian, and Malsum, the evil twin (Andrews 82; Spence 141). However, Glooskap and Malsum's mother died at their birth, and, from their dead mother's body, Glooskap created the sun, the moon, animals and humanity, while Malsum created in nature all that was seen as a hindrance to humans: mountains, valleys and snakes (Andrews 82; Spence 141). However, in Malick's *The New World*, the director manipulates and changes significant plot points of this myth in order to create his own image of the earth suitable for contemporary society, perhaps, especially, western society.

In the original Algonquian myth Mother Earth, as it were, dies, and her body is recycled into aspects of nature that are both 'good' and 'bad'. This is certainly the case in Malick's anthropomorphised view of the earth as it is a metaphor which harbours that which may be considered good, and that which may be considered evil. However, in

Malick's film it is significant that the director chooses to portray 'Mother' (who we can take to mean Mother Nature, as I have previously attempted to justify) as a living being (*The New World*). In very fleeting moments in the film, especially as Pocahontas is addressing "Mother", we are given images, lasting no more than a second, of a woman, photographed as she stands in front of the sun, who possesses an ethereal beauty. We can safely assume she is the "Mother" to whom Pocahontas refers. However, while it is true that the Algonquian see the rocks, the seasons and the wind as alive (Spence 147), it is significant that Malick chooses to show Mother Earth as never having been killed to begin with, a much more accurate way of characterising our human-nature interconnections: humanity may die, but Mother Earth will live on. Thus, while Malick certainly borrows elements of Algonquian myth, he manages to create a wholly different characterisation of the earth when compared to the Algonquian narratives. Malick creates an anthropomorphisation of nature that is suited for humanity *now*. However, while Malick is intent on manipulating the Algonquian nature myth of the earth, the kind of characterisation of the earth he creates is by no means original, and not without its criticisms.

Malick's personification of nature bears a striking resemblance to James Lovelock's anthropomorphisation of the earth as Gaia. There are, though, problems which may arise from both Malick's and Lovelock's feminised conceptualisation of the earth. Using ecofeminists principles, Berman comments on the effect of Lovelock's gendered metaphor for the planet by stating that this particular anthropomorphisation of the earth "reinforces hierarchical dualisms and perpetuates the oppression and subordination of women and Nature" (263). Ecofeminist Patrick D. Murphy provides a more detailed description of this problem. Making reference to Lovelock's use of the Greek myth from which the name Gaia comes, Murphy explores the narrative behind the name, coming to the conclusion that Lovelock's use of a female metaphor for the earth is inappropriate:

> The Gaia imagery of contemporary ecological consciousness represents part of a broader movement to resacralise nature; it also is the most recent manifestation of the Western tendency to render the planet in female gender terms. Yet, what are the dimensions of such rendering? Although the conception of Earth as Mother/Goddess predates patriarchal cultures, the imagery perceived throughout Western culture derives mainly from patriarchal Greek and Roman mythology. In that mythology, Gaia begins as a

> parthenogenetic initiator, but quickly becomes subservient to her son-husband, Uranos. As soon as the male arrives, the female loses her independence. Hesiod states that Earth arose first and created Heaven-Uranos 'equal to herself,' and yet he is immediately deemed 'Father Heaven' and gains control of his mother. That the Greeks' respect for Earth was crippled by patriarchal misconceptions, however, does not mean that current users of the myth must necessarily fall prey to sexism; nor does it mean they must only refer to patriarchal perceptions of the Earth goddess. The issue, rather, is whether or not they can use Gaia imagery without evoking patriarchal perceptions. It seems highly unlikely that Gaia imagery can be used without invoking any of the Greek patriarchal baggage attached to the symbol (59).

Murphy's problem with the Gaia image lies not in the fact that it is a metaphor, per se, but that it is a female metaphor based on patriarchal values. Murphy also states that this is not the right metaphor for this time: "The use of Gaia imagery and the envisioning of the Earth as a sacred female may have been and may remain a necessary step to get people moving toward a higher consciousness, but it cannot serve as the right stride for the path of planet-human harmony" (68). I will argue, however, that it is most certainly the right kind of metaphor by which to live at this particular time. In stressing that Gaia is overthrown by her son-husband Heaven-Uranos, despite the fact that it is stated that they are equals, Murphy seems to have selected certain aspects of the mythology, and neglected other parts, to justify his point.

Hesiod, in "The Theogony" states that, Earth and Heaven conceived several children, among them three particularly evil sons: "Cottys, Briareus, / And Gyges" (201-02). From the moment they were born, the sons "Drew down their father's hate" (Hesiod 209), after which Heaven "seized them all, and hid them in a cave / Of earth" (Hesiod 210-11). Hesiod further explains the effect this has on Earth, and how she then asserts her agency to take control of the situation:

> Heaven in his deed malign rejoiced: vast Earth
> Groan'd inly, sore aggrieved; but soon devised
> A stratagem of mischief and of fraud. …
> She spake emboldening words, though grieved at heart.
> 'My sons! alas! ye children of a sire
> Most impious, now obey a mother's voice;

So shall we well avenge the fell despite
Of him your father, who the first devised
Deeds of injustice' (212-23)

Murphy claims, then, that it is a sign of a deeply disturbed and patriarchal culture which would have Heaven, a male, dominating Earth, a female. However, as the extract reveals, this is not how the story ends. What Hesiod's text portrays is a female character unwilling to passively accept the injustices acted out against her or her children, even if it is an injustice acted out by her son-husband. This is a story of vengeance and retaliation. It is also significant that Earth acts out her revenge "soon", giving the reader the impression of a being who does not hesitate to retaliate when injustices are inflicted upon her. However, when Earth gives instructions to her sons to kill their father, we are told that she speaks "emboldening words, though grieved at heart", suggesting that she is not unreasonable and without conscience. Earth, then, is not something, or, in this case, someone, who seeks out conflict at every chance, but is rather an even-tempered fighter. It could be argued, though, that Earth still does not have the same kind of power seen in the male characters of this narrative as it is the sons who are the ones who eventually kill their father-brother, Heaven. However, we must not forget that it is Earth who is the leader who initiates the killing of her son-husband by instructing her other sons to carry out the task. Earth may be seen as a character with agency and will. This is a far cry from the kind of reading which Murphy gives of Earth, or Gaia. Murphy's reading of Gaia as being stuck in patriarchal conventions, forever submitting to the will of her son-husband, allows humanity to view the earth as something weak, something of which humanity may take advantage. However, this reading is a reading of Hesiod's text which selects only certain bits of information to evidence a very particular and, by implication, a very flawed point. A more accurate reading would be that Gaia is fierce but reasonable, which is a reading I am offering in support of Lovelock's conceptualisation of Gaia. Lovelock does not provide much by way of the mythology surrounding Gaia, using only the effect of the narrative as a means of promoting his reading of the earth. However, what we are able to find is a reading of a character that promotes a treatment of the earth which Lovelock has been championing since his conceptualisation of the earth as a living system.

Lovelock's interpretation of nature is that it is complex and layered, and his reading does not seem to carry any kind of patriarchal baggage. It is an interpretation of the earth in which the earth's femininity comes across as being only incidental. In some parts of his text, Lovelock manipulates the Greek myth to suit his own political and scientific agenda. Thus, there are many qualities which characterise Lovelock's Gaia. To begin with, Lovelock, without dismissing any of the characteristics of Gaia just discussed, characterises Gaia as an old and ailing woman, unable to recover as quickly as someone younger (*Revenge of Gaia* 59-60). However, Gaia, though old and ailing, is by no means submissive: "We now see that the great Earth system, Gaia, behaves like the other mythic goddesses, Khali and Nemesis; she acts as a mother who is nurturing but ruthlessly cruel towards transgressors, even when they are her progeny" (*Revenge of Gaia* 188). Lovelock shows that, despite the planet being both mother and fighter, in our current state of what Lovelock calls global heating, Gaia, at least in the ways in which she is reacting towards its human inhabitants, is now more a fighter than a mother: Lovelock makes the claim that "In several ways we are unintentionally at war with Gaia" (*Revenge of Gaia* 196). However, despite humanity being at war with the planet, it is not a war that Lovelock advocates. As if recognising the danger of a war metaphor, Lovelock feels that we "urgently need to make a just peace with Gaia while we are strong enough to negotiate" (*Revenge of Gaia* 196). Perhaps Lovelock recognises that, in the midst of the current climate change, fighting back would be an utterly futile exercise as Gaia would always win, as our entire existence as a species depends, firstly, on the existence of Gaia. The only logical thing to do, therefore, if we are to save ourselves, would be, as Lovelock suggests, to make peace with the planet.

It seems, then, that Lovelock's use of a female metaphor is more dynamic than patriarchal discourse would suggest. By characterising Gaia not only as a mother, we do not see Gaia solely as a provider whose gifts we take for granted, which is much the way contemporary western culture has come to understand nature. By characterising Gaia not only as a ruthless fighter we do not anthropomorphise Gaia as that which should be contested to ensure humanity's survival. Rather, by interweaving both aspects, which are by no means mutually exclusive, into the same single anthropomorphic persona, Lovelock defines the earth as a person who is kind but should be approached with caution. Thus, criticising Gaia imagery for feminising nature, and therefore portraying the

earth as a victim that can be exploited, is to look at Gaia imagery too narrowly. This is a two-thousand-year-old image of the earth which has never been more relevant and necessary for humanity's relationship, especially western society's relationship, with the earth today. It is also an image of the earth which bears a striking resemblance to Malick's perception of the earth as "Mother". Both images show the earth as a force that should be treated, not with violence and domination, as it is an earth that is reasonable, but with care and respect, as it is a force that is, ultimately, more powerful than we can imagine. Nature, if perceived in this way, becomes something of a wonder. It is not something that may be feared, but something awesome that may be admired. Nature is female, and she is strong and graceful.

Conclusion

> We fall back into the biological category of the potato bug which exterminated the potato, and thereby exterminated itself (Leopold "River" 127).

> 'These dry years you hear some people complaining, you know, about the dust and the wind, and how dry it is. But the wind and the dust, they are part of life too, like the sun and the sky. You don't swear at them. It's people, see. They're the ones. The old people used to say that droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave' (Marmon Silko *Ceremony* 46).

Tending Towards an Understanding of Nature

I began this dissertation by enquiring about the nature of nature by way of offering a critique of the selected works of Malick, Herzog, Penn and Krakauer, all of whom offer differing attitudes and definitions of nature, and all of whom have done so using anthropomorphism as a basic tool of inquiry. Thus, using and modifying ecocriticism, part of this dissertation dealt with the ways in which metaphors may be used to develop a certain perspective of humanity's relationship with nature. One of ecocriticism's central concerns is that of the of anthropomorphisation of nature, and, like many ecocritics, Buell is of the opinion that to not anthropomorphise the earth is "myopic" (*Environmental Imagination* 5), implying that the act of anthropomorphising nature is wise, and, perhaps, in humanity's best interest concerning its current and future relationship with the earth. However, despite many, but not all, ecocritics agreeing with this point, there remain several areas of improvement and development in this otherwise useful literary theory, areas of improvement which I have discovered while in the process of analysing my primary texts. It is these neglected aspects of ecocriticism, to which

I now turn, which I hope will stimulate an interesting examination of the kinds of fruit this literary theory will bear in years to come.

One of the major concerns about the future of ecocriticism that some critics have put forth is its ability to analyse, not only different artistic media, but different genres within the same medium. Dominic Head is one such critic who remains sceptical about the ability of ecocritics to apply their theory to the novel, especially the postmodern novel. Head's argument is that a genre such as non-fiction nature writing lends itself better to the political ideologies of ecocriticism, which is a theory that valorises texts in which nature is handled with the same depth, complexity and interest as the human subject (33). However, when using ecocritical principles to analyse the novel (an example of narrative fiction writing), Head suggests that this literary form is doomed from the beginning because, according to Head, the novel, "this 'triumph' of industrialised society, is too much a product of its social moment to ruminate usefully on the route to the post-industrial world" (33). However, this does not leave Head defeated. Head shows that ecocriticism must be taken as a theory in flux, that "different kinds of ecocriticism are necessary and desirable" (38), and that the novel is a form of literature that we should perceive as being able to lend itself to an ecocritical reading, even if this means compromising some of the principles upon which ecocriticism is based. This is certainly the approach I take in Chapter 1 in which I develop celluloid ecocriticism, a theory which assisted in my analysis of my primary filmic texts.

Of course, ecocriticism, as it is a theory that is constantly changing, is also a theory to which additions are constantly being made, especially additions from other disciplines. An example of this is referred to in Chapter 1 in which I discuss how ecocriticism is a theory that thrives on its reliance on a scientific understanding of the natural world. Thus, given that ecocriticism is a literary theory still in development, there are several exciting ways in which it may branch out. One such direction may be a kind of merging of ecocriticism and psychoanalysis, a merging of theory which would have proved valuable in my critique of the interpersonal relationship with nature practised by Chris McCandless and Timothy Treadwell. Thus, it may be interesting to observe the ways in which ecocriticism may benefit from one of the most significant

theories over the last century, a theory that has regularly contributed to our understanding of literature.

In Chapter 3 I attempted to provide some insight into understanding the manner in which Timothy Treadwell and Chris McCandless perceived nature by analysing, firstly, their use of diction, and, secondly, the imagery used to portray these characters in their respective film. However, psychoanalysis may show that, for example, in the case of Timothy Treadwell, his desire to help the Alaskan grizzly bears, and, for the most part, abandon his human relationships, may display what is known as pathological altruism, a defence mechanism characterised by the human subject unconsciously putting himself in danger in the belief that he is doing so for the benefit of anyone but himself (Oakley, Knafo and McGrath 4). Therefore, it could be explained that Treadwell places himself at the centre of the harshness of nature to exercise an unconscious masochistic belief that he must be harmed. Thus, the study of protagonists such as Chris McCandless and Timothy Treadwell provides fertile territory upon which a merging of ecocriticism and psychoanalysis may flourish. Some work has already been done regarding the effect nature has on the human psyche, of which a fine example is Roderick Nash's writing on the effects, both positive and negative, nature has on people at the mercy of psychological pathologies (265-68). There remains, though, much ecocriticism may learn from the discipline of psychoanalysis, not only as it relates to film, as suggested by Ivakhiv (24), but also in the broader scope of ecocriticism.

However, if ecocriticism chooses to embark on such a merging of theory, it may be helpful to be aware of some of the implications of this pursuit. One such implication, given that psychoanalysis is a discipline tasked with the examination of the human psyche, is the risk of seeming to privilege the human subject in favour of the environment that subject inhabits. For ecocriticism to work alongside psychoanalysis, then, perhaps it is necessary to examine the subject *because* of her environment, not despite it. Thus, psychoanalysis may benefit from a merging of psychoanalytical and ecocritical principles. This is because ecocriticism recognises that, not only can the human subject impact her environment, but the environment can impact the human subject as well, even beyond what psychoanalysis would recognise as the subject's developmental stages.

However, while some of my findings in this dissertation have concerned the theoretical, my central concerns were to do with anthropomorphism, or, more specifically, humanity's relationship with nature and the myriad ways in which we are able to perceive and interpret nature. In my analysis of the selected texts by Malick, Herzog, Penn and Krakauer, I attempted to show the relative success of each artist's use of his particular anthropomorphism of nature in relation to their views on how humanity ought to establish more productive interconnections with the planet. I have concluded that Penn, and especially Krakauer, are successful in pointing out the dangers of a lack of awareness in taking metaphor as fact. I have also shown that in Herzog's personification of nature, the director uses metaphors of the earth that do not quite substantiate his cause, whereas Malick's metaphors of the earth do. Thus, these texts make significant contributions to, firstly, the realm of art, especially as it relates to anthropomorphism, and, secondly, the broader social milieu in which this art exists. Certainly, the broader moral aspects of anthropomorphising nature cannot be ignored.

Thomas Claviez speaks of the morality that is apparent in the inevitability of anthropomorphism:

> I venture to say that the distinction between an anthropocentric and an ecocentric ethics of environment is a precarious, if not mistaken one. Even if we account for an environmental ethics in ecocentric terms, we have to explain, legitimize, or simply 'sell' this ethics to other humans. That is, even if we put the interests of nature in its entirety (and not only those of the human species) at the centre of our concerns and try to formulate them, we will by necessity have to do so in human terms – provided we are not content to preaching it in and to the desert. The preservation of the planet and nature will entail a consensus as to the worth of its preservation *among humans*. Consequently, even an ecocentric environmental ethics demands that it be communicated in 'anthropocentric' ways (436 author's italics).

What Claviez proposes here is interesting as it not only speaks of the inevitability of reading nature in anthropomorphic terms, but also weights this act with moral significance. Claviez shows that the end to which nature is perceived in human terms is for the purposes of establishing a relationship between humanity and nature that is ultimately for humanity's survival. It is with this in mind that the artists considered in this disserta-

tion have imbued their anthropomorphised views of nature. Thus, as all of the primary texts will show, the act of anthropomorphising nature is not an indulgence of art for art's sake, but, also, art for the sake of human-nature relationships. It is Malick's portrayal of nature as Mother, however, which I have argued is the most effective anthropomorphisation of the planet. Indeed, part of the reason this is so is because of the broader artistic and global significance of Malick's personification of the earth.

To begin with, the importance of Malick's depiction of nature lies in the fact that it perceives humanity as existing outside of nature, which is a distinctly anti-deep ecological approach to human-nature relationships. For Malick, it is possible to integrate with nature, but nature often reminds us that we are her guests. It is a depiction of nature which quietly warns us that we are lucky to be here, and is an approach, as I have attempted to argue throughout this dissertation, which may prove useful if we are to survive as a species alongside the presence of a woman who is becoming less tolerant of humanity in her home.

Another reason for the broader importance of Malick's metaphor concerns the fact that it views nature as a decidedly complex system, and so allows us to develop an acute awareness that the planet is not one, but many, things. Thus, through Malick's unique, unusual and interesting imagery of nature (a quality which is certainly also true of Herzog), the audience is made aware that part of valuing nature comes from valuing the diversity of species found within it as well. Indeed, subjecting an audience to the same or similar images of nature does not only do a disservice to the diversity found within nature, but also becomes monotonous for the viewer, thereby making it increasingly difficult to elicit the viewer's care, a point explained by Jonathan Bate: "Any environmental campaigner will tell you that it is easy to raise money for the defence of natural phenomena that are regarded as beautiful (a clear lake in the mountains, an old-growth forest) or that have anthropomorphic appeal (a cuddly giant panda, a seemingly smiling and linguistically well-endowed dolphin). It is much harder to gain interest in un-picturesque but ecologically crucial phenomena such as peat-bogs and earthworm communities" (*Song of the Earth* 138). Thus, Malick's attempt to, in a way, update the aesthetics of Romanticism by showing nature in new and interesting ways, and, specifically, by assigning different meanings to Romantic aesthetics, may be what is needed to

cultivate more productive bonds between nature and humans as it motivates for viewing nature in its multi-foliate forms, thereby attempting to sustain an audience's interest in nature.

However, it must be noted that advocating Malick's maternal personification of nature as a *permanent* means by which to view the earth would be hypocritical given that one of my criticisms of Herzog's metaphor for nature was that it lacked self-awareness, and, resultantly, lacked the propensity to change amidst a changing planet. In its inability to change when necessary, it is evident that Herzog's metaphor, regarding its prescriptive claims on human-nature relationships, is not sustainable. Thus, the kind of metaphor for the earth which I have been promoting as the appropriate metaphor by which to live now, may very well not be the kind of metaphor of the earth by which we need to live ten or even one hundred years from now, and certainly not a thousand years from now. This highlights one of the reasons why it is necessary to change one's metaphors, especially in the face of a violently swift global crisis. However, and in relation to this, one's metaphors need to change so as to ensure a lack of complacency in an audience being exposed to these metaphors daily. Metaphors of the planet, then, are not evergreen.

This, then, begs the question of what kinds of metaphor of the planet humanity will create for the future earth. If what some critics suggest is true, that humanity will not desist in the kind of lifestyle it lives in which humans are placed first and the well-being of nature is not given a moment's consideration, then what we can expect is a more violent earth. Indeed, the rise in popular apocalyptic texts such as *The Road* (McCarthy) and *Oryx and Crake* (Atwood) is testament to the fact that some artists believe that we are heading towards an anthropomorphically angry planet who is attempting to eradicate its human inhabitants. If this is the future of the earth-human relationship, then perhaps a future metaphor for the earth would be one in which the earth is viewed as a person with whom humanity should have as little contact as is humanly possible. Thus, western civilisation has come a long way from its belief that the earth was (literally) a bounteous and infinitely generous giver. Interestingly, however, Lovelock does suggest that, in very specific and ideal conditions in which industries and farms are, for the most part, absent, and the entire human population is vegan, the planet may comfortably support

no more than one hundred million people, a number which is about seventy times smaller than the planet's current human population (*Face of Gaia* 56). Only under these very particular circumstances, which now seem fantastical, will humanity, once again, be able to return to thinking of the planet as a gentle and generous mother, in the full knowledge, of course, that it is a metaphor that is, and must be, susceptible to change.

However, avoiding an angry earth may be achieved with the use of appropriate imagery for nature. Coming to respect the strength of the planet, then, means coming to respect the strength of metaphors. Thus, along with the use of science, our survival may rest on the quality of our symbolic reading of the earth. Indeed, given my advocacy of Malick's anthropomorphisation of nature as Mother, I am of the opinion that our living alongside nature depends on our unique ability to use, and live by, metaphors. Metaphors, then, as it is in their very nature to establish resonant interconnections between seemingly incongruous phenomena, allow us to fortify our bonds with nature. There is power in metaphor, and it is a power that may determine our longevity as a species. Metaphors are not only inevitable, as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, but they are also necessary.

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