Nature, Fidelity,

and the Poetry of Robert Hass

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Sarah Jane Barnett

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Abstract

This thesis uses two methods of investigation—a critical essay on Robert Hass and a collection of poetry—to explore the relationship between contemporary poetry and the natural world.

Central to the early collections of American poet Robert Hass is the question of whether language can depict the natural world. Hass uses techniques to try to accurately describe the natural world in some poems, while suggesting in others that language is limited in its ability to represent the natural world. Hass's use and refusal of poetic technique, and the tension it creates, has not previously been explored in the critical literature. To address this critical gap, I use a third-wave ecocritical approach to examine Hass's depiction of "nature" in his collections *Field Guide*, *Praise*, *Human Wishes*, and *Sun Under Wood*. The examination explores Hass's use of scientifically accurate names and descriptions to realistically depict the natural world, which suggest that Hass sees the natural world as knowable, particular, and valuable; the way his poems depict humans as animals by drawing comparisons between human and nonhuman behaviour, but also suggests that humans are separated from other animals by language, rational thought, and self-awareness; and Hass's use of three strategies—that of showing the limitations of language, qualifying language, and the theme of loss—to explore the role of the poem in our relationship to the natural world. The critical essay concludes that, instead of resolving the tension created by both his use and refusal of poetic strategy, Hass uses the tension to enact the complex relationship between poetry and the natural world. Hass makes the poem an object of inquiry where one part of the poem examines another part of the poem, and the outcome of the inquiry is the creation of knowledge, which suggests the poem is a form of epistemological phenomena. Furthermore, the thesis suggests that Hass's depiction of nature becomes a statement about poetry that asserts we should put issues of representation aside in order to take pleasure in the experience of poetry.

The creative component of the thesis—a collection of poetry—has been shaped and informed by the investigation of the critical essay. Inspired by Hass, the creative work uses a series of strategies to explore the relationship between poetry and the natural world. While less

polemic than Hass's work, the poems call attention to the way our depictions of the natural world are constructed.

A central strategy of the creative work is the use of technical language and terminology from fields such as geography, biology, and glaciology. Rather than relying primarily on traditional lyric imagery, the poems use scientific discourses to suggest human emotions and situations. By bringing together different types of language—that is, scientific and lyric—the poems place pressure on each discourse. The unexpected and out-of-context use of technical language to describe human concerns is meant to subvert the discourse and imply that, because it can be used out of context, it is a constructed rather than an objective representation of the world. Through such subversion the poems intend to suggest that other discourses about the natural world are equally constructed.

Other strategies used by the creative work include depictions of the evolved human animal with a focus on sexuality, gender, mortality, and urban habitats. The creative work also draws attention to the way our conceptualisations of nature often reflect human intention and imagination, rather than representing the nonhuman world. For example, a series of poems about birds and animals investigate the way we imagine and use animals as a mirror for human concerns. Other poems depict our perceived separation from the natural world, and the way we conceive of nature as a place of solace.

The strategies are used both explicitly and implicitly in the poems, as in the critical essay. They call attention to the way poetic depictions of the natural world reflect human culture and intention, rather than the physical world.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter One: Introduction

"Our inability to know [nature] perfectly does not preclude

us from trying to understand it better."

Christopher Hitt

Since the environmental crisis[1] became part of the consciousness of Western society in the

1960s and 1970s, a new nature writing has developed that uses evolutionary, ecological, and

biological concepts in order to more precisely represent the natural world (Payne 137–8;

Hamilton). In line with evolutionary biology, many writers have also started to portray both

human and nonhuman animals as part of nature, which contrasts with previous portrayals that

represented humans as separate from nature. Of the shift, poet and critic Joan Retallack states:

"A radical reconceptualizing of 'nature poetry' is currently taking place, so radical … it's hardly

recognizable as the genre formerly known as" (par. 31). Still, approaches are anything but

uniform, and "nature writing" is not without controversy. One particular controversy exists

between ecocritics who focus their critical examinations on the realism of a text—that is, how a

text accurately depicts the natural world—and the poststructuralist critics who attack their

approach as a naïve rejection of literary theory. For example, critics such as Dana Phillips

question whether language, no matter how carefully it is used, can ever faithfully describe the

world (577). By contrast, some ecocritics concerned with environmental advocacy worry that by

focusing on the theoretical issue of whether language can represent the world, critics forget

about larger environmental issues (Carroll *Literary* 15–16). For instance, ecocritic Laurence

Coupe argues against the "self-serving inference that nature is nothing more than a linguistic

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[1] While the exact scope of the "environmental crisis" is hotly debated (including whether or not the environment is in crisis), the global social movement termed the "environmental crisis" started to develop in the 1960s and 1970s with publication of books such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) (Garrard 1) and *Limits to Growth* (1972) by Donella Meadows et al. (Foss 23–24). The term refers to the danger of irreparable degradation of the world's ecosystems and habitats through global pollution and extinction, caused by unsustainable human activity (Foss 16). For this thesis the author assumes that the environmental crisis is a legitimate concern.

construct" (3), as does ecocritic Kip Robisch who asserts that current literary theory[2] "promotes the fiction of ecosystems being only humanly imagined and constructed—and so promotes those systems' exploitation" (704).

One writer whose work manifests the tensions between realism and literary theory is American poet Robert Hass (Scigaj 4). This introductory chapter will expand on the occasion for studying the techniques and strategies Hass uses to depict "nature" in his poetry and the reasons for using the field of ecocriticism to examine Hass's work. The chapter will also give a brief summary of the concept of nature in literature, a history of the field of ecocriticism, and finally the objectives and the approach taken by the critical portion of this thesis.

Robert Hass

Hass's poetry is part of what has been termed "new nature poetry" (Love *Practical Ecocriticism* 572), that is, poetry that encourages readers to re-examine their relationship with the nonhuman parts of nature. Hass also examines the relationship between language and nature, and accurately describing the natural world through poetry was a key goal for Hass in his early collections. Of his first collection *Field Guide* (1973),[3] he said: "One of the tasks I had set for myself in those numbing years was to get hold of the immediate world around me" (*Field Guide* Preface x). Hass uses techniques such as specifically naming and accurately describing the flora, fauna, and ecosystems of the Californian landscape—his immediate environment—to encourage

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[2] Throughout the thesis the use of the term "contemporary literary theory" primarily refers to poststructuralism. While providing a full account of poststructuralism is outside the scope of this thesis, this footnote gives a brief and generalised summary in order to contextual the use of the term throughout the thesis. The origin of poststructuralism can be attributed to French philosopher Jacques Derrida's famous lecture, *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, at John Hopkins University in 1966. Poststructuralism expands upon structuralism's use of signs, arguing that, because signs arise from "a division or 'articulation' of signs," meaning can only be found in "the difference between two signifiers" (Eagleton 110). Defining a sign through difference prevents one from seeing meaning as arising exclusively from the relationship between sign and referent—the idea on which realism is based. Instead, a sign's meaning is the result of an endless series of differences (Eagleton 110). In other words, meaning is determined through a sign's differential relationship to all other signs. The idea that the meaning of a sign is unstable calls into question the use of ecocritical approaches based in realism or representationalism; that is, such approaches are in conflict with current literary theory.

[3] *Field Guide* was written at the height of opposition to US involvement in the Vietnam War, which is one reading of why Hass calls that time "those numbing years" (Preface x).

readers to pay attention to the particulars of the natural world.

While Hass desires to "get hold of" or connect himself with the particulars of the natural world through poetic techniques, his poems also simultaneously refuse those poetic techniques by recognising the distance that exists between words and the world to which they refer. Still, if Hass acknowledges that the link between language and object is unreliable, he asserts that in particular circumstances poets can focus their attention so that the language they use embodies the world, rather than diminishing it to broad categories or loose and inaccurate description: "I felt only too keenly that the relation of names and things is always precarious, but also that, in some circumstances, certain kinds of fidelity of attention could be a stay against the violence of language itself" (*Field Guide* Preface x). Central to Hass's work is the question of whether this "fidelity of attention" is enough to accurately depict the natural world.

The goal of this thesis is to examine Hass's poetry for the techniques and strategies he uses to depict nature. Hass is the focus of this thesis for three reasons. First, in recent years Hass has moved away from issues of nature, language, and representation in his poetry. This provides the opportunity to examine his early collections (*Field Guide*, *Praise*, *Human Wishes*, and *Sun Under Wood*) as a discrete body of work concerned with nature, representation, and language.

Second, a review of the literature suggests that the various tensions that arise in Hass's treatment of nature have been dealt with on only an occasional, rather than a substantive basis. That is, there is a gap in the critical literature on his approach to nature. Since *Field Guide* won the Yale Younger Poets Award in 1972, Hass's poetry has received critical attention in peer reviewed journals, magazines, and books. Literary critics have looked at a variety of themes in Hass's work, such as politics and war (Gilbert, Olsen), reconciliation between opposites (Gilbert), Hass's quarrel with literary theory (Eismann), and Hass's appreciation of the natural world (Glück). Hass is often discussed alongside poets such as Mark Strand (Chiasson), Louise Glück and Robert Pinsky (Hoagland), and, when discussing the distinctive voice of American West Coast poetry, Gary Snyder and Peter Dale (Williamson). Much that is written about Hass

tends toward praise, although Dan Chiasson, Robert Miklitsch, and Alan Shapiro have argued that Hass's poetry fails to achieve its goals.[4]

Interviews with Hass and reviews of his books have been published in a variety of magazines, such as *Smartish Pace*, *Forbes Magazine*, *Nation*, and *PN Review*. Some discuss Hass being awarded the Pulitzer Prize (Guthman), address Hass's teaching activities (Hamilton), or his environmental activism (Miller, Shillinger). In critical terms, the interviews provide information on what Hass intends his poetry to achieve, and they also provide background on his social and personal influences: America at the end of the Vietnam war, the Californian landscape, Buddhism, and his marriage break up. The interviews also describe the theoretical environment in which Hass's work developed, for example under the teachings of Yvor Winters at Stanford, and later his relationship with poet Czesław Miłosz.

Although some of the arguments I forward in this thesis have been explored by other critics, a close textual reading of the techniques and strategies Hass uses to depict "nature" in his poetry has not, as far as I have been able to determine, been done before. For example, critic Charles Altieri, who has written about Hass's poetry for twenty years, discusses Hass's use of particulars and names when describing the world ("From Experience" 211, 213), and the limitations Hass finds when using names to represent the physical world ("From Experience" 212–3). As I do in this thesis, Altieri discusses Hass's poem "Meditation at Lagunitas," but he focuses on memory in relation to the "speech act" ("Sensibility" 466), rather than on what I believe are the key themes of the poem: language, representation, and nature. Critic Vernon Shetley explores the way Hass's poems "question the place and viability of lyric subjectivity" (183), but he, too, does not explore issues of language, representation, and the natural world. Critic Robert Archambeau examines Hass's poetry in terms of the influence of Yvor Winters, and his "reoccurring themes and oppositions … the most important of these are a concern with

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[4] Shapiro especially believes that Hass's poems do not achieve their goal of representing the world, because of Hass's focus on the "marginal and momentary" which creates frustration for a reader (120). Robert Miklitsch states "there is too much description for description's sake … he is content to mimic or mirror the natural world."

the distinction between realist and nominalist views of language as well as a concern with the competing claims of the physical world and the individual intelligence" (100). Archambeau argues that Hass's poetry avoids resolution as a way to question "whether statement and world can coincide" (123), but he does not discuss this explicitly in terms of Hass's depiction of nature. In sum, while these critics have written informed critiques of Hass's poetry, none have gone far enough, in my view, in examining the techniques and strategies Hass uses to depict "nature," or the tension that arises between Hass's poetic techniques and his own question of whether this "fidelity of attention" is enough to accurately depict the natural world.

In addition, while critics have addressed some of the qualities of Hass's work that are examined by this thesis, most limit their analyses to individual poems or to one or two of Hass's collections. To my knowledge, no critic has performed a textual analysis of Hass's depiction of "nature" in his four early collections (1972–1996), which form a discrete body of work concerned with nature, representation, and language.[5] The most comprehensive analysis of Hass's work can be found in Thomas Wesley Davis's doctoral thesis *The New Thinking about Loss: Language, History and Landscape in Poetry after Modernism* (2002). Davis's thesis explores "the relationship between the subjectivity of language and individual experience" in four poets who "developed their craft in the wake of the Modernist movement" (iii). Davis argues that, as poets have begun to focus on the distance between words and the world, "unexpressed aspects of personal, social, and political life" (iii) are being produced. In his chapter on Hass, Davis argues that Hass wants "an active engagement with the history that is always shaping language" (152), and calls Hass's evasion and lack of resolution a form of

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[5] Other doctoral dissertations examine Hass's collections as a body of work, but none focus on Hass's depiction of "nature." For example, Michael Trammell examines the theme of "emptiness" in Hass's first three collections, arguing that the progression from discovery, to elegy, to simplification creates a "style of writing that continuously upends the reader's expectations" (Abstract iii). In her doctoral thesis, Allison E. Hammond examines Hass's first four collections of poetry for their "relationship to the Romantic literary tradition" (Abstract iii). Hass's work has also been the subject of individual chapters in doctoral and masters theses. For example, Todd R. Hall examines the way Hass "merges the discourses of theory and poetry to create a poem that hangs suspended between a confidence and an anxiety about language" (Abstract i); and Joshua R. Butts examines the role of observation in Hass's work. While some of these works touch on themes explored by this thesis, their investigations are limited to a single chapter and do not go far enough, in my view, in examining Hass's depiction of "nature."

poetic "disorder" (163). While Davis touches on some of the arguments of this thesis, he concludes that Hass views language as a reservoir for history, which is a narrower reading of Hass's use of language than I will provide here.

Third, understanding the techniques and strategies Hass uses to depict nature in his poetry will inform the creative component of this thesis. Hass is one of the finest contemporary American poets (Chiasson 1; Gardener, Hoey 502), being appointed Poet Laureate of the United States (1995–1997), winning the National Book Award (2007), and jointly winning the Pulitzer Prize (2008) for his collection *Time and Materials: Poems 1997–2005* (2007). His poetry is often associated with the natural world, in particular the California landscape (Hoagland 39), and has widely influenced both American and international nature writing. A deeper understanding of Hass's techniques and strategies will provide a starting point for exploring issues of language, nature, and representation in the creative component of this thesis, which is why this critical essay has an explicit craft focus.

This thesis, then, will investigate the following question: What poetic techniques, strategies, and arguments does Hass use to depict nature in his poetry, and what tensions does Hass discover between his depictions and the physical world?

In order to contextualise an ecocritical reading of Hass's poetry, the remainder of the introductory chapter will provide a brief background on the concept of nature in literature and literary criticism. The introduction will also review the history and approaches of ecocriticism—the lens through which I will examine Hass's poetry—including where the thesis places itself within the movement.

Writing Nature: The Concept of Nature in Literature

In contemporary literature,[6] the term nature writing, or "nature-oriented literature" (Murphy qtd. Barnhill 277), while often debated, typically refers to poetry, fiction, and non-fiction about pastoral landscapes, the wilderness (Cooperman 183), native forests, and the nonhuman animals

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[6] Twentieth and twenty-first century literature

that live in the "environments at furthest remove from human habitation" (Bennett "Different Shades of Green" 208). In America, nature writing is associated with writers such as George Perkins Marsh, John Burroughs, Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, and John Muir (Payne), as well as contemporary poets such as Mary Oliver and Jorie Graham (Cooperman). In New Zealand, nature writers include Samuel Butler, James K. Baxter, Mary Ursula Bethell, Brian Turner, Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, and Hone Tuwhare (Temple).

"Nature writing" can also describe personal responses to the natural world, such as Thoreau's journal (Slovic "Seeking Awareness" 44), field guides, professional articles, and natural history essays (Lyon qtd. Barnhill 275), or a combination of multiple categories (Barnhill 278), such as Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* which uses science writing and storytelling to document the effect of pesticides on the environment (Payne 137).[7] In these texts, as well as in literary criticism and everyday usage (Payne 2), the "nature" of "nature writing" typically indicates animals and habitats that are other than human. For example, in *Dramas of Solitude: Narratives of Retreat in American Nature Writing* (1998), Randall Roorda gives readings of Thoreau's "Ktaadn," *The Desert* by John Charles van Dyke, and writing by Wendell Berry that conceptualise nature as a place of solitude and retreat, and nonhuman. Roorda describes the idea of retreat in nature writing as a "movement from human society toward a state of solitude in nature" (Intro xiii), with solitude, and an implied absence of humanity, being a defining aspect of nature in literature. While Roorda asserts that he recognises the complexity of the term "nature", he also argues that the "aspect of its meaning upon which the label 'nature writing' depends is certainly its status as counterpart to 'culture'" (Intro xiv), and he explicitly states that "nature writing … is not human" (1). For Roorda, both nature and nature writing exclude humans and human habitats.

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[7] There are two well-known attempts to develop a definition of nature writing, specifically Thomas J. Lyon's "A Taxonomy of Nature Writing," and David Landis Barnhill's more recent "A New Approach to Nature Writing," which was a response to, and expansion of, Lyon's work. Barnhill proposes a "broader, more inclusive idea of nature writing" (Barnhill 275) where different methods of writing about nature are called "*elements*" (for example "Philosophy of language" and "Philosophy of nature" are each elements), and identified separately in a single text (Barnhill 279–281).

Scott Slovic offers a more complex definition of nature writing, but one that still excludes humans. Slovic asserts that the writing of Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) has influenced all subsequent literature about nature. Slovic specifically refers to Thoreau's idea of a conflicting "inner consciousness and external nature" where nature can be closely observed, and through observation humans can identify nature within themselves. But he says that, in essence, Thoreau views "nature as distinct from man," which Slovic echoes by calling nature "an external presence … the separate realm" ("Seeking Awareness" 4, 6). Thoreau's "nature writing" and Slovic's definition evoke the image of writers venturing into the wilderness to connect with nature. Critiquing just this sort of notion of the typical nature writer, Jason Cowley, the editor of *GRANTA*'s edition of new nature writing, said, "I would picture a certain kind of man, and it would always be a man: bearded, badly dressed, ascetic, misanthropic. He would often be alone on some blasted moor, with a notebook in one hand and binoculars in the other" (1); in other words, humans are the observer and cataloguer of nature.

In twentieth century literature in English, then, the idea of nature as distinct from human is conceptualised in several ways. It has been seen as a place of solitude or retreat from humanity (Roorda; Light 139), as an external "other" to be observed (Slovic "Seeking Awareness" 4), as a way to "evoke and to symbolize states of the human psyche" (Carson "I have heard" 485); as a pristine place for communion with the spiritual (Cronon qtd. in White 19; Barnhill; Light 138), as a place of mystery (Catton qtd. Slovic "Seeking Awareness" 8), or as the object of a new, environmentally focused values system (Foss 42).

Lynn White Jr., in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, suggests that Western society's tendency to see humans as something apart from nature is due to Judeo-Christian thought, and that the biblical assertion that God created the earth, animals, birds, and fish for man's benefit continues to influence an anthropocentric view of nature. White explains that our beliefs

are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those

who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians. Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos

rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are *not*, in our hearts, part of the

natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our

slightest whim. (12)

To lay our modern concept of nature at the feet of Christianity oversimplifies the issue. In an

essay that examines characterisations of nature since the 17th century, Ted Benton describes the

many forces that reshaped "nature" in Western thought from its being seen as a God-given

resource for man, to an object of scientific investigation, and a romanticised ideal that inspires

awe.

Whatever the differences in these conceptualisations of nature, though, they would

agree that all beings exist in a hierarchy "with humans at the apex" (Benton 41). It was Charles

Darwin's work on the Galapagos Islands (and his eventual theory of evolution) that first

illustrated a concept of nature where "there was no *single* economy of nature, but, rather, a

multitude of locally accidental economies" (Benton 42). Darwin's theory of evolution was thus

the first holistic Western concept of nature that proposed "humans are just one (possibly

transitory) outcome of all this, among all the rest, with no special place, or superior standing"

(Benton 44). Critic Frederick Turner, in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary*

Ecology, eloquently describes this new way of conceiving humans as part of nature, through the

lens of evolutionary biology:

Our bodies and brains are a result of evolution, which is a natural process so

paradigmatic that it could almost be said to be synonymous with nature itself.

Moreover, we are by nature social, having been naturally selected, through millions of

years of overlapping genetic and cultural evolution, to live in a cooperative cultural

mix. The most powerful selective pressure on our genes since our line broke away from

those of the other primates has prompted us toward cities; thus we are by nature

hairless, brainy, infantile, gregarious, oversexed, long-lived, artistic, talkative, and

religious. (42–43)

Although evolutionary theory, widely accepted, places humanity within a broader conception of nature, Western society (and contemporary literary theory), continues to see nature as nonhuman, while living in an urban and industrialised society that relies on nonhuman resources (Benton; Hitt 604). The outcome has been, arguably, the environmental crisis. As Cowley argues, "it is the tradition of the false notion of separation that has caused us so many problems and led to so much environmental degradation" (12).

The threat of environmental degradation has spurred writers to challenge, either implicitly or explicitly, the "false notion of separation" (Cowley 12) and the term "nature writing." One way poets have done so is to engage with the life sciences such as ecology, geography, and evolutionary biology in order to describe the natural world. For example, poet Joan Retallack suggests an ecological approach to nature writing when she argues that poetry can

> operate under the rubric 'ecopoetics' with the aim of developing a body of work that reinvestigates our species' relation to other inhabitants of the fragile and finite territory our species named, claimed, exploited, sentimentalized, and aggrandized as 'our world' … That is, they (trees, birds, other animals, grasses, rivers …) experience but cannot imagine us. We imagine but too often do not really experience them. (par. 30)

In the first paragraph of her article, poet and critic Linda Russo also suggests that through "observing and considering" our depictions of the natural world in poetry we can better understand the way language influences our relationship with "natural phenomena." Critic Daniel G. Payne similarly suggests that what we call nature writing needs to change because "we are only beginning to realize that humankind and nature are inextricably linked … 'nature,' in all its forms, is the theme for our age and one that should not be dismissed simply as the province of 'nature writers'" (6).

Ecocriticism and Literature

As well as spurring changes in the way poets and other writers engage with the notion of nature,

the environmental crisis catalysed the emergence of ecocriticism, a discipline that studies

depictions of the environment and nature in literature and the role those depictions play within a

text. The term ecocriticism was first used in 1978 by William Rueckert in his paper "Literature

and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (Weidner 194), but the seeds of the movement

grew during the 1960s and 1970s with writers such as Aldous Huxley and Rachel Carson (Love

"Ecocriticism and Science" 563), with the first wave beginning around 1980 (Slovic "The Third

Wave" 4).[8] Not until the mid-1990s, and the publication of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold

Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), did the field start to

gain strength and acceptance in the eyes of other academics (Easterlin 1; Bennett "Different

Shades" 7). It was only in 1998 that Cheryll Glotfelty, after six years of campaigning, gained

approval for sessions about environmental literary criticism at the annual Modern Language

Association conference in North America (Coupe 157).[9]

    Ecocriticism has been slow to receive acceptance and professional legitimacy from some

literary critics and publishers, with the first book-length introductions to ecocriticism[10] only

published in the mid-2000s (Heise "Greening English" 289). Even with the development of a

professional association, The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment

(ASLE), and peer-reviewed journals, some critics question whether the field will significantly

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[8] As Scott Slovic points out, the practice of "exploring themes of nature in literature, and even sometimes adopting sophisticated ecological ideas in examining literary texts, started long before Rueckert coined the term ecocriticism. David Mazel charted some of this history in the 2001 volume, *A Century of Early Ecocriticism*, focusing on English and American publications between 1864 and 1964" ("Third Wave" 5), but what we today call the field of ecocriticism started in the 1980s.

[9] It must be acknowledged that the thesis primarily focuses on the work of ecocritics and writers based in the United States. In part, this is because Hass is an American poet, but it is also due to the space constraints of the critical essay and my own focus on the United States as a subject in my poetry. This means that—when not central to my research—some influential ecocritics have remained unmentioned. I have also not referred to the many branches of ASLE that exist in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Japan, India, Korea, Taiwan, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and Europe.

[10] See Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004) and Lawrence Buell's *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005).

influence literary criticism over the long term (Weidner 190). Some academic critics have stated that "ecocriticism [is] more an amateur enthusiasm than a legitimate new 'field'" (Buell "The Future" 6). Buell states that the field's challenges are fourfold: "organisational," "professional legitimation," "defined distinctive models of inquiry," and "significance beyond the academy" (Buell qtd. in Weidner 195–96). It is the third challenge, a lack of "defined distinct models of inquiry," or the need for a sound ecocritical approach when reading a text (Cohen 29), that has been cited as the most pressing issue (Easterlin 2; Estok 152; Weidner 195-6) for ecocritics.

The Different Waves of Ecocriticism

Broadly speaking, ecocriticism investigates the textual depictions of nature in literature. This includes the shifting meanings of "nature," "environment," and "wilderness," and the role of science in nature writing. Ecocriticism also addresses the "cultural connections between the environment, culture, and art" (Weidner 190), as well as connections between the environment and such issues as ethnicity, gender, religion, and race.

While, to some extent, ecocritical practice means, as Buell states, "what its self-identified and imputed practitioners say it does" ("The Ecocritical Insurgency" 702), broadly speaking, a review of the literature suggests that ecocritical methodologies can be split into first-wave ecocriticism, second-wave ecocriticism, and a nascent third-wave ecocriticism. It must be noted that the accepted division of ecocriticism into critical "waves" simplifies a field where, as Heise puts it, critics "diverge widely in their views" ("Hitchhiker's Guide" 506) or as Slovic states, "there is no single, dominant worldview guiding ecocritical practice—no single strategy at work from example to example of ecocritical writing or teaching" (Arnold et al. 1102). Ecocritics instead are brought together by a common political project or point of view, rather than a shared theoretical methodology or approach (Heise "Hitchhiker's Guide" 506), which results in a diverse field of enquiry.

The idea of "waves" is itself problematic as the term suggests a seamless transition from one school of thought to the other, which is more agreement than the field has currently

attained. Many ecocritics still publish scholarly articles using a first-wave approach (Slovic

"The Third Wave" 5), and some second-wave ecocritics developed their ideas in the first years

of ecocriticism. For example, in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in

Literary Ecology*, which was published in 1996, Cheryll Glotfelty includes human activities as

part of the environment (Intro xxiii), which is a second-wave trend. Still, Buell's division of the

field into waves has been broadly adopted by other ecocritics. For example, in his 2009 article

"Does Ecocriticism Really Matter? Exploring the Relevance of Green Cultural Studies,"

Weidner cited Buell's use of the term "waves" when discussing the challenges facing

ecocriticism (195), as did Greta Gaard in her 2010 article on ecofeminism. Heise also refers to

the idea of a second wave of publications when describing the way ecocriticism broadened its

themes ("Hitchhiker's Guide" 513), and Slovic refers to ecocriticism using "waves" (4) in his

recent article, "The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections on the Current

Phase of the Discipline" (2009).[11] Thus, while the term "waves" is not universally used among

ecocritics, it is widely accepted, and the field's division into waves is a conventional

characterisation that is both broadly accurate and useful as a basis for describing a substantive

shift in focus.

First-Wave Ecocriticism

The first wave of ecocriticism developed in the 1970s and 1980s (Bennett "Different Shades"

207), and began to be recognised as coherent field in the 1990s. First-wave ecocritics analysed

literature that described a traditional conceptualisation of nature, wilderness, and the nonhuman

environment for the extent to which texts supported the values of the green movement

(Armbruster, Wallace). For some scholars the field provided a way to invigorate traditional

nature writing as a serious literary genre. Other scholars used ecocriticism as a tool to address

environmental concerns, which they saw as the responsibility of "*all* the human sciences" (Buell

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[11] Sabine Wilke, on the other hand, proposes the term "camps," where one camp "explores the linkages
between natural and cultural processes" and can be roughly aligned with the first-wave ecocriticism, and
the other camp "insist on the historical and cultural construction of nature," and roughly belong to third
wave ecocriticism (91). While Wilke argues for the idea of camps, the term suggests a greater amount of
organisation and definition than ecocriticism currently attains.

"Ecocritical Insurgency" 699). For example, Laurence Coupe asserts that ecocriticism can use "nature as a 'critical' concept" (4) to challenge the practice of industrialisation which is underpinned by the idea that production should continue at any cost to natural resources. In this sense, many first-wave ecocritics cast "nature" as the "victim of modernization but also as its opposite and alternative" (Heise "Hitchhiker's Guide" 508). In his book *Ecocriticism* (2004), Greg Garrard explains that "ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a 'green' moral and political agenda" (3). Hence, first-wave ecocritics tended to promote texts that raised moral questions about human interactions with nature, while encouraging audiences to live in a way that provided solutions to environmental problems. In 2007, ecocritic Bonnie Foote explained:

> The majority of ecocritics to date have taken an insistently activist scholarly approach.
> In so doing these critics focus on the social and, ultimately, environmental impacts of
> narrative and of criticism itself. (739)

Lawrence Buell is the ecocritic most associated with a first-wave approach. In *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1996), Buell argues that ecocritics should examine the way in which texts represent the world, rather than focusing on how the text is constructed or can be interpreted. In Buell's early writing, the world of a text has a direct relationship with the world it represents (Phillips 585), and his approach aspires toward conservation of the environment and broad environmental advocacy (Weidner 191). A focus on mimesis or a realistic representation of nature in a text is primarily associated with the first wave of ecocritics who wanted to re-establish the "realistic … priorities" of literature (Phillips 585). While the exact application of a realistic approach varies from critic to critic, these ecocritics examine literature for traditional depictions of nature—that is, nature that excludes humans—to determine how successfully a writer represents the natural world in a text (Phillips 586). The aim of such an examination is to bring the reader's attention to environmental issues.

For example, in 2006, Harvard conservation biologist Glenn Adelson and ecocritic John Elder—a proponent of field teaching[12]—came together to give a realistic ecocritical reading of the poem "Spring Pools" by Robert Frost. The critics combined the fields of ecocriticism and ecology to read Frost's poem for how it accurately represented the ecosystem of a particular landscape, stating that one of "the attractions of ecocriticism … is a desire to register aspects of literary achievement that are specifically linked to particular landscapes" (1). While both academics acknowledge there is "nothing definitive about [their] approach," they believe their close reading of the poem highlights the way Frost accurately represents the flora and fauna of a particular landscape (14) and changes in the water table (9). Using this approach, Adelson and Elder discuss the way Frost's natural history activities informed his poems and enabled him to carefully record the nonhuman world (Bailey qtd. Adelson and Elder 5). Like many first-wave ecocritics, Adelson and Elder chose to examine Frost because he is a "poetic naturalist" (2), and his work displays "ecological references" (3). By using realism[13] as an approach, the ecocritics could provide a reading of Frost's poem that meets their environmental objective, which is to draw attention to nature beyond the text.

Adelson and Elder's focus on how well Frost's poem realistically depicts the natural world excludes ideas from poststructuralist literary criticism. For example, they directly ask their readers "to linger over specific texts and natural phenomena rather than to speculate too quickly on the language and philosophy of ecology or on implications for literary theory" (15). It is a request to pay attention to the physical world that the poem attempts to represent, rather

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[12] For example, in his essay "The Poetry of Experience," Elder describes teaching Robert Frost's poem, "Mowing," by taking his students to a hayfield and showing them how to cut grass with a scythe. He states: "Though I had long loved this poem, the experience of mowing the hayfield … helped me enter into it and appreciate it in a new way" ("The Poetry" 650). For Elder, sharing the experience described in the poem protects his students against reducing the "physicality of the landscape or the labor of farmers to nothing more than intellectual argument or abstract music" ("The Poetry" 654). In other words, Elder asks his students to see the poem as representative of the world by acting out the poem in the world.

[13] For clarity, this thesis uses realism or representationalism to refer to the literary approach underpinned by the idea of reference, or that words refer to an objective reality, and that meaning arises exclusively from the relationship between word and referent. The term 'realistic' is used by the thesis to describe the focus of a first-wave approach on the way ecocritics examine texts for how accurately—how realistically—those texts depict the natural world.

than to the complex relationship between language and the world. Through such attention, Adelson and Elder want to encourage environmental consciousness, in this instance an understanding of the invisibility but "agency of the water table" (8)—that is, the role the water table plays in the ecosystem. Elder has argued that an emphasis on realism will protect ecocriticism from issues that he believes plague contemporary literary fields, specifically, "jargon, self-referentiality, and a narrow professionalism that are the opposite of nature writing's original, liberating impulse" ("The Poetry" 650). Elder does not dispute that literary "projections onto nature are invariably skewed" or that our readings of nature are "abstracted" and "impoverished" ("The Poetry" 658), but for Elder, linking a poem to the nonhuman world can convince readers of the importance of the nonhuman world.

To give another example of a first-wave reading, Barbara Harrell Carson similarly applies a realistic approach to the depictions of nature in William Williams's colonial novel *The Journal of Penrose, Seaman*.[14] Carson examines the way Williams creates a realistic narrative by accurately describing the flora and fauna of the Caribbean. Williams, like Frost, was familiar with the flora and fauna from his own natural history activities. For example, in his novel Williams names beetles, wasps, and flies, with over one hundred specific descriptions in total (480–1), as well as descriptions of sea crabs (483). For Carson, these realistic descriptions place "a clear emphasis on the writer's experience" (Lyons qtd. Carson 483), and she notes how the realistic style of Williams's writing has meant that the text is often mistaken for a "true story of [his] personal experiences" (480). Carson's approach also highlights the environmental themes in the novel by showing how Penrose's adopted Caribbean community is "increasingly threatened by civilization"—mariners, traders, and the Spanish (479). After a series of fires, the character comes to ruminate on the idea that humans are a destructive force within an ecosystem. Although not as explicit as Elder and Adelson in her environmental agenda,

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[14] While "bowdlerized" versions were published, the novel *Mr. Penrose: The Journal of Penrose* was not published until 1969 when the original manuscript was discovered (Carson 478–9) and edited by David Howard Dickason.

Carson's reading asks us to consider the ethics of our attitude to nature (494), and her examination assumes an unproblematic relationship between the text and the landscape it represents.

The focus on environmental issues over literary theory that is common among first-wave ecocritics is neatly captured by Kip Robisch's essay "The Woodshed: A Response to 'Ecocriticism and Ecophobia." Like Elder and Adelson, Robisch is concerned that poststructuralist literary theory inevitably suggests that ecosystems are human constructions. Robisch speaks out against the danger of dwelling on the poststructuralist idea that "nature" is not a physical reality but a social construction,[15] and calls the "no nature position" "wrong-headed" (698). Robisch states that ecocritics need to be accountable for the impact of their work on the local environment by positively influencing their community's awareness of nature. For Robisch, then, literary critics who view literature through the lens of poststructuralism will not be concerned with the significant difference between a functioning ecosystem and a polluted ecosystem. This, he argues, will lead to ambivalence towards exploitation of nonhuman resources (Robisch 704; Buell "Ecocritical Insurgency" 705). In sum, first-wave ecocritics like Robisch either see realistic texts as having an unproblematic representational relationship with the physical world, or are willing to set aside concerns about that relationship—Elder's request to "to linger over specific texts and natural phenomena" rather than engaging with theory—in the belief that such an approach can promote environmental conservation.

While this is hardly an exhaustive survey, these examples suffice to illustrate the major themes of first-wave ecocriticism: a focus on traditional nature writing (or texts that realistically depict nonhuman creatures and habitats), an explicit refusal to engage with poststructuralist notions of language, and an analysis performed with explicit environmental or 'green' objectives.

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[15] Which Carroll refers to as "Textualism" or "the belief that language or culture constructs the world according to its own internal principles … [that] signs determine the shape of reality" ("Organism" 28).

Second-Wave Ecocriticism

As ecocriticism progressed, critics from both within and outside the field questioned the scope of a first-wave approach. For example, Nancy Easterlin (2004) criticised the use of traditional definitions of nature and environment, arguing, "Although ecocritics no longer generally use these words in a tacit and unreflective manner, they typically resort to standard dichotomies that sever humans from nature" (6). Instead, Easterlin argues, ecocritics should engage with the life sciences, in particular ecology and evolutionary biology, in order to provide "a theoretical basis" (5) for the examination of texts. Coupe suggested, "we must avoid reducing complex linguistic performance to the level of merely pointing at things" (2). As a first-wave approach is underpinned by environmental goals, critics read a text for how it values the nonhuman landscape. As Dixon suggests, "classic American nature-writing … privilege[s] the traditional Thoreauvian nature walk—attentive, respectful, contemplative" (1093). If the critical lens also privileges such a reading, then it risks becoming merely a vehicle for environmental rhetoric, which can result in a narrow and selective reading.

From the late 1990s some ecocritics responded to such criticisms by broadening the scope of the field's enquiry. For example, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment sponsored the *Forum on Literatures of the Environment* in 1999. During the forum letters were "submitted in response to a call for comments on the growing importance and expanding scope of the fields of environmental literature and ecological literary criticism" (Arnold et al. 1089). Ecocritics such as Arnold, Cohen, and Dixon argued for a range of changes, from including interdisciplinary work within the humanities as a way to develop new perspectives (Arnold et al.1089–90) to a need for greater internal critique (Arnold et al.1094–5).

Ecocritics have also raised the specific concern that humans and human habitats have been excluded from first-wave ecocriticism's definition of nature. In *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), Buell admits that his own initial focus on traditional concepts of nature was too restrictive and human-centric for a mature literary criticism (22) and instead

proposes the term "environmental criticism" to include both "natural" and "built" environments

(12). Likewise, in the introduction to their collection of essays, *The Nature of Cities:*

Ecocriticism and Urban Environments (1999), Michael Bennett and David W. Teague state:

"One goal of this volume is to point to the self-limited conceptualizations of nature, culture, and

environment built into many ecocritical projects by their exclusion of urban places" (4). Other

ecocritics, too, began to examine texts about cities as nature writing, for example Kathleen R.

Wallace's examination of the work of feminist poet Audre Lorde who, to understand the

complexity of her urban environment, names the objects within the environment. Wallace

argues that the act of naming is "one of the key characteristics of the texts usually considered

part of the nature writing tradition" (72) and suggests that Lorde's urban poetry is a form of

nature writing in that sense.

The second wave of ecocriticism did not entirely replace first-wave ecocritical practice.

For example, Barbara Harrell Carson's article "'I have heard […] things Grow': Uses of Nature

in William Williams's Colonial Novel" that appeared in 2010 *ISLE*—the journal of The

Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE)—is an example of a first-

wave scholarly article where the text's realism is accentuated, and humans and nonhumans are

likened but considered separate. Still, broadly speaking, many ecocritics began to use a concept

of nature that encompassed both humans and nonhumans, and this new way of defining nature

is an essential attribute of a second-wave approach. That is, for second-wave ecocritics,

"nature" includes not just animal and plant life, but cities and urban living. This

reconceptualisation has shifted ecocriticism's focus from promoting the "green" effectiveness of

a text (Bennett "Different Shades" 208) to examining the many conceptualisations of the

human–nonhuman relationship (Fromm), and how they are changing. Ecocritic Michael Bennett

explains the difference between the two waves:

> The first wave of ecocriticism embraced those environments at furtherest remove from
>
> human habitation—the pastoral and the wild—as represented by a narrowly defined genre

of nature writing. In contrast, the new wave of ecocriticism is interested in the

interconnections between urban and non-urban space, humans and nonhumans, traditional

and experimental genres, as well as the impact of race, class, gender, and sexuality on

how we use and abuse nature. ("Different Shades" 208)

Second-wave ecocritics redefine nature to mean both human and nonhuman animals as well as

urban habitats (Easterlin 3), and through this redefinition move away from an anthropocentric

view of the world (Weidner 190). They also examine texts without explicit or primary

environmental themes for the different ways that they depict nature and without necessarily

imposing 'green' agendas. While some second-wave ecocritics continue to use criticism to

show, as Bennett states, "how we use and abuse nature," others focus on a broader examination

of how "nature" and the human–nonhuman relationship (Fromm) is conceptualised in a text.[16]

　　　As with a first-wave approach, second-wave approaches vary from critic to critic. For

example, second-wave ecocritic Love uses theories from evolutionary biology to underpin his

examination of human nature in a text. Other second-wave ecocritics, such as Carroll and

Louise Westling, who also use the field of evolutionary biology, go further than Love and

examine the text as a product of evolution. For example, Westling uses Merleau-Ponty's

linguistic theory to suggest that language is "an organic and physical part of the natural world"

(174). However different their use of the science, they are generally unified in their rejection of

literary theory and maintain a first-wave stance that the relationship between a text and the

world is unproblematic.

　　　Before further discussing a second-wave approach, this section must first give a brief

summary of the field of evolutionary biology and how it relates to literary theory. The

evolutionary biological definition of nature is based on the theory of evolution, first proposed

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[16] Slovic cites "Laurence Coupe's collection *The Green Studies Reader* (2000), Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace's *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, and *The Environmental Justice Reader*, edited by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein" as exemplars of second-wave ecocriticism ("The Third Wave" 6).

by Charles Darwin in *On the Origin of Species* (1859).[17] The term evolution refers to the specific biological process of "natural selection," where a "sorting of alternative genes" (Goldsmith, Zimmerman 26) allows living organisms to develop and diversify from their earlier forms. Currently, the theory of evolution has five pillars of evidence: physical studies of the earth's age and formation; comparative anatomy and embryology, or the presence of common characteristics in different species that are "derived from common ancestors" (Goldsmith and Zimmerman 40); biogeography, or the way life has diversified to exploit ecological opportunities (Goldsmith and Zimmerman 41); population genetics, or the discovery of genetic variation in natural populations, and molecular biology. While evolution is referred to as a theory, evolution is widely viewed as evidence-based fact (Goldsmith and Zimmerman 46).

The theory of evolution has implications for an ecocritical conceptualisation of nature, because humans, as animals, are subject to evolution and therefore are considered a part of, rather than apart from, nature (Goldsmith, Zimmerman 1). More importantly, the theory of evolution also states that human nature can be viewed within an evolutionary context (Goldsmith and Zimmerman 19). For example, the moral themes that are repeated throughout unrelated societies; reproductive behaviour (Goldsmith and Zimmerman 123); "selfish, cooperative, spiteful, [and] altruistic" behaviours (Goldsmith and Zimmerman 153); the parental investment of female mammals (Goldsmith and Zimmerman 45); "marriage practices, mate guarding, inheritance, male violence, infanticide, responses to and control of the sex ratio, patriarchy … self-deception, nepotism, group identity, and intergroup conflict in the form of warfare" (Goldsmith and Zimmerman 347) are all considered evolutionary traits.

For second-wave ecocritics, the evolutionary basis of human nature, and therefore culture, disables the traditional dualistic definition of nature (Easterlin 8) and opens up new possibilities when examining texts. While culture has previously been "disconnected from biology," it is now seen as "the work of human brains that have been produced by natural

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[17] Biologist Alfred Russel Wallace should also be credited with conceiving of the theory of evolution, and his paper was jointly presented with Darwin's to the Linnean Society in London in 1858.

selection" (Goldsmith and Zimmerman 347). As ecocritic Carroll explains:

> Darwinian evolutionary theory has established itself as the matrix for all the life
> sciences. This theory situates human beings firmly within the natural, biological order,
> and evolutionary principles are now extending themselves rapidly into the human
> sciences … if literature is in any way concerned with the language, psychology,
> cognition, and social organisation of human beings, all of this information should have
> direct bearing on our understanding of literature. It should inform our understanding of
> human experience as the subject of literature, and it should enable us to situate literary
> figurations in relation to the personal and social conditions in which they are produced.
> (*Literary Darwinism* 15)

Although many second-wave ecocritics may not see themselves as using an evolutionary approach, the theory of evolution is implicit in the way second-wave ecocritics reconceptualise nature as both human and nonhuman. Some ecocritics explicitly use evolutionary biology when examining a text, for example by taking an adaptationist approach that examines how a text depicts the evolved human mind. Other critics focus on how literature is itself a phenomenon of evolution (Westling 163). In sum, both these second-wave literary critics and biologists see evolutionary biology as a way to examine human nature and culture through a scientific lens (Goldsmith, Zimmerman 347), which in turn allows us to better understand our behaviour in the future.

Glen Love is the ecocritic probably most associated with an evolutionary approach (Buell "Ecocritical Insurgency" 704). Love argues that "interdisciplinary work between humanists and the sciences" is one way to change the traditional concept of nature (*Practical Ecocriticism* 47) used by first-wave ecocritics and to contribute to ecocriticism's critical efforts (*Practical Ecocriticism* 5). Love believes that an evolutionary approach can replace poststructuralism as a unifying literary theory, replace the nature/culture binary of first-wave ecocriticism, and highlight environmental concerns (Cohen 11–2).

Love applies his approach, for example, to the novels of three modern canonical American writers: Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, and William Dean Howell. Using the "biological and geographical sciences" (95) to perform a reading of place and human nature in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925), Love argues that Cather uses the story of the inhabitants of the Blue Mesa (an abandoned cliff city) to show a "shared human condition," that of a longing for a "home," between the novel's characters and the Mesa's previous inhabitants. Love argues that longing is a "commonly evolved tendency" (99) that has been "verified by the DNA in our Darwinian bodies" (100) and therefore is a facet of an evolved human nature. Love defines human nature as:

> living in social groups rather than alone; our tendency to form cooperative relationships and to accept reciprocal obligations; the underlying structure and semantics of human languages; human facial, hand, and arm gestures; our use of fire; our territory (including our attraction to specific places); the play of children; our propensity to create art; our distinctions between close and distant kin; age grading and age distinction; division of labor; dominance relationships between men, women, and children; rules of social-unit membership; mistrust of 'others' … and so on. (96–97)

While Love redefines "nature," as with first-wave ecocritics his overriding purpose is still to highlight environmental concerns (Cohen 11). For Love, an evolutionary approach addresses the way nonhuman creatures and habitats are often reduced to backdrop, metaphor, or "human ... signification" (Coupe 4) in a text.[18] By reading texts through the lens of evolutionary biology, Love believes that critics can examine human and nonhuman elements of a text with equal interest ("Ecocriticism and Science" 561). Showing how language and culture have not separated us from our biology, will, he argues, "help initiate ... a more biologically informed ecocritical dialogue about literature and its relationship to nature and to environmental concerns" (*Practical Ecocriticism* 11).

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[18] Buell describes how Love argues for "a kind of unified field theory of ecocritical discourse" that "should base itself on the model of evolutionary biology" (The Ecocritical Insurgency 703–04).

Like Love, Joseph Carroll uses a "biologically based" framework and "empirically derived information about human nature" to examine texts ("Organism" 34). But if Love aligns his approach with environmental goals, Carroll separates environmental activism from literary theory, stating "the current and necessary preoccupations with problems of environmental degradation should not obscure the general theoretical significance of the environment in the biology of literary representation" ("Organism" 42). In other words, Carroll wants to focus on how the adaptive forces that shape human nature also shape our literature, for example, how "survival, reproduction, parenting and kinship" ("Organism" 36) and Paul Ekman's six basic emotions ("Organism" 39) are depicted in a text. Carroll argues that literature itself is a form of evolutionary "cognitive mapping" that allows humans to orient ourselves within an environment ("Organism" 33–34), or simply put, that literature is an outcome of human evolution. This allows Carroll to assert that literature is the product of individual human minds—the "locus of experience and meaning"—and is an expression of our "fundamental" human nature ("Organism" 41, 43).

Carroll's evolutionary approach attempts to occupy a middle ground between realism and poststructuralist literary criticism. While Carroll states that "knowledge … can correspond more or less adequately to a world that exists independently of human beings" (*Literary* 18), he also argues that individuals have different motives and identities that influence the way they imagine the world ("Organism" 41). Carroll's definition of how knowledge arises echoes the poststructuralist idea that meaning is not present within a sign, but formed from the context within which the sign is used: as a consequence, meaning is not stable or fixed. Still, Carroll remains unconvinced by poststructuralism ("Organism" 32), because he believes the theory suggests that knowledge is unattainable ("Organism" 28) and that this is in opposition to "the total structure of scientific knowledge, especially biological knowledge" (qtd. Love "Ecocriticism and Science" 565).

A third critic, Easterlin, also uses an approach that disables the nature/culture binary,

but unlike Love and Carroll, focuses on the human-human and human-place relationships in a text, through the lens of evolutionary psychology (12). Easterlin argues that it is essential for ecocritics to examine human-human relationships. She states: "for modern humans, who have been resourceful in harnessing the power of nonhuman nature, and in protecting themselves from its most immediate dangers, members of our own species constitute, psychologically speaking, the most significant component of our environment" (8). As an example, Easterlin cites Kathleen R. Wallace's reading that "woman-centered networks" are part of the personal geography in Audre Lorde's poetry (12).

Easterlin also argues that because evolution is due to adaptive changes to an environment, and because an environment is "a context dependent concept" (8) based on location—that is, "place" is a cultural or individual interpretation of an environment—an evolutionary reading of "nature" in a text must consider the human-place relationship. By differentiating between "place" and "environment," and focusing on the individual perspective, Easterlin moves away from realism and toward the poststructuralist idea that texts are not representations of the physical world, but interpretations constructed from signs. While Easterlin doesn't go as far as stating (as the poststructuralists do) that the meaning of signs are unstable and constantly reinterpreted by author and reader, she does acknowledge that psychological, cultural, and personal factors create a text, which makes it a mediated representation of the physical world. Easterlin explains her approach: "Since the adapted *human mind* produces literature, that mind's modes of perceiving its surround are, in all likelihood, central to the literary representations of persons, places, and their interactions" (2). In other words, a writer's different ways of perceiving a place directly inform his or her representations of that place in literature.

Buell combines Easterlin's and Love's ideas when he suggests that place should be analysed alongside character, theme, and plot (Weidner 194–5). He states:

> ... landscape-oriented ecocritical work would in the long run promise to give a far

richer account than we now have of the placial basis of human and social experience, conceiving "place" not simply in the light of an imagined descriptive or symbolic structure, not simply as a social construction, not simply as ecology, but all of these three simultaneously. Indeed, we are now, I believe, in the midst of a time of intense interest in place theory, to which the ecocritical movement has begun to make important contributions and surely will make more. ("Ecocritical Insurgency" 707)

While Buell's ecocriticism tends towards realism, by defining "place" as ecological and social, he acknowledges that place in a text is culturally constructed, or as Easterlin would argue, is a product of human-human and human-nonhuman relationships that can be discussed through evolutionary psychology (12).

While second-wave ecocritical approaches acknowledge that a text is an interpretative product of the writer's cultural and placial influences, for example, Carroll's framing texts as "imaginative structures" ("Organism" 43) or Easterlin's argument that psychological, cultural, and personal factors influence a text, their criticism does not generally engage with contemporary literary theory such as poststructuralism. Using the field of evolutionary biology to underpin a critical approach requires an acceptance of scientific authority which views knowledge as referring to an objective reality. Even if evolutionary ecocritics examine a text as the imaginative product of an individual human mind, and therefore as a product of evolution, the implication is that a critic can use scientific knowledge to decode the interpretive elements of a text, and through that process make statements about an objective physical world. Broadly speaking, second-wave approaches still marry a writer's text (interpretative though it may be) to what is considered a knowable and describable biological reality (Dickinson 619).

As with my overview of the first-wave approach, this is not an exhaustive survey, but the examples show that the principle difference between first- and second-wave ecocriticism is a redefinition of "nature" that relies on evolutionary biology to include humans, culture, and urban habitats. As these examples suggest, the major themes are a focus on the universal

characteristics of human nature (and related behaviour) in literature, the way human-human and human-place relationships contribute to a text's depiction of nature, and a reading of texts as products of individual and evolved human minds—Carroll's "locus of experience and meaning" ("Organism" 41). As a result, second-wave ecocritics examine texts that would traditionally fall outside the genre of nature writing, which allows ecocriticism to "reshape the study of texts and artifacts that do not explicitly engage with nature" (Buell qtd. in Heise "Greening English" 296).

Third-Wave Ecocriticism

Since their development, first- and second-wave approaches have faced a number of criticisms from inside and outside the field.[19] One of the most common criticisms raised against first- and second-wave ecocritics is their refusal to engage with contemporary literary theory. For example, in 1999 critic Dana Phillips argued that ecocritics should formulate a postmodernist ecocritical approach because "the constructedness of nature is a basic tenet of postmodernism … representation is always already inadequate" (578). Likewise, critic Michael Cohen questions the theoretical basis of ecocritical thought when he asks: "What does a literary critic mean by saying that environment acts in a work of literature, when academic convention requires that literature be treated as a human—not natural or divine— construction?" (16). Ecocritic Serpil Oppermann echoes Phillips and Cohen when she states: "despite a number of attempts at its theorizing from writers … who draw mostly from various lines of poststructuralist thought, ecocriticism still remains controversial and antagonistic about its insufficient theoretical engagement" (108).

A need to respond to such criticisms can be seen as the catalyst for the current nascent

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[19] Such as, the examination of "nature" in a text without using a defined methodology or "clearly articulated set of theoretical principles" (Easterlin 1), which includes a lack of common definitions between waves for terms such as "nature" and "environment"; a focus on texts with explicit environmental themes, which limits ecocritical investigation of the concept "nature," and, as the majority of ecocritics are Western academics, produces "narratives about nature…from privileged positions of gender, class, and ethnicity" (Cohen 29; Heise "Hitchhiker's Guide" 509); broad interpretations of the language and methodologies from other fields (Cohen 10), for example, one metaphor commonly used by ecocritics is that of the city as an organism (Phillips), which may be attractive ideologically, but has been unsubstantiated by ecology (Worster 580).

third-wave ecocriticism. As the wave is still in a developmental phase (while it began to emerge in 2000, it was not labelled as such until 2009 [Slovic "The Third Wave" 7]), exemplars in the literature are not as easily found as those from first- and second-wave ecocriticism.[20] In Slovic's attempt to summarise the characteristics of the third wave, he lists fourteen distinct critical approaches that range from "'eco-cosmopolitanism,' 'rooted cosmopolitanism,' 'the global soul,' and 'translocality'… post-national and post-ethnic visions of human experience of the environment … the new wave of "material" ecofeminism … eco-masculinism … and green queer theory … [and] the concept of 'animality'" ("Third Wave" 7). Such diversity of approach signals that the wave is still in a nascent phase. Slovic also states that the third wave includes the critiques of ecocritics such as Dana Phillips and Michael P. Cohen who "have taken the field to task for its lack of engagement with critical theory, its embracing of representationality in literature … and the lack of a precise methodological definition of ecocriticism" ("Third Wave" 7).

The issue of a precise methodology can be further narrowed down to one of the most common criticisms levelled at both first- and second-wave ecocritics, which is that they use an approach based in realism or representationalism when examining a text rather a methodology grounded in contemporary literary theory (Phillips 597). A representational approach means a belief in 'reference'—the idea that words refer to an objective reality. Such an approach previously underpinned "literary representation throughout most of Western history" (Brewton),

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[20] For example, since the 1990s there have been ecocritics who propose a poststructuralist ecocritical approach, but although they are growing in number, they make up a small proportion of scholars in the discipline. A survey of *ISLE* articles published since 2000, conducted for this thesis, found only ten articles that explicitly proposed or used a poststructuralist ecocritical approach. Moreover, these critics tend to argue their position through poststructuralist theories of language rather than with case studies that apply their methodologies to a text. For example, Joseph Carroll's "Organism, Environment, and Literary Representation" outlines an evolutionary biological approach that draws on poststructuralist notions of language (in particular, that meaning is formed from the context within which the sign is used) but doesn't provide case studies. This may be because they're often more engaged with critically attacking ecocritical approaches, as Heise notes of Phillips ("Hitchhiker's Guide" 510), especially his article "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology," rather than suggesting working methodologies. Language theory, however, is not a methodology. It can underpin a methodology or approach, but it cannot be applied to a text without further expansion: it is the 'what' but not the 'how.' By focusing on theory rather than application, (which, when dealing with terms such as "nature" and 'environment' requires attention to definitions), such efforts at a third-wave ecocriticism are difficult to effect.

but was superseded by contemporary literary theories such as poststructuralism (Carroll *Literary Darwinism* xv). By eschewing literary theory, ecocritics decline to engage with questions of signification and representation, which are some of the central concerns of twentieth and twenty-first century literary criticism (Brewton; Heise "Hitchhiker's Guide" 505).[21] Consequently, ecocritics risk limiting the relevance of their work to other schools of literary criticism and restricting ecocritics' engagement with other literary criticism professionals (Carroll "Organism" 29).

One of the key problems with the use of realism over contemporary literary theories is that realism encourages ecocritics to examine texts that depict "nature" as understood by the ecocritic, whereas texts with concepts of "nature" that fall outside the ecocritic's world view, for example a particular socio-economic or cultural position, might go unnoticed. That first-wave ecocritics did not view humans and urban habitats as part of "nature," and therefore these were excluded from ecocritical analyses (Bennett "Different Shades" 208), is one example. As Michael Cohen explains: "traditional theories of representation are under attack because of the narrowness of their interests and especially because younger critics have become suspicious of personal narratives about nature produced from privileged positions of gender, class, and ethnicity" (29).[22] Likewise, Heise argues that such a focus can perpetuate tropes such as toxic discourse, pollution, and displacement without critical reflection on their use in the text. As an example, she cites the use of "pastoral, biblical apocalypse, [and] nuclear fear" tropes in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), a book about the detrimental effects of pesticide, which is widely praised by ecocritics for its realistic depiction of the natural world ("Hitchhiker's Guide" 512).

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[21] For example, critic Dana Phillips cites the work of renowned ecocritic Lawrence Buell—specifically *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1996), a foundational book in the field (Heise "Greening English" 292)—as an example of the way ecocritics focus on realism rather than engaging with contemporary literary theory. Phillips argues that while Buell states that he uses literary theory to examine texts (Buell qtd. Phillips 583), in practice Buell picks and chooses what he needs from poststructuralist theory in order to lend authority to his environmental goals, and to re-establish "realistic literary priorities" (585).

[22] For example, most issues of *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (*ISLE*) include a personal essay. One example, from 2010, is Gerald Thurmond's personal story about bird counting that is intertwined with a reading of a Robert Frost poem.

Consequently, as the majority of ecocritics are Western academics publishing in English, and non-English experts are "largely ignored" (Heise "Greening English" 297), a narrow idea of "nature" is established in the critical literature.[23]

Based on Slovic's summary of the third-wave, the common goal of third wave approaches can be broadly stated as being to address the many criticisms raised against first- and second-wave ecocriticism: for example, as stated, a narrow and anthropocentric definition of nature that excludes humans and human habitats (first wave only), a lack of a defined methodology and definitions of key terms such as "environment," "nature" and "ecocriticism," a focus on Western texts and Western definitions of "nature," and a lack of engagement with literary theory. While Slovic's own focus is "exploring ethnicity through the study of environmental literature" (1), the goal of this thesis is to examine the techniques and strategies that Hass uses to depict "nature" in his poetry, which often explore the distance that exists between words and the world to which they refer. Therefore, this section will provide examples of third-wave approaches from the literature that, in some way, investigate and focus on the relationship between language and the world, often drawing on contemporary literary theory.

While first- and second-wave ecocritics place an inherent trust in language to represent nature, some of the ecocritics developing third-wave ecocriticism are exploring how language reflects our culturally informed interpretations of nature, but not nature itself; that is, the focus is on the text, and the concepts depicted in that text, rather than on the physical world. For example, in a 2011 essay, ecocritic Adam Dickinson uses the pseudoscientific field of pataphysics[24] and the field of biosemiotics—where all ecological relationships create subjective signs (104)—to discuss the poetry of Canadian poet Lisa Robertson. He calls his essay "a preliminary investigation" (630) to indicate the new and confrontational territory he proposes

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[23] Cohen gets to these points when he accuses ecocritics of seeing texts not as "fields for argument, but as scenes for reconciliation," and as portraying "nature writing as a progressive historical tradition ... [to create] a parable of the development of finer environmental consciousness" (22). In other words, Cohen believes that ecocritics are in danger both of creating a false history of nature writing and of preaching environmental rhetoric rather than forming a coherent investigation of a text (22; Easterlin 2).

[24] A field of "imaginary solutions" and study of exceptions (Jarry qtd. Dickinson 616).

for ecocriticism. Dickinson describes the way Robertson's texts portray the "social, historical, rhetorical and biological ... signifying surfaces" (632) of urban Vancouver, in order to offer multiple perspectives of the city. For example, one text describes how a fast growing blackberry species can at once be conceptualised as a weed, but also as a decoration, in order to show how the landscape is subjectively interpreted.

In order to challenge the first- and second-wave concerns with realism and resistance to contemporary literary theory (632), Dickinson discusses the way Robertson's work does not create "a settled subject … but [a] threshold" (632), or in effect, that the reality she describes has no fixed meaning. Through his examination, Dickinson makes the poststructuralist argument that Robertson's multiple significations and imaginary perspectives of Vancouver show how all organisms exist in a web of interpretative relationships, and that reality is created through context and cultural conventions (627).

For all of Dickinson's poststructuralist complexity, his criticism has environmental goals. Dickinson views nature as a physical reality, "'a squishy thing,'" he states, quoting Timothy Morton (631), but also as an object of multiple significations. He asserts: "To accept a biosemiotic perspective on relationships between the physical and ideological surfaces of place is to understand our semiotic connection to creatures and materials beyond the ostensible limitations of our skin" (631). In other words, Dickinson believes that the natural world is both physical and semiotic, and by examining the way relationships and culture influence our interpretations of the physical world, we can better understand—and therefore manage—our interactions with the world outside of ourselves.

Ecocritic Serpil Oppermann echoes Dickinson's approach when she uses the metaphor of a "rhizome"[25]—the stem of a plant that puts out many roots (117–118)—to propose an ecological poststructuralist approach that examines how textual depictions of nature stem from

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[25] Use of the rhizome as a metaphor for "non-linear patterns of interconnection" and "holism" compared to "reductionism" has its foundation in cultural studies. It is primarily "associated with the work of Deleuze and Guattari, whose 1988 book *A Thousand Plateaus* works across a range of perspectives or plateaus including psychoanalysis, subjectivity, the state, maps, language, forms of writing and so forth in a non-linear multi-perspectival way" (Barker 178–9).

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the multi-dimensional relationship between language and the world. She states: "representations of nature in literature can neither be wholly dissociated from their referents in nature, nor from their complex conceptualizations in language … Just as ecocriticism can enrich the postmodern thought by its more salient worldly and moral footing, the postmodern thought can enhance ecocriticism by its critique of the referentiality of meaning" (120). Oppermann aims to combine ecocriticism's focus on the relationship between humans and nonhumans with poststructuralist literary theory in order to create a unique critical perspective.[26] As with Dickinson, Oppermann's goals are environmental. She argues that an ecological postmodern approach can examine "the ways in which nature has been defined, constructed, interpreted, recontextualized, reflected, represented or misrepresented" in literature in order to show how language has contributed to the environmental crisis (117). Oppermann suggests that ecocritics move away from realism, which she states has "conceptual problems" (103), and instead should examine how our ideas about nature are constructed, and how those constructions function in our ideologies, institutions, and literary and scientific discourses (122).

Oppermann applies her approach to a reading of Ronald Sukenick's metafictional novel *Out* (1973). She describes the way the novel's characters (who she terms "indefinite verbal entities" [119]) expose their various and subjective interpretations of the landscape during their journey through the United States. For example, the character of Empty Fox recites a poem about the wind. Oppermann argues that the wind represents the author's desire for narrative freedom, and by highlighting Empty Fox's use of the wind as metaphor—that is, his symbolic use of the natural world—Oppermann argues that Sukenick "playfully contests any interpretive totalization" of his text (119). In effect, Oppermann draws on the poststructuralist idea that the meaning of a text is contextual in order to show how Sukenick's depiction of the wind suggests that textual representations of nature are interpretative and constructed (119).

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[26] She cites George B. Handley's reading of the postcolonial discourses in Derek Walcott's poetry (117–18)—and the way Walcott's depictions show his feelings of "historical belonging" to the landscape (qtd. 118)—as an example of such an ecocritical-postmodern examination.

From an ecocritical perspective, such a reading allows Oppermann to argue that—as our depictions are interpretative rather than representative—there may be ethical ramifications of the way we construct nature, for example the "ongoing destructive relations with and our harmful treatment of nature" (123–4). As part of Oppermann's approach, she offers a series of questions that allow critics to examine depictions of nature in a text. Some of her questions focus on literary theory, such as "From what ethical and ideological position is nature textually constructed in a given literary text?" (121), whereas other questions are more traditionally ecocritical and environmentally focused, for example, "Do they present partial truths about the environmental issues?" and "Does the environment have a passive subject position?" (122). The dual focus of the questions allows the approach to identify poststructuralist perspectives on a text while still using an ecocritical lens.

Critic and poet Matthew Cooperman proposes a performative ecocritical approach that conceives the relationship between language and the world as a "negotiated space" (181), where our engagement with that space "iterates a world into being" (187) within the poem, which in turn influences our perception of the physical world. Cooperman argues for a performative view of poetry, where, while language does not fully represent the world, words do "refer to things" (188) but only in the context of a reader facilitating the relationship. For Cooperman, poetry is the primary medium for exploring the relationship between language and the world; it is a relationship that happens through "seeing and naming" and "the reciprocity of reading and writing" which creates the "habitable space" (188) of the poem. Simply put, Cooperman argues that the meaning of a poem is created dynamically and subjectively by both reader and writer.[27]

As an example, Cooperman cites a line from American poet Susan Howe's collection,

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[27] Cooperman's idea of a habitable space has also been explored in the field of ecocomposition, which studies the relationship between environments (natural, constructed, and imagined) and the discourses involved in speaking, writing, and thinking (Dorbin, Weisser 572). Ecocomposition uses concepts of place and environment as critical categories (Dorbin, Weisser 567), and argues that our access to physical reality is created through discourse. Ecocompositionists Sidney I. Dorbin and Christian R. Weisser state that "in a sense, humans occupy two spaces: a biosphere, consisting of the earth and its atmosphere, which supports our physical existence, and a semiosphere, consisting of discourse, which shapes our existence and allows us to make sense of it" (Dorbin, Weisser 573–4).

Singularities (1990): "there are traces of blood in a fairy tale" (qtd. 183). Cooperman describes how Howe's poem refers to "real things as source: people, places, histories, the bloody field of a particular colonial skirmish," but goes on to explain that the reader does not "see" the source objects, but instead their own interpreted version of each word (183). While a physical reality exists that was the inspiration for the poem, Cooperman suggests that the poem materialises from, as he states, "this tension between world and the word, between seeing and naming things," which brings the poem into being.

As with Oppermann, Cooperman's approach has environmental goals. He suggests that by "theorizing the relationship of poetry to the environment" (188) we can understand our part in the natural world, and through that understanding break down the binaries that exist between nature and culture (188–89). Like Oppermann, Cooperman also offers a series of questions as a guide, for example: "How do our uses of and beliefs in language evident in the poem parallel our uses and beliefs for the environment?" (189). By being aware of the way literature forms relational entities, Cooperman argues we come to perceive the way we use "nature" in poetry, which allows us to shape and understand our interactions with the physical environment (184). For example, returning to Howe's line, the way a poem is created from the relationship between source objects, for example the "blood" of the colonial skirmish, and human interpretation, or Howe's "fairy tale," exposes the way we mythologise battlegrounds.

Dickinson and Oppermann both provide ecocritical approaches that adopt poststructuralist notions of language as a way to explore how our depictions of nature are contextual and constructed; Dickinson combines pataphysics with the field of biosemiotics to underpin his approach, whereas Oppermann uses a form of ecological poststructuralism. Cooperman, on the other hand, proposes that texts can be read as performative—that is, that the meaning of a text is created dynamically and subjectively through the actions of the reader and writer. Broadly speaking, performativity, like poststructuralism, sits in opposition to realism, which is often used by first-wave ecocritics. Performativity is a complex and multidisciplinary

term,[28] but for the purpose of this thesis it refers to the process by which language produces a result or consequence in the physical or extra-semiotic reality. For example, while realism assumes that meaning arises exclusively from the relationships between sign and referent, performativity states that meaning arises from performance, such as the act of writing, or Cooperman's "tension between world and the word, between seeing and naming things."

While each of these third-wave ecocritics engage with poststructuralist notions of language (that is, that the meaning of language is unfixed and contextually created), they shy away from embracing poststructuralist constructivism. To engage with the idea, as Coupe states, "that nature is nothing more than a linguistic construct" (3), conflicts with their underlying ecocritical goal, which is to understand the ethical implications of how we conceive and depict nature in literature. The idea that literature has ethical consequences requires a physical reality that can be influenced by beliefs that arise from our linguistic constructions.

When discussing the issue, Easterlin states[29]: "we are left to ask what the precise relationship of constructs to actualities is" (3). Easterlin may be asking the wrong question, as the "precise relationship" between language and the world has consumed ecocriticial debate at the expense of examining texts. Phillips suggests a reason why, when he states: "Do not get me wrong: I think there is a beyond of literature. There is, for example, nature. I just think that nature cannot deliver one from the constraints of culture, any more than culture can deliver one from the constraints of nature" (585). In short, Phillips asks us why we waste our time trying to find the physical world in a poem when any analysis is filtered, and therefore flawed, by culture

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[28] Performativity is a complex theory that originated in the 1950s with J. L. Austin's work in speech act theory, but has been adapted and expanded by the fields of feminist theory, science studies, and economics, among others. Due to considerations of space, this thesis will not provide a history of performativity as it does with poststructuralism, but can offer Barad's concise summary: "Performativity's lineage is generally traced to the British philosopher J. L. Austin's interest in speech acts, particularly the relationship between saying and doing. Jacques Derrida is usually cited next as offering important poststructuralist amendments. Butler elaborates Derrida's notion of performativity through Foucault's understanding of the productive effects of regulatory power in theorizing the notion of identity performativity. Butler introduces her notion of gender performativity in *Gender Trouble*, where she proposes that we understand gender not as a thing or a set of free-floating attributes, not as an essence—but rather as a "doing" (Footnote 8, 808).

[29] In her statement, Easterlin was discussing the work of critics John Tallmade and Henry Harrington who insist that while "nature" is a concept constructed by culture, an independent physical reality does exist.

and experience.

To restate Phillips' question: why perform any textual analysis if the link between words and the world is so flawed? What have ecocritics to gain? Considering Phillips's statement that language has "no direct relationship with the world it represents" (585), the word that we should dwell on is "direct." This thesis does not want to suggest that the physical natural world is, as poststructuralist literary critic David Mazel states, "a myth, a 'grand fable,' a complex fiction" (qtd. in Heise "Hitchhiker's Guide" 510). Every text has a relationship—albeit mediated—with the world. While words may only point to the world, they are, as critic Alison Hawthorne Deming said of art, "necessary because it gives us a new way of thinking and speaking, shows us what we are and what we have been blind to, and gives us new knowledge and forms in which to see ourselves" (qtd. in Estok 149). Nature in literature is an important issue for ecocritics, because how a poem depicts the natural world—how it perceives, refracts, and recreates the world (Easterlin 6)—shows us how we imagine the world, and imagination informs use. The third-wave approaches used by Oppermann and Cooperman embrace this duality by examining depictions of nature in a text without relying on realism, but while still discussing the ethical implications of those depictions.

One field that achieves a similar balance is that of performativity. In her 2003 essay "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," Karen Barad outlines a theory based on approaches developed in feminist and queer studies, and scientific disciplines (807).[30] Barad's theory is tangentially related to the third-wave approach that Slovic calls "'material' ecofeminism." Although Slovic does not refer to Barad, he cites Susan Hekman's *Material Feminisms* (2008), which also outlines a postconstructivist approach,

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[30] Barad's theory of performativity is part of a new conceptual approach in science studies called postconstructivism which emerged in the mid-1980s in response to constructivist theories of scientific knowledge (Wehling 82). The field aims "to move beyond the well-established opposition of realism and constructivism" (82). Instead, postconstructivists want to establish a perspective that can "study the sciences primarily in terms of their situated material and discursive practices" (Wehling 81), and question "the supposedly self-evident premises and hidden assumptions" (Wehling 85) of realism and constructivism. In this way, postconstructivism is not a step beyond constructivism, or a return to realism, but a way to "challenge and transform" the field of science studies (Wehling 96).

albeit with feminist goals.

Barad's approach challenges the metaphysical and ontological ideas that underpin realism. To do so, Barad draws on the work of physicist Niels Bohr, one of the founders of quantum physics. Bohr questions the accepted Newtonian idea that objects are distinct and independent entities from each other, [31] and instead proposes that phenomena are the basic ontological entity: that "things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings" (813), but instead that things materialise out of performative relationships. The idea challenges representationalism because, as Barad states, without distinct things, language cannot "perform mediating functions" (813) between them and an observer.

In reconceiving the material world as phenomena—that is, as interactions rather than distinct entities—Barad views her approach as an alternative to realism and social constructivism, which, as she states, both "believe that scientific knowledge mediates our access to the material world; where they differ is on the question of referent, whether scientific knowledge represents things in the world as they really are (i.e., 'Nature') or 'objects' that are the product of social activities (i.e., 'Culture')" (804–5). The reconception shifts the enquiry from the "taken-for-granted ontological gap" (804) between words and things, to how discursive practices materialise phenomena.

Due to its complexity, Barad's reworking of performative theory requires careful expansion. As described, Barad proposes that the material world exists as a series of phenomena that materialise dynamically as a result of intra-actions between agents. [32] These agents—the causal material or "bodies" within a phenomenon (823)—may or may not be human, and it is through the different materialised qualities of each part of a phenomenon that the boundaries between humans, nature, and culture are created. Simply put, Barad suggests that the world is in

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[31] Barad argues that such a view is the "hallmark of atomistic metaphysics" (813) with its indivisible atom.

[32] Barad uses the word intra-action rather than interaction as a way to show the conceptual shift away from preexisting independent entities (815).

a constant process of materialisation, where "meaning and form" are created within a phenomenon by the selection of "different agential possibilities" (817). She states:

> Reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but "things"-in-phenomena. The world is intra-activity in its differential mattering. It is through specific intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency. (817)

Part of a phenomenon's specific intra-actions happen through discursive practices, which Barad defines as what "constrains and enables what can be said" (819), rather than as human discourse. For Barad, discursive practices create boundaries that form part of a phenomenon's particular configuration, and while these boundaries create meaning as they stabilise, they are not static: eventually each boundary destabilises (818). Barad states that discursive practices "are not speech acts, linguistic representations, or even linguistic performances… are not anthropomorphic placeholders for the projected agency of individual subjects, culture, or language. Indeed, they are not human-based practices," but are "boundary-making practices" (821). It is the relationship between discursive practices and material within phenomena—and the "constraints and exclusions" (822) that arise from interaction—that causes matter's constant state of becoming and underpins Barad's theory of "agential realism":

> A crucial part of the performative account that I have proposed is a rethinking of the notions of discursive practices and material phenomena and the relationship between them. On an agential realist account, discursive practices are not human-based activities but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted. And matter is not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency. And performativity is not understood as iterative citationality (Butler) but rather iterative intra-activity … We are not outside

observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places in the world;

rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity. (828)

In terms of poetry and this thesis, Barad's theory suggests a causal relationship exists where words and their meaning materialise out of "practices/doings/actions" (802)[33]. Barad's idea that material-discursive enactments are causal should be of interest to ecocritics as the idea of causality suggests, for Barad, that there is a form of accountability in the "world's becoming" (824). When phenomena are configured through an enactment of boundaries, such an enactment always involves exclusion of other possibilities.[34] Barad argues that because "particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment," that "these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering" (827). While the ontological claims of Barad's theory are radical (and will not be addressed by this thesis), the epistemological aspects of Barad's approach allows ecocritics to critique the way the knowledge we create influences our perceptions and use of the natural world. In terms of literature, a performative approach is one way that ecocritics can examine how knowledge is created, and the complex relationship between a text and what it purports to describe (a theme that cannot be examined using realism), while also being able to discuss the ethical obligations that arise from both writing and reading.

As with my overview of the other ecocritical approaches, this is not an exhaustive survey, and one solely focused on the facet of third-wave ecocriticism that aims to engage with contemporary literary theory.[35] As these examples suggest, the key elements are: an engagement

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[33] Such practices perform what Barad terms an "agential cut" (817), which enacts boundaries and materialises both matter and meaning within a phenomenon—that is, a unique and dynamic ontological entity—that did not exist beforehand. Barad cites the example of the "wave-particle duality" of light, where light exhibits both "wavelike behavior" and "particle like characteristics," which, according to physics, can't exist simultaneously, yet each of these characteristics can be measured by different apparatuses. Barad states that "The notions of "wave" and "particle" do not refer to inherent characteristics of an object that precedes its intra-action" but materialise from the interaction itself between light and apparatus, where the "different apparatuses effect different cuts" (Barad Footnote 21 815–6).

[34] Barad reframes the Heisenberg uncertainty principle to support her assertion.

[35] In consideration of space, this summary excludes the notable example of Timothy Chandler who, in *ISLE*, discusses posthumanist phenomenology as one of the "new directions ecocriticism could take when

with contemporary notions of language and the idea that meaning is contextual and constructed (whether that be through poststructuralism, performativity, or biosemiotics); a desire to break down the binaries that exist between nature and culture; and an underlying ethical goal, which is to understand the implications of how we conceive and depict nature in literature.

Thesis Approach

The thesis will examine Hass's early collections—*Field Guide*, *Praise*, *Human Wishes*, and *Sun Under Wood*. The four collections create a discrete body of work concerned with nature, representation, and language. An overview of previous critical responses to Hass's work will be woven throughout the discussion in chapter two.

Hass's work explicitly engages with "nature," and because of this, is a firm contender to be examined using ecocriticism. Furthermore, an ecocritical lens provides a clear framework within which to work, places my reading within a current critical context, and allows me to draw on the previous work of other ecocritics. The thesis will use a third-wave ecocritical approach that combines definitions from evolutionary biology with performativity. Such an approach aligns my investigation with accepted scientific thought and current ecocritical practice. As shown through the examples cited in this introduction, an evolutionary approach originated in second-wave ecocriticism, but third-wave ecocritics also aim to break down the binaries that exist between nature and culture, which can be achieved, in part, using an evolutionary biological definition of "nature." As I am not an expert in the field of evolutionary biology (nor, like Elder, have an expert at my disposal), to use anything but the most widely accepted theories from evolutionary biology would be to invite misrepresentation, which is a common criticism of second-wave ecocritics. Therefore, this thesis will provide a reading based on the accepted idea—as discussed previously—that humans are subject to evolution

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informed by theory" (554). Chandler cites Louise Westling's work that "examines the linguistic nature of the boundary between humans and the billions of other organisms with which we share the planet" (554); David Wood's essay "What Is Eco-phenomenology?"(554–5); and his own approach using the theories of German philosopher, Gernot Böhme.

(Goldsmith, Zimmerman 1; 19), and that "all organisms on Earth are related. The human lineage is a small twig on the branch of the tree of life that constitutes all animals. This means that, in a biological sense, humans are animals" ("Misconceptions of Evolution").

Specifically, chapter two examines the techniques and strategies Hass deploys, often explicitly and self-consciously, to depict the natural world in his poems. For example, his techniques include the use of scientifically accurate names and descriptions as a way to try to realistically depict the natural world (in particular the Californian landscape). I will show that such a depiction suggests that Hass views the natural world as knowable, particular, valuable, and worthy of attention. While the use of names and particulars implies that Hass trusts biological and specific language to represent the natural world, I further argue that Hass's second technique—that of drawing comparisons between human and nonhuman behaviour, which depicts humans as animals—also implies that some experiences exist outside of language. In short, Hass's depiction of nature suggests that we are both part of nature, but separated from other animals by language, rational thought, and self-awareness.

Hass continues to explore the limitations of language through a third strategy, that of explicitly drawing attention to the interpretive nature of names and descriptions, for example the way names carry personal and historical meanings, and how those interpretations vary for each person. Through this strategy, I argue, Hass implies that descriptions of the natural world are individual and culturally constructed, rather than representative. By suggesting language is often insufficient—that the relationship between language and nature is more complicated than representationalism would suggest—Hass calls into question his own depictions of nature.

The second part of my reading will use a performative approach. Similar to other third-wave approaches, performativity allows me to examine the way meaning is contextual and constructed, and whether those constructions have ethical implications. While a second-wave approach could also examine such an idea—for example, Easterlin's argument that psychological, cultural, and personal factors influence a text—the focus of most second-wave

approaches is to contextualise textual depictions of nature within the theories of evolutionary biology—that is, to link the text with the physical world. Instead, performativity allows me to examine the aspects of Hass's poems that have a textual rather than representative purpose. In other words, while Hass's depiction of nature always refers (albeit imperfectly) to a physical reality, and it is widely agreed that the physical reality is subject to evolution, some of his strategies have the primary purpose of making a statement about poetry, rather than attempting to represent the natural world. This difference in focus signals one of the key distinctions between the approaches of second- and third-wave ecocriticism.

Drawing from Barad's theory of post-humanist performativity (with a focus on her epistemological approach), I will perform a close reading of Hass's poetry using the following questions: How do Hass's poems suggest poetry as performative phenomena? What do his assertions imply about the relationship between poetry and the natural world? As with other third-wave approaches, my reading has implicit environmental goals as it draws attention to the ethical themes, where present, that arise from my investigation into the techniques and strategies Hass uses to depict nature.

Specifically, the thesis will show that Hass uses a fourth technique, that of qualifying language—that is, language that makes a statement less absolute—to refute the authority of his own, often figurative, descriptions of nature, and his techniques of naming and particularisation. While this technique also implies that poetic description is constructed rather than representative, Hass's self-conscious use of qualifying language also suggests his discomfort at describing the nonhuman world figuratively. I will argue that Hass's simultaneous use and explicit refusal of poetic technique allows the poem itself to become an object of inquiry—that is, the poem becomes a form of phenomenon in the performative sense; the knowledge it produces materialises from Hass's inquiry into his own descriptions of the natural world. Through his exploration Hass suggests that we often mistake our constructions of nature as knowledge about the natural world, an assertion that has ethical implications.

Hass's technique of qualifying language sits in tension with and contradicts the goals that motivate his other strategies of naming and particularisation of description. The thesis will argue that, instead of resolving the tension created by both his use and refusal of poetic strategy, Hass uses the tension and the theme of loss as a strategy to enact the complex relationship between poetry and the natural world—that Hass's depiction of nature becomes a statement about poetry. The thesis will conclude that Hass's depiction of nature ultimately asserts we should put issues of representation aside in order to take pleasure in the experience of poetry.

While the main goal of the critical essay is to examine the techniques and strategies Hass uses to depict "nature," the thesis conclusion will briefly reflect on whether this particular ecocritical approach was valuable for such an investigation. While the purpose of the critical essay is, on the one hand, to address a gap in the critical literature about Hass, my investigation also has a specific craft focus. It is the combination of Hass's techniques and strategies that attracted me to Hass's poetry and have guided the approach taken by the critical essay—that is, my third-wave approach allows a close investigation of Hass's techniques and strategies, and, in turn, informs the creative component of the thesis. Due to the methodology's specific focus, is not intended to be an approach suitable for all third-wave ecocritical investigations.

Chapter Two: Hass's Depiction of the Natural World

Hass has argued that certain techniques can "marry the world, but . . . do not claim to possess it" (*Twentieth* 305; Olsen par. 10), or in other words, they allow the natural world to be described apart from the poet's desires and intentions. One of Hass's techniques is the use of scientifically accurate names and descriptions to depict the natural world, including depictions of the human animal. In his poems, Hass "bears witness" (Davison par. 7) to the natural world, where a tree is not just a tree, but is a particular species of tree: a sycamore, for example, or a yew. His descriptions are ecologically accurate for the locations being described: if a yew grows only in swampy woods, then it will not appear in another habitat in Hass's poetry.

Hass's attention to particulars began with his debut collection *Field Guide*, which was selected by editor Stanley Kunitz for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award in 1972. In the introduction to *Field Guide*, Hass recounts a conversation with Kunitz during which Hass proposed replacing "snowy egrets" in a poem for the sake of sound, a suggestion that Kunitz dismissed. Kunitz's dismissal gave the young poet permission to place biological accuracy above poetic craft. Hass states: "It was a way of letting me know that even thinking about some biologically inaccurate substitution for the sake of sound showed a failure of character on my part, and, for that time, for what I had pledged myself to in [*Field Guide*], for the particular relation of imagination to the world it struggled to embody, he was exactly right" (*Field Guide* Preface viii).

Hass's desire to "embody" the natural world in poetry can be attributed to a number of influences throughout his career, including his translation of other poets who value particular and realistic descriptions. For Hass, translating poetry allowed him to "absorb" the "energies, ideas, [and] rhetorical strategies" of other writers ("Poets Q&A: Robert Hass." par. 14), such as Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz.[36] Hass states: "the only purpose [for Milosz] of poetry is a perfect description of reality. The adequacy and presence of the physical world is something I wanted to

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[36] Hass was friends with Nobel laureate, Czeslaw Milosz, and he has translated several volumes of his work (Archambeau 124).

believe in" (qtd. in Coffey par. 8). Likewise, Hass was influenced by translating the haiku of Japanese poets Basho, Buson, and Issa, stating: "haiku is an art that seems dedicated to making people pay attention to the preciousness and particularity of every moment of existence. I think that poetry can do that" (qtd. in Ross par. 51).

Names and Particulars

Through naming the natural world in his poems Hass attempts to achieve two goals. First, naming requires Hass and his readers—as he states of haiku—to "pay attention" to the natural world, and second, Hass believes naming works against the way language, used incorrectly or unconsciously, can reduce the natural world to broad categories. Hass has argued that, at times, the distinction between particulars and broad categories are not being made in either society or poetry because "there's a tremendous tendency, especially in our hurried-up society, to abstract, to not see, not notice" (Hass qtd. in Shillinger par. 29). For Hass, "to not see, not notice" is especially detrimental when poets describe the natural world. When discussing other poets' reductive descriptions, he states: "a seemingly serviceable phrase like "the bird sings … masks vast human ignorance about bird behavior. That so-called singing could mean that humans have invaded a bird's territory and it would like to peck their eyes out. A starling sounds like a rusty hinge, but sloppy writers call that "'singing' too" (Hass qtd. in Hamilton par. 12). To counter our inclination to "not notice," Hass refuses to generalise (Ross par. 2), and instead names the different species of flora and fauna that appear in his poems.

Hass's use of specific names over generic categories also reflects his values about the natural world: it is particular and worthy of attention. He has expressed such views on a number of occasions. When environmentalist Pamela Michael describes her River of Words collaboration with Hass, she echoes Hass's stance: "Nature is specific: living things inhabit or visit certain ecosystems and not others. And so language must be specific, too, as the best poetry is (112). Hass has also taught environment studies classes at the University of California to encourage students to move away from abstraction. In conversation with journalist Joan

Hamilton, he says: "They've learned to see the environment as diagrams and feedback loops …

I don't think we have a chance of changing our relationship to the natural world if you don't

know what's around you … the point is to pay attention" (Hass qtd. in Hamilton par. 2–3). By

paying attention through names, Hass believes nature writers "model[s] a new way of seeing"

the natural world as particular and valuable (Hass qtd. Hamilton par. 22).

The title itself of Hass's debut collection *Field Guide* manifests this philosophy: it refers

to guides that identify wildlife by species or genus name, and many of the poems in the

collection suggest that names—Hass's way to pay attention—bring us closer to nature. In the

love poem "Fall," for example, Hass names the mushrooms he and his wife gather by their

biological kingdom, "fungi" (13), and also by their individual species: "chanterelles, puffballs,

chicken-of-the-woods" (4):

> Amateurs, we gathered mushrooms
> near shaggy eucalyptus groves
> which smelled of camphor and the fog-soaked earth.
> Chanterelles, puffballs, chicken-of-the-woods (1–4)

In the poem, the two lovers cook and eat the mushrooms as instructed by the field guide. Even

with the guide, they are terrified of being "killed by a mistake" (8), but:

> Death shook us more than once
> those days and floating back
> it felt like life. Earth-wet, slithery,
> we drifted toward the names of things. (16–19)

By using the term "amateurs," and describing their fear of death, Hass acknowledges the

distance between the lovers and the natural world. But names bridge that distance: by learning

the mushrooms' names and attributes, the lovers connect physically and intimately with the

natural world. While the poem indicates there is danger in engaging with the natural world, it

also suggests that by paying attention we can safely bring that world into ourselves. The final

transformation of the characters into "earth-wet, slithery" (similar to a mushroom), that "drifted

toward the names of things" implies that by naming the natural world we come to (or drift

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toward) an understanding of the other, or as Archambeau suggests, that "it is through the exposure to that danger [of the world outside ourselves] that life is truly experienced" (106).

Hass populates *Field Guide* and succeeding collections with specific common names. In "Adhesive: For Earlene," Hass names the trees and fruit when describing the scene after a storm: "rain and wind / had scattered palm nuts, / palm leaves, and sweet rotting crabapples / across our wildered lawn" (4–7). The speaker of "Palo Alto: The Marshes" about the United States' seizure of California after the Mexican-American War (Olsen), sees "the star thistles: erect, surprised" (33), and "Here everything seems clear, / firmly etched against the pale / smoky sky: sedge, flag, owl's clover" (88–90). In "Child Naming Flowers" from *Praise* (1979), Hass's second collection, the speaker names the "wild fennel" (5) "flowering plum," (7) "fig trees," (12) and "towhee" (25) of his childhood home. In "Santa Lucia" from the same collection, the speaker names the plants he sees on the "Five Springs trail" as "Dead-nettle, thimbleberry" (18–19).

The specific landscape most often represented in Hass's poems is that of California. The state's landscape recurs in Hass's poetry[37] not simply because it is his home, but also because Hass feels that he is able to most accurately describe that landscape in his poems: "The California landscape shows up so much in these poems because it was a subject given to me and because I had, for whatever reasons, a passion for natural history, but also because it was a place for me where language did not belong altogether to desire, to human intention" (*Field Guide* Preface ix–x).[38] In other words, Hass felt his knowledge of the natural history of California enabled him to write about the landscape accurately in his poems—that is, using names and language that is particular to that landscape—instead of writing about a place he did not know, where his own desires and imagination could more easily fill his knowledge gap with inaccurate

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[37] Hass's poems represent a range of California settings, including Santa Lucia, Charlottesville, San Francisco, Palo Alto, Squaw Valley in Lake Tahoe, Santa Barbara, and Tacoma, among others.

[38] Hass has also said that he was influenced by other regional writers such as "Faulkner on Mississippi, Dostoevsky as a poet of St. Petersburg, Lowell and New England, and, to a lesser extent, the California poets, Jeffers and Rexroth," and that he was concerned about the "natural and cultural environment of California" during the 1950s and 1960s economic boom (qtd. "Poets Q&A: Robert Hass." par. 54).

descriptions.

For instance, in "My Mother's Nipples" from Hass's fourth collection *Sun Under Wood* (1996), a poem about his mother's alcoholism, Hass names the animals and plants in the "upper meadow" (2) of Squaw Valley (a scenic and hiking destination near Mount Shasta in California). The poem names the "voles and wood rats" (5), and the "deep-rooted bunchgrass" (12), rather than the more reductive 'rats' and 'grass.' The poem goes on to elaborate, naming "so many grasses— / reedgrass, the bentgrass and timothy, little quaking grass, / dogtail, rip-gut brome" (147–149). Likewise, the speaker in "Santa Barbara Road," from Hass's third collection *Human Wishes* (1989), describes the "vultures, red-tailed hawks," (31) "horse-chestnut," (50) "night-blooming jasmine," (77) "azaleas," (79), "Iceland poppy," (87) "sugar pine," (209) "thimbleberry," (211) "aspens," (214) and "crawfish" (217). In both poems Hass uses names to draw our attention to the particular inhabitants of Squaw Meadow and Santa Barbara Road.

In "Black Mountain, Los Altos" from *Field Guide*, Hass documents the unique fauna of the Black Mountains in California:

>   Only
> three species of tree in
> all these hills: blue oak,
> buckeye, and patches of
> wind-rasped laurel. (12–16)

In describing the particulars of a unique ecosystem where "only / three species of tree" grow, identifying the landscape as the "Black Mountain" in California, and naming the trees as "blue oak," "buckeye," and "laurel," Hass signals that he is representing a real physical landscape. The specificity of his description—and the function of the trees as literal rather than figurative description in the poem—invites us to draw our attention to the landscape beyond the text. In this way, Hass uses names to meet his environmental goals—that is, he does so to counter our inclination to "not notice" (Hass qtd. in Shillinger par. 29) the natural world, and to encourage us "to know what's around [us] … to pay attention" (Hass qtd. in Hamilton par. 2–3).

In "Transparent Garments" from *Praise*, Hass explicitly suggests why he believes names can represent the natural world. In the poem, the speaker meditates on the different associations he makes with 'white':

> White, as a proposition. Not leprous
> by easy association nor painfully radiant.
> Or maybe that, yes, maybe painfully.
> To go into that. As: I am walking in the city
> and there is the whiteness of the houses,
> little cubes of it bleaching in the sunlight,
> luminous with attritions of light, the failure
> of matter in the steadiness of light, (8–15)

The speaker states that "white" is a "proposition," or in other words, the colour suggests different meanings. He associates "white" as "leprous" which (while stated in the negative) suggests the white skin of leprosy. The speaker also associates white with the "painfully radiant" whiteness of light in the city. The poem continues:

> a purification, not burning away,
> nothing so violent, something clearer
> that stings and stings and is then
> past pain or this slow levitation of joy.
> And to emerge, where the juniper
> is simply juniper … (16–21)

The speaker's purification concludes "where the juniper / is simply juniper" (a place "past pain" or "joy"), and the simplicity of the description after the heightened process of purification suggests that the name of the tree protects it from being interpreted or appropriated as the speaker did with the white objects. The juniper is not "painful" like the light of the city—it is "simply juniper." Hass suggests that recognising the particulars of the natural world through its names makes it resistant to interpretation, abstraction, and co-option.

While Hass uses the image of the juniper to argue that names limit interpretation of the natural world, the need for such an argument implicitly acknowledges that language can be

interpretative as well as representative—that language can be a barrier as much as a bridge. In the introduction to *Field Guide* Hass states that names are "precarious" (Intro x), and this tension between his desire to accurately describe the natural world—his stated "fidelity of attention" (*Field Guide* Preface x)—and his recognition that the slippery nature of language makes such fidelity difficult, is in fact central to Hass's poetry.

Hass's use of common or scientific names of flora and fauna depicts the natural world as specific and particular—every plant and animal has a name by which it can be identified, and those creatures exist in particular ecosystems. Hass's use of names also suggests that, through classification, the natural world is knowable, that language can accurately represent the world, and, as the lovers do with the mushrooms in "Fall" from *Field Guide*, that the connection can help us to understand ourselves. In terms of Hass's goal to help us "notice" and value the natural world, his technique of naming is somewhat successful; his poems describe the natural history labels that have been given to the Californian landscape, for example the "red-tailed hawks," (31) and "night-blooming jasmine" (77) from "Santa Barbara Road." As a result California is identified with his work. As reviewer Alan Williamson said: "Of the poets in my generation, the one who has made California landscapes most memorably symbolic is, of course, Robert Hass" (Williamson par. 18).

While Hass's use of names reflects his personal knowledge of the Californian landscape—his home—it may not necessarily be the home of his reader. Just as writers are shaped by their physical as much as by their cultural or social environments, so are the texts that writers produce (Weisser and Dorbin 567). Although Hass has convinced readers to "notice" that he writes about California in his poems, his names will only clearly evoke the characteristics of the flora and fauna of the landscape for someone who knows the natural history of the region. For readers unfamiliar with California, the effect is the opposite: the names are unknown, and such readers might struggle more to visualise the natural world than if Hass had used generic language. Hass has acknowledged the issue:

I have a friend, [the poet] Linda Gregg, who has remarked to me about my poems that they don't describe the way that people really see. They see a yellow flower by the creek: They don't see a mimulus, they don't know the Latin name of the flower. And in that case all I can say is that I've wasted a lot of my time teaching myself the names of the flowers and the birds. So that is what I see. (Robert Hass, interviewed by Zach Rogow, Berkleyan, par. 22–23)

When Hass states "that is what I see," he comes to the crux of the issue, which is that naming achieves a certain particularisation for some readers, but that it may not for others. In his article, "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology," Phillips succinctly explains the trouble we encounter when relying on language to represent the world:

There is no doubt that literature can be realistic and even in some limited sense representational: it can point to the world. That is, it can point to some carefully circumscribed aspect of the world … elaborate protocols of cultural competence must always be followed by both speaker and auditor, writer and reader, in order to make realism operational … Realism is idiomatic. (Phillips 597)

In other words, there must be common knowledge and cultural background between Hass and his readers for Hass's particular descriptions to represent the world. While specific names or descriptions in Hass's poems are a useful tool for communicating his experiences of the natural world (Wilson 150–151), names are limited in their ability to truly represent, for the reasons Phillips describes. To come to a place where little ambiguity exists as to the precise referent of a word, as Phillips argues, a lot of "back and forth—between text and world, and world and text" (596) is required, and still only results in a human classification of the natural world, and not the natural world itself.

Problems arise, too, when Hass acknowledges that any given natural object might have more than one such name. For example, when describing the plant growing over a grave in "Graveyard at Bolinas" from *Field Guide*, Hass uses multiple names for a plant: "The delicate /

light green leaves of monkey flowers / (or Indian lettuce) / are tangled on her grave" (26–29). The two names are descriptive, but they provide different ways of seeing or understanding the "light green leaves" of the plant: the former suggests that the leaves represent the features of a monkey, asking us to consider its appearance, while "Indian lettuce" suggests that this plant was eaten by Native Americans, a reference to its use and history. While both names refer to the physical plant, they also show that naming—and selecting which names to use—is a form of interpretation. Consequently, Hass works against his own use of names to describe the natural world apart from human desires and intentions, and instead highlights the way names reflect social and historical events. In other words, while Hass's continued use of names shows that he believes they can represent the natural world, his poems also question the success of his own technique.

Hass's depiction of the human settlement in California, which he does with similar attention to names, explores why using language to direct attention our to nature—via its representative function—can be problematic. One reason Hass gives for writing about the history of the landscape is to expose "the historical roots of language" (qtd. in Miller par. 12), especially in relation to names, and in fact many of Hass's poems argue that naming is primarily historical rather than representative—an argument that sits in tension with Hass's use of names to particularise and represent the natural world per se. For example, "Maps" from *Field Guide* describes travel across the Sierra Nevada in the late nineteenth century. The poem mentions the names of the mountain passes:

> Olema
> Tamalpais Mariposa
> Mendocino Sausalito San Rafael
> Emigrant Gap
> Donner Pass (61–65)

In this list, Donner Pass was named after a group of emigrants who tried to cross the pass in 1846, but were trapped by snow. Likewise, Emigrant Gap is a low section on the Sierras where

emigrants could take their wagons. The poem goes on to assert, "Of all the laws / that bind us to the past / the names of things are / stubbornest" (66–69), as if to suggest that names can carry "large meanings and deep historical resonances," as Archambeau said about Hass's work (117), rather than being representative of these objects as nature, per se. The historical nature of geographical names is not dissimilar to the way the flora and fauna of California were named. This is an idea that Hass explores in other poems such as "English: An Ode" from *Sun Under Wood*, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Hass's assertion that names act as stubborn links to the past implies that names more accurately correspond to moments in social history than to the animals and plants of the physical landscape. Again, this idea sits in tension with Hass's technique of using names to depict and direct our "attention" to the landscape: it instead directs our attention to social history. Hass further explores the limitations of language—and how it relates to poetic depictions of nature—in a second technique, that of depicting humans as animals.

Our Creature Selves

In his poems, Hass draws comparisons between humans and animals that suggest humans are themselves evolved animals and part of the natural world. When drawing these comparisons Hass often focuses on the biological force of human sexual desire. Hass's editor, the poet Stanley Kunitz, has observed: "Hass's poetry is permeated with the awareness of his creature self … with the whole chain of being" (*Field Guide* Forward xii), or, in other words, the place of the human animal within the natural world.

Hass often juxtaposes two unrelated scenes to show the parallels between the behaviour of humans and that of other animals, and consequently to imply that humans are part of the natural world. For example, in the title poem from *Human Wishes*, a poem about imagination and desire, Hass places a chimpanzee's desire for red ants beside his wife's desire for a cupboard:

<div align="center">Last night on television the ethnologist and the</div>

cameraman watched with hushed wonder while the chimpanzee care-

fully stripped a willow branch and inserted it into the anthill. He desired

red ants …

…………………………………………………………………………

… There was an empty

place in the universe where that branch wasn't and the chimp filled it, as

Earlene, finding no back on an old Welsh cupboard she had bought in

Saffron Walden, imagined one there and imagined both the cupboard

and the imagined back against a kitchen wall in Berkeley (4–7, 10–14)

By likening Earlene's ability to imagine the back of a cupboard to the chimpanzee's creation of

a tool to catch ants, the poem posits that both chimpanzee and human are able to fill "an empty /

place in the universe" created by their desire. The comparison also suggests a similarity between

the imagined worlds of humans and other animals, where imagination has traditionally been

seen as a human ability—one interpretation of the "hushed wonder" of the "ethnologist and the

cameraman" is that the poet is mocking their amazement that other animals exhibit what is

considered by them to be human behaviour.

Another way Hass suggests similarities between humans and nonhumans is by

comparing the evolution of humans with that of other animals. In "On the Coast near Sausalito"

(3–4), the opening poem of *Field Guide*, the speaker contemplates the ancient beginnings of

humans and other animals, and the way we can glimpse our own biological history through

other species. For instance, the opening section of the poem uses images that allude to our

evolutionary beginnings: the sea at low tide has "slimed rocks / mottled brown and thick with

kelp" (8–9), and they break into the "antediluvian depths" (13). As Hass states, "The old story:

here filthy life begins" (14).[39]

The poem goes on to describe the way our domestic behaviours connect us with the

natural world (Mullins qtd. in Hamilton). While fishing, the speaker thinks about the cabezone,

[39] "On the Coast near Sausalito" is also an example of the way Hass refuses to portray nature as sublime
or ideal. For example life is "filthy" (14), the fish is "ugly" (30), and the sea "was, almost, / the color of
sour milk" (2–3). Other examples include "The Pure Ones" from *Praise*, where the poet refers to "lethal
spring" (2), and "Santa Lucia" from *Praise*, where the poet describes "wildflowers, which were not
beautiful" (56).

an "ugly atavistic fish" (30) that is "not highly regarded / by fishermen" (24–25), and

"resembles a prehistoric toad" (34). But when brought into human domestic rhythms—used by

Italians who "fry the pale, almost bluish flesh / in olive oil with a sprig / of fresh rosemary"

(27–29)—the fish becomes "delicately sweet" (35). If Hass were to end the poem on that note, it

could read as redemption of the 'other' through human contact. But the final section of the

poem, where the speaker catches a cabezone, brings the speaker and the fish together within

"the violence of the food chain" (Hass *Field Guide* Preface viii–ix):

> But it's strange to kill
> for the sudden feel of life.
> The danger is
> to moralize
> that strangeness.
> Holding that spiny monster in my hands
> his bulging eyes and the sun was
> almost tangent to the planet
> on our uneasy coast.
> Creature to creature,
> we stared down the centuries. (39–50)

"The danger is to moralize that strangeness" the speaker states, but he cannot ignore the

connection he feels. The final two lines of the poem summarise the speaker's conclusion: killing

the ancient fish has allowed him to glimpse the time scales involved in its evolutionary story,

and standing "creature to creature," he recognises that story as his own.

 Likewise, Hass depicts his "creature self" in "San Pedro Road" from *Field Guide*. Once

again the speaker is fishing, and dreaming about "the great white bass" he would like to catch:

>   a carcass washes by, white meat,
> spidery translucent bones and I think I understand,
> finally dumb animal I understand, kick off boots,
> pants, socks,
> and swim,
>   thrashing dull water to a golden brown,

> terrorizing the depths with my white belly, my
>
> > enormous length,
>
> done with casting, reeling in slowly, casting … (17–25)

The speaker recognises something of himself in the carcass that "washes by": "I think I understand," he says as he takes off his "boots, / pants, socks," (19–20), the removal of his clothes suggesting a shedding of his humanity and of self-knowing.[40] When the speaker goes on to describe himself as a "dumb animal … terrorizing the depths with my white belly, my / enormous length" (19, 23–24), the description of his "white belly" echoes the "white meat" of the carcass, implying that he is like other animals, and that his desire to catch the "great white bass" is animalistic in origin.

"Quartet" from *Human Wishes* builds on Hass's depiction of the human animal. Through social and biological descriptions of two couples having dinner, the poem suggests we lead an existence that is both instinctual and rational. The couples, "in / their late thirties and stylish, but not slavishly so" (1–2), are intellectuals: "a professor of French, let's say, the / assistant curator of film at a museum … (a journalist, a sculptor, and an astronomer, etc.) " (6–7, 8). Here the indeterminacy of the diners' professions suggests that Hass wants to highlight their intellectuality rather than their specific vocations, so as to illustrate a type. The final movement of the poem describes the couples by shifting abruptly to language that might appear in a nature documentary: "Four people, the women / with soft breasts, the men with soft, ropy external genitals" (22–23). The descriptions of the sexual organs suggest base animal instincts, and purposefully contrast with the idea of fashion—"stylish"—and the diners' intellectual professions. All of this serves to underscore that base animal instincts exist alongside self-awareness and intellect.

Going a step further, in "Santa Lucia" from *Praise*, Hass proposes that we are unable to escape our biological drives because sexual desire cannot be controlled by reason. The poem opens with a woman comparing a male suitor to a hungry wolf. When the man "camps outside

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[40] As a reference to the biblical story of Adam and Eve

[her] door" he is "innocent, carnivorous" (1–2) and she calls "his body, wolfish, frail" (12). The term "carnivorous" describes his hunger for her, his desire, but "frail" implies that such desire cannot be controlled by reason: he is "frail" in its grip. By calling the man "innocent," alongside "carnivorous" and "wolfish," the poem suggests that because the man cannot control such an animalistic desire, he should not be blamed for it; his animal and biological drives have overridden his reason.

But if Hass uses desire—whether it be the desires of Earlene and the chimpanzee, or those of the "wolfish, frail" man—to depict humans as animals and to suggest that we are controlled at times by our biological forces, his poems also argue that humans are nevertheless estranged from other aspects of nature by language, rationality, and self-awareness. As with his technique of naming, Hass suggests that language may be limited in depicting the natural world. For example, the speaker of "In Weather" from *Field Guide*, a poem about the world coming out of winter, describes himself as a biologically driven animal. Yet while Hass identifies himself as an animal, he also experiences his separation from the natural world—and experiences therefore inner conflict—as a thinking animal. At the beginning of the poem the speaker feels pity or responsibility for the animals who come to "root / and scatter" (31–32) his garbage in the middle of the night. "It seems a small thing / to share what I don't want" (36–37), he says, and the extent of the poet's own waste makes him aware of his place within a larger ecosystem, and the impact he has on other creatures:

> The refuse of my life
> surrounds me and the sense of waste
> in the dreary gathering of it
> compels me all the more
> to labor for the creatures
> who quiver and are quick-eyed
> and bang the cans at night
> and are not grateful. (42–49)

Gradually, the speaker moves away from feeling separate from the creatures and begins to link

his own behaviours with their 'animal' behaviours. For example, he meditates on the behaviour of male "sea worms" (72) who live inside the female worms:

> And, eyes drifting, heart-
> sick, honed to the wind's edge,
> my mind became the male
> drowsing in that inland sea
> who lives in darkness,
> drops seed twice in twenty years
> and dies … (84–90)

The next section of the poem—a sequence about the poet's own relationship with sexual desire—draws parallels between men and the worm: a man who "spits seed" (105) into a woman is akin to the worm who "drops seed" in the darkness. While Hass draws similarities between man and worm—one reading is that the speaker finds himself as helpless as the worm when faced with the biological desire to reproduce—he nevertheless clearly distinguishes between them. The worm in his poem is "drowsing," a word that evokes comfort. The speaker, by contrast, is "heart- / sick" (84–85), the choice implying that the speaker would rather be the comforted "drowsing" worm than a man who, after spitting his seed, reacts in an upset and confused way:

> The heavy cock wields,
> rises, spits seed
> at random and the man
> shrieks, homeless
> and perfected in the empty dark.
> His god is a thrust of infinite desire (104–109)

Both the worm and the man drop or spit their "seed," but Hass's use of "shrieks" and "homeless" suggest that the man feels lost and distressed after this happens, which sits in contrast with the experience of the "drowsing" worm. The idea that the man's "cock … spits seed / at random" implies he has no control over his body when it comes to sexual desire, which is supported by the later assertion that his "god is a thrust of infinite desire," which suggests that

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his animalistic sexual desires rule the speaker—they are his "god"—and that those desires are "infinite." Hass complicates the description by stating that the man is also "perfected" by sex in the "empty dark," the darkness echoing the experience of the male worm who "lives in darkness." The contrasting experiences of the man and the worm suggest that Hass sees a conflict between our animal desires, which he calls "infinite," and our intellects: We, like the worm, can momentarily fulfil our instinctual desires, and thus for a moment be "perfected," but as thinking beings we cannot remain in that "perfected" place. Hence, in that sense, we become "homeless." The poem continues:

> I tried to hate my wife's cunt,
> the sweet place where I rooted (114–115)

The speaker's "wife's cunt" is both a "sweet place" and an object of "hate"; it is a "sweet place" because it can fulfil the "infinite" sexual desire of his animal self (signalled by the word "rooted" which suggests animal behaviour), but also a place he tries to "hate" because of the way sexual desire controls the speaker.[41]

As the poem concludes, the speaker tries to reconcile the conflict he has with his creature self. While in bed with his sleeping wife, he attempts to mimic "the almost human wail / of owls, ecstatic / in the winter trees, *twoo*, *twoo*" (142–45). While the speaker can mimic the owls' calls, he recognises they are "almost" but not "human," which suggests that he finds a distance between the owls' "ecstatic" experience and his own impersonation. The poem concludes, "My wife stirred in our bed. / Joy seized me" (147–48) as the speaker, his wife waking, sees an opportunity to once again fulfil his biological drive and desire, despite the knowledge of the loss he will feel afterwards. In the end, then, the speaker recognises that he is both similar to, and different from, other animals—similar in his instinctive drives and different due to his awareness of them. This awareness however does not diminish the power of his

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[41] The poem "Cuttings" from *Human Wishes*, where a man lies in bed after sex with his lover, also uses sex to show humans' conflicting existences. The poem states "All day / you were in a body. Now / you are in a skull" (37-39), to suggest that humans experience two existences, that of our intellectual selves as suggested by "skull," and that of our instinctual or animal selves as suggested by "body."

instincts.

If intellect estranges humans from other parts of nature and from our own instinctual

drives Hass suggests too that language is limited in its capacity to describe the instinctual

aspects of our experiences. This interest in the limits of language originates in Hass's first

collection, *Field Guide*. For example, "Spring" from that collection, expands on Hass's

depiction of animal sexual pleasure by proposing that there is a type of knowledge that exists

beyond rationality and language. Two lovers browsing in a bookstore are lectured by another

shopper about the twentieth century Italian playwright, Ugo Betti:

> We bought great ornamental oranges,
> Mexican cookies, a fragrant yellow tea.
> Browsed the bookstores. You
> asked mildly, "Bob who is Ugo Betti?"
> A bearded bird-like man
> (he looked like a Russian priest
> with imperial bearing
> and a black ransacked raincoat)
> turned to us, cleared
> his cultural throat, and
> told us both interminably
> who Ugo Betti was. The slow
> filtering of sun through windows
> glazed to gold the silky hair
> along your arms. Dusk was
> a huge weird phosphorescent beast. (1–16)

Images of the "cultural" man who appears "like a … priest," "imperial," and in a "black

ransacked raincoat," suggest that the man's cultural knowledge requires a certain austere

abstinence, which Hass then contrasts with sensuous images of animalism and the body

(Shapiro 115): "the silky hair / along your arms" and "Dusk was / a huge weird phosphorescent

beast." The contrast seems to suggest that knowledge is not compatible with animalism, or that

the lovers' view of the world is more vibrant because they experience it through their bodies

rather than, like the "cultural" man who has read Ugo Betti, through language. At the conclusion of the poem Hass explicitly contrasts the lovers' instinctual or animal experiences of the body with that of language:

> and when I said, "the limits of my language
> are the limits of my world," you laughed.
> We spoke all night in tongues,
> in fingertips, in teeth. (22–25)

The statement "the limits of my language / are the limits of my world," taken from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, can be broadly interpreted to mean that a person's idea of the world is determined by the way they are able speak about the world. Hass's placement of a quote by a philosopher concerned with language alongside the final lines of the poem where the two lovers 'speak' with their bodies in order to replace the "insufficiencies of language" (Archambeau 115), implies that he disagrees with Wittgenstein: there are ways to understand the world beyond language. For example, the lovers "spoke all night in tongues," where "tongues" can refer to the body part, to the religious experience where one speaks a language beyond translation, and to language itself. Read together, the simultaneous meanings suggest a discourse of the body, that cannot be translated—that is, Hass's interest in what makes us animals leads him to think about language. In acknowledging that there is a physical form of communication beyond language, Hass's poem denies that language can fully embody our experience of the world.

Likewise, "Like Three Fair Branches from One Root Deriv'd" from *Praise* suggests that an absence of thought is necessary if we are to experience the happiness of our animal selves. For example, the poem argues that the body achieves a state of sexual pleasure through disengagement of the mind:

> Now it is the pubic arch instead
> and smells of oils and driftwood,
> of our bodies working very hard
> at pleasure but they are not

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> thinking about us. Bless them,
>
> it is not a small thing to be
>
> happily occupied… (11–17)

The state of sexual pleasure, which Hass links to our animal selves, involves "not / thinking" (14–15). Likewise, "Santa Lucia II" from *Human Wishes* asserts that the experience of sex happens in a place that words cannot inhabit: "Pleasure is so hard to remember. It goes / so quick from the mind" (1–2). Detailing "the famous night / we first made love" (15–16) this poem more explicitly suggests that sexual experiences exist not just beyond thought but beyond language:

> It always circles back to being seen.
>
> Psyche in the dark, Psyche in the daylight
>
> counting seed. We go to the place where words
>
> aren't and we die, suffer resurrection
>
> two by two. (18–22)

The image "we die … two by two" suggests the common literary metaphor for orgasm, 'little death.' While sex becomes a way for the speaker to be "seen," it also exists in a "place where words / aren't," which is why the speaker finds the "pleasure … hard to remember." The speaker's instinctual or animal experiences exist outside of language, and therefore, for Hass, cannot be fully captured by language. Hass's interest in the human as animal leads him to explore the relationship between experience, thought, and language in these poems. Although Hass depicts humans as animals, thought and language keep us removed from our own animal natures. As with his technique of names, his depiction of the human animal questions whether language can represent our experiences and implies that the relationship between language and nature is more complicated than representationalism would suggest.

Hass's interest in the limits of language can be partially attributed to the influence of poet Yvor Winters, who taught Hass at Stanford University during the sixties. Hass adopted Winters's "reoccurring themes and oppositions … the most important of these are a concern with the distinction between realist and nominalist views of language as well as a concern with

the competing claims of the physical world and the individual intelligence" (Archambeau 100). Hass's exploration of the relationship between language and the natural world would also have been influenced by attending Stanford University "in the heady 1960s" (Coffey par. 2). During this time the influence of "various political and aesthetic upheavals taking place both in and out of the academy" (Gilbert 266) including 1960s politics, counterculture, and the Vietnam War (Davis 151) taught Hass to question authority and to balance "traditional and radical impulses" (Gilbert 266).

In line with such thinking, Hass's poems question whether abstract universals such as "nature" exist, or whether "nature" is individually constructed for each person. To do so, Hass uses two methods to suggest that poetic descriptions do not represent the natural world, but instead that meaning, as for Barad, is interactional—and our interactions with other elements of nature determine what nature "means" for us. First, Hass draws attention to the interpretive nature of names, for example the way names carry personal and historical meanings, and how these interpretations vary for each person. While these poems do not explicitly suggest that poetry is performative, Hass implies that names—and, at times, all description—are individual and cultural constructions rather than representations of the natural world. In this way, Hass's poems are in sympathy with Barad's performative notion that meaning and knowledge are created by interactions. It is an idea that contradicts the goals that motivate his other strategies of naming and particularisation of description. That is, Hass's strategies undercut his seeming trust in language to represent the world.

Hass often uses a second technique, that of qualifying language—that is, language that makes a statement less absolute—to refute the authority of his own, often figurative, descriptions of nature. While this technique also implies that poetic description is constructed rather than representative, Hass's self-conscious use of qualifying language also suggests his discomfort at describing the nonhuman world figuratively. In the next section I will argue that Hass's simultaneous use and explicit refusal of poetic technique allows the poem itself to

become an object of inquiry: That is, the poem becomes a form of phenomenon in the performative sense: The knowledge it produces materialises from Hass's inquiry into his own descriptions of the natural world. Through his exploration Hass suggests that we often mistake our constructions of nature as knowledge about the natural world, an assertion that has ethical implications.

One conclusion Hass draws from his inquiry into the relationship between poetry and the natural world can be best understood through examining the theme of longing in his poems. Hass uses the theme to imply that longing arises in part from the perceived gap between word and thing, between our desire to know a thing and its unknowability, via language. It is an argument that, similar to qualifying language, sits in tension with Hass's continued use of names and particulars to describe the natural world. This thesis argues that, instead of aiming for resolution, Hass's most complex poems—those that were challenging to examine using a first- or second-wave approach—use the tension as a strategy to explore whether poetry can ultimately represent the natural world, and if it can't, what that means for Hass as a poet. I conclude by arguing that, in doing so, Hass moves beyond the theoretical issues of representation and comes to celebrate the pleasure of the poem.

The Limitations of Language

While names allow Hass to write about nature, they also "[become] the source of exploring language's … limitations" (Olsen par. 15). This section will examine how Hass's exploration of the limitations of language results in poems that are in sympathy with the theory—as outlined in chapter one—that meaning is created through performative interactions. Through his exploration, Hass suggests that our depictions of nature are constructed rather than representative, and that we often mistake our constructed concepts of nature as knowledge about the natural world.

Although Hass argues that names help us to pay attention to the natural world, his poems also describe the way names carry personal and historical meaning. Through exploring a

name's connotations and associations, Hass suggests that both cultural and personal history influence the way we experience, interpret, and create meaning about the natural world—that is, depictions of nature are, in part, depictions of ourselves. For example, in "Songs to Survive Summer" from *Praise*, the speaker notices "the black-headed / Steller's jay is squawking / in our plum" (138–140). Later, the speaker reveals the story of German botanist and explorer Georg Wilhelm Steller, who joined an expedition to Alaska with Vitus Bering:

> he'd connived to join
> the expedition and put
> his name to all the beasts
> and flowers of the north. (250–254)

Of the six new species Steller discovered on the voyage, five were named after him. By dwelling on the way Steller "put / his name to all the beasts," Hass reminds us that the names we use to describe nature have as much to do with the situations in which they were applied as they do with the natural world. The idea echoes Oppermann's argument that our depictions of nature are, in some part, created from previously learned discourses, as the poem describes an interpretive moment between observer and object, where the observer draws on historical information—the bird's name—to describe the natural world. By using "Steller's jay" early in the poem, and then delaying the explanation of the name, Hass not only implies that cultural interpretations play an important part in the creation of meaning, but that we may be unaware of them.

In "English: An Ode" from *Sun Under Wood*, Hass expands on the idea that language carries historical meanings (Davis 152) by exploring the etymology of particular words. For example, the poem jokes about being "*at loggerheads* / with the critics" (90–91) and then discusses the origin of the word "loggerheads" as "heavy brass balls attached to long sticks; / they were heated on shipboard and plunged into buckets of tar / to soften it for use" (106–108). Later in the poem, the speaker recognises a bird:

> And we heard a high two-note whistle: once,

twice and then again with a high vibrato tailing.

"What's that?" "Loggerhead shrike." (120–122)

By dwelling on what Davis calls the "historical condition of language—its subjectivity, cultural particularity, its temporal contingency" (195)—and by highlighting the word "loggerhead" as a bird's name,[42] Hass draws attention to the way names carry historical meanings. While Davis suggests that Hass wants to create a space where he can move from social to personal history in order to bring personal history into a shared landscape (185), the poem can also be read as exploring the way our concept of nature is defined, depicted, and constructed through language. Hass's explicit discussion of the origin of the name suggests the way historical discourses can be embedded in language and can (often unknowingly) become part of our own interpretations.

Along with historical meanings, Hass's poems also suggest that the language we use reflects personal information rather than the particularity of what is being described. Critic Vernon Shetley refers to this idea when he states that Hass's poems have "a highly precise vocabulary of observation with a richly nuanced sense of the way that conceptual categories shape perception" (Shetley 172), or in other words, that Hass's "precise" way of writing—his use of names and close descriptions—indicates he understands that language influences the way we create meaning about the natural world.

For example, in "Weed" from *Praise*, Hass shows how personal associations with the name "horse-parsnips" (24) have shaped the way the speaker sees the plant:

Horse is Lorca's word, fierce as wind
or melancholy, gorgeous, Andalusian:
white horse grazing near the river dust;
and parsnip is hopeless,
second cousin to the rhubarb
which is already second cousin
to an apple pie. Marrying the words

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[42] Named because of its large head, the Loggerhead Shrike is also commonly called the Butcherbird (the genus Lanius from its Latin name Lanius ludovicianus meaning butcher) because of the way it impales its prey on thorns and spikes. The 'shrike' component of the name refers to the bird's shrieking call, which Hass instead describes more specifically as a "two-note whistle … with a high vibrato tailing" (120-1).

> to the coarse white umbels sprouting
>
>> on the first of May is history
>
> but conveys nothing. (1–10)

The physical experience of the "green ungainly stalks, / the bracts and bright white flowerets" (22–23) of horse-parsnip have been lost through the language used to name the plant (Davis 190). The poem argues that history is responsible—"Marrying the words …. is history"—for the plant's name, but also that the historical association of the words "horse" and "parsnip" "conveys nothing" about the physical plant. For example, Hass states that "Horse is Lorca's word," referring to avant-garde Spanish poet, Federico García Lorca, who featured horses in his poetry, and that when compared to rhubarb or apples which are fruit made into sweet pies— apple pie being a traditional symbol of American prosperity—the parsnip is "hopeless." Hass's underlying assertion is that names reflect the interpretive act of naming rather than what is named—they reflect culture rather than nature per se.

But if Hass argues for language as a reflection of history, he would also seem to suggest that this history varies with the beholder; in the poem, the act of observation creates a unique description that arises from the speaker, rather than an objective description of the plant. For example, Hass's exploration of the historical associations of the words "horse" and "parsnip" are written from a particular perspective: as a poet, he associates horse with another poet, and as an American he sees the parsnip in the context of his culturally relevant apple pie. So while Hass's meditation on "horse-parsnips" proposes that words carry historical associations, which may have little to do with what they have named, his comparisons also imply that, for him as the observer, words carry very particular cultural associations—whether that culture is national (American) or professional (poet)—which materialise as meaning in the poem. In this way, Hass's poem is in sympathy with the notion that discursive practices—that is, what "constrains and enables what can be said" (Barad 819)—are causally involved in the way knowledge is

created.[43]

In the melancholy "The Apple Trees at Olema" from *Human Wishes*, Hass explicitly

argues that names reflect personal associations rather than nature per se. In the poem, two lovers

walk in the woods where they speculate on a "leopard-spotted / leaf-green flower whose name

they didn't know" (8–9); "Trout lily, he said; she said, adder's-tongue" (10). While the names

can be read as metaphors for the way the two people view their relationship, they also suggest

that the man and the woman see the plant differently due to their emotional states. For example,

"Trout lily" implies tenderness through the slow movement of the fish and the soft petalled

flower, whereas "adder's-tongue" implies tension and danger through the flickering of a snake's

tongue, and the possibility of being bitten. The man (who viewed the flower as tender) wants to

connect with the woman, looking to her "to mirror his response" (14). When walking together

he "could be knocking wildly at a closed door / in a dream" (17–18), which suggests illusion

and expulsion, but also the desire to be let in. The woman, on the other hand (who named the

flower after a snake) ignores the man to focus on the apple trees, and instead "lets them in" (24).

In the poem, Hass develops his argument in two ways: first, he suggests that

description, as well as names, is constructed rather than representative; and second, that each

interaction between observer and object creates an uniquely different construction. To do this,

Hass provides contrasting interpretations of apple trees in order to explore how the relationship

between observer and object creates meaning. When the two lovers come upon "two old

neglected apple trees" (3), the woman interprets the trees in two ways. In her first response she

is "shaken by the raw, white, backlit flaring / of the apple blossoms" (11–12), and she expresses

repulsion at the blossoms' "torn flesh" (20). Later, though, she calls the flowers "tender" (22).

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[43] Such a reading could also be made by the field of poststructuralism, and there are parallels between the two fields (Barad having stated that poststructuralists invoke performativity [807]). For example, neither performativity or poststructuralism view meaning as an inherent property of the sign-referent relationship (as with naïve realism) (Barad Footnote 7 807). Where poststructuralism and performativity diverge is in the creation of meaning: poststructuralists see meaning as arising from a sign's difference to other signs, which makes meaning always in some sense absent (Eagleton), whereas performative theories view meaning as arising from practices and actions between agents, so while meaning is equally constructed, it is not absent or impotent. For Barad, matter and meaning arise concurrently and causally within phenomena (822). The ethical implications of her theory will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

While it would be an imposition to state that the poem explicitly describes the apple trees as active in the creation of meaning (as Barad's theory suggests), Hass's imagery of the apple tree and the snake, which evoke the Garden of Eden and its themes of knowing and not knowing, implicitly questions how we come to know the world. Through the couple's many interpretations of the plants in the poem, Hass suggests that meaning is created dynamically and changes for each unique interaction (for example, the woman's changing view of the tree as "raw" and then "tender"). Such a depiction implies that language is not an objective way to know the natural world—as Hass has previously suggested of names—but instead describes the meaning that arises from interactions.

In "Iowa City: Early April" from *Sun Under Wood*, Hass begins to explicitly suggest that description stems from performative interactions, that is, meaning is not an expression of the sign-referent relationship, but instead is constituted through the act of performing the very meaning that is "said to be its results" (Butler qtd. Merley 18). In this instance, the interaction takes place between a raccoon and a man. The poem describes the private lives of the creatures that share the speaker's world: a bright orange cat on a patch of new grass, a "dazed woodchuck" (9) in the roots of a tree, and a raccoon that the speaker "thinks" is after "a wad of oatmeal" (6). The poem continues:

> and this life going on about my life, or living a life about all this life
>> going on.
> Being a creature, whatever my drama of the moment, at the edge
>> of the raccoon's world—
> He froze in my flashlight beam and looked down, no affect, just
>> looked,
> The ringtail curled and flared to make him look bigger and not to
>> be messed with—
> I was thinking he couldn't know how charming his comic-book
>> robber's mask was to me,
> That his experience of his being and mine of his and his of mine
>> were things entirely apart … (69–80)

In stating that his life is just one "drama" among the many that take place for the creatures that inhabit his home, the speaker acknowledges he is not the centre of the complex ecosystem, especially in relation to the raccoon, where the speaker exists at the "edge" of its world. When the speaker encounters the raccoon, it bristles in order to "look bigger." Instead of seeing the raccoon as threatening, though, the speaker calls him "charming" and uses a culturally based description—the "comic-book / robber's mask"—to describe the raccoon's markings. Not only does the metaphor of the mask suggest that the speaker knows and interprets the animal through his own cultural references, but "comic" indicates that the speaker finds the raccoon's display humorous rather than threatening. The distance between the raccoon's threatening posture and the speaker's comical interpretation makes the speaker realise that their experience of the encounter is "entirely apart." While Hass continues to depict the natural world as particular (he names the animal as a raccoon and describes its behaviour), the poem acknowledges that raccoon and man experience the encounter in different ways, which suggests that both raccoon and man are active agents in the creation of the experience's meaning where the raccoon is threatened, and the man is amused. In this way, the meaning in the poem, as for Barad, is performative—that is, it is the interaction between raccoon and man that creates what nature means for the man.

From an ecocritical perspective, there is benefit in focusing on the performative aspects of how meaning is created, because, as theorist Jonathan Levin states, it is important to "pay careful attention to how we experience the natural world, as well as our literary representations of it, in order to devote a greater consideration to the many ways in which we invariably shape the world we inhabit, for good and ill" (Arnold et al 1098). In other words, our understanding of the way meaning is created influences the way we view representations of nature in literature. For example, in "English: An Ode," "Weed," and "The Apple Trees at Olema," Hass suggests that, rather than being an objective representation of the natural world, meaning is influenced by

historical, personal, and situational information. While Hass's poems are not polemic,[44] his

poems draw attention to the way we often mistake our constructed concepts as knowledge about

the natural world. Such a suggestion asks the reader to critically engage with their own

depictions of nature in order to uncover whether or not they are using the nonhuman world for

human intention. If literature reflects culture and context rather than nature per se, and, as

Oppermann argues, all discourse is created from previous learned discourses, then the concepts

we perpetuate in literature (and in our lives) inform future discourses, with the implication that

meaning informs use.

Qualifying Language

While Hass's assertion that meaning is constructed (rather than representative) is in sympathy

with theories of performativity, other poems explicitly suggest that the poem itself is a form of

performative phenomenon, or, as Cooperman's argues, that "by any measure a poem is

relational, an act as much as an artifact" (186). In other words, the poem does not reflect

meaning, but is a phenomenon that performs an interaction from which meaning arises. One

way Hass creates meaning with his poems is through his use of what I am calling qualifying

language, the second technique he uses to explore the limitations of language. Through using

qualifying language, for example, such words as "almost," "I think," "perhaps," and "probably,"

Hass makes his statements less absolute and raises doubt for the reader. One critic calls this

practice a balancing of "Western knowledge and Eastern no-knowledge" (Davison par. 10), and

Hass uses the method as a way to question the authority of his descriptions—especially those

that are figurative—and to use the poem to inquire into the relationship between poetry and the

world. Using this technique, Hass suggests that figurative description reduces the natural world

to symbol.

The inquiry stems from Hass's concern that poetic description reflects human intention.

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[44] Some of Hass's poems are explicitly environmental. For example, "My Mother's Nipples" from *Sun Under Wood* describes the destruction of "the upper meadow at Sqaw Valley" (2) for housing development.

In Hass's collection of essays *Twentieth Century Pleasures* he suggests that description can give a false impression of ownership, whereas, as previously stated, Hass hopes that "certain kinds of fidelity of attention" (*Field Guide* Preface x) can describe the natural world outside of human concerns. Hass believes that images can,

> marry the world, but . . . do not claim to possess it … As someone can own a piece of land and have the power to change it or dispose of it as he pleases, and someone else can use that land, walk on it, work it, know the color of it changed in gray light, when the wild radish flowers, where the deer leave imprints of their bedding down, and not own it, have no external claim to it. (305)

For example, in "Old Dominion" from *Praise*, Hass suggests the risk of using the nonhuman world figuratively:

> The shadows of late afternoon and the odors
> of honeysuckle are a congruent sadness.
> Everything is easy but wrong. (1–3)

Hass finds it easy to use the perfumed honeysuckle as a symbol for his sadness, but he recognises, as Miklitsch says, that "when the world translates too easily, something is wrong—on the imaginative plane, the consequence is facility, impotence; on the emotional plane, depression, sadness" (par. 17). Hass's statement that "[e]verything is easy but wrong" seems to suggest that he feels uncomfortable at his use of figurative language to describe the natural world—his statement that the "honeysuckle" represents "sadness"—in case it leads to possession. Likewise, in "On the Coast near Sausalito" from *Field Guide*, Hass uses qualifiers to undermine his description of the sea. The speaker states: "I won't say much for the sea / except that it was, almost, / the color of sour milk" (1–3). While, as Davis argues, Hass's "over-determined" or exaggerated description of the sea as "sour milk" turns away from conventional poetic associations of the sea with "the Mother" (158), his qualifying "almost" goes one step further and revokes Hass's authority to figuratively interpret the sea: to view the sea, as Barad would argue, as a passive agent. The result is a simultaneous use and refusal of poetic technique

which shows Hass's desire to describe the sea, but his discomfort at transforming the sea by way of metaphor least he interpret the natural world through human desire.

In "Dragonflies Mating" from *Sun Under Wood*, Hass qualifies his descriptions by using language such as "I think" (1), "perhaps" (7), and "probably" (16):

> I think (on what evidence?) that they are different from us.
> That they mate and are done with mating.
>
> They don't carry all this half-mated longing up out of childhood
> and then go looking for it everywhere.
> And so, I think, they can't wound each other the way we do.
> They don't go through life dizzy or groggy with their hunger,
> kill with it, smear it on everything, though it is perhaps also true
> that nothing happens to them quite like what happens to us
> when the blue-backed swallow dips swiftly toward the green pond
> and the pond's green-and-blue reflected swallow marries it a
> > moment
> in the reflected sky and the heart goes out to the end of the rope
> it has been throwing into abyss after abyss, and a singing
> > shimmers
> from every color the morning has risen into.
>
> My insect instructors have stilled, they are probably stuck
> > together
> in some bliss and minute pulse of after-longing
> evolution worked out to suck the last juice of the world
> into the receiver body. They can't separate probably
> until it is done. (101–121)

The sequence appears as the final section of a poem that explores the way language and stories are linked to place.[45] Hass opens the sequence with a statement, "I think (on what evidence?) that they are different from us," which implies that the speaker is speculating on the motivations

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[45] In this instance California, from the Channel Island Indians to the missionaries of St Raphael's Parish, and to Hass's own alcoholic mother.

of the dragonflies. Hass also qualifies his statement that dragonflies cannot emotionally wound: "I think" (105) he says, and when stating "nothing happens to them quite like what happens to us" (108), Hass qualifies the statement with "perhaps" (108). The passage indicates that while the speaker can describe the dragonflies, he views his description warily as a subjective interpretation of their behaviour. At the end of the poem when the dragonflies have stopped mating, the speaker qualifies his description twice with "probably": "they are probably stuck together" (116) and "they can't separate probably / until it is done" (120–121). The second instance feels shoe-horned into the line after "separate" as though the awkward interruption to the line's rhythm intends to draw attention to the speaker's uneasiness when interpreting the dragonflies' behaviour.

The poem can be read in a variety of ways. One reading is that through using qualifying language Hass implies that the speaker's descriptions are an interpretation, and ultimately cedes authority, at least about the dragonflies' true intention, to them. This reading seems too simplistic, though, for a poet concerned with nature, representation, and language. A closer reading suggests that while the speaker learns about the dragonflies from watching their behaviour, he also uses the dragonflies to meditate on his true subject, that of human sexuality and desire. Stating that the dragonflies are "insect instructors" releases the speaker from the need to research human biology, and instead he uses the behaviour of other creatures to reflect on the melodrama of human sexual relationships—our "half-mated longing." In that context, Hass's self-conscious use of qualifying language acknowledges that the speaker uses the dragonflies as a symbol. The discomfort Hass experiences at using the nonhuman world figuratively—that is, as a form of human intention rather than as a representation of the natural world—can be linked back to Hass's desire for images that "marry the world, but . . . do not claim to possess it" (305). By having one part of the poem—his qualifying language—perform an inquiry into another part of the poem—his figurative description, Hass highlights the way figurative description can reduce the natural world to symbol.

Likewise, "Happiness" from *Sun Under Wood* investigates the imposition of figurative language. While the poem is primarily about the poet's happiness, it also explores how meaning is created through the act of seeing and describing, and how this meaning can transform the natural world to symbol:

> Because yesterday morning from the steamy window
> we saw a pair of red foxes across the creek
> eating the last windfall apples in the rain—
> they looked up at us with their green eyes
> long enough to symbolize the wakefulness of living things
> and then went back to eating—
>
> and because this morning
> when she went into the gazebo with her black pen and yellow pad
> to coax an inquisitive soul
> from what she thinks of as the reluctance of matter (1-10)

The speaker in the poem momentarily connects with the foxes, and this is long enough for him to interpret the creatures figuratively as "the wakefulness of living things." The foxes turn away, though, which challenges the speaker's ability to turn them to symbol: the foxes return "to eating" unaffected by the speaker. In this way the poem manifests the speaker's looking, and the resistant action of the foxes. The idea is echoed by the speaker's wife who, when writing with "her black pen and yellow pad" also finds herself hindered by the "reluctance of matter" to be described in a way that fulfils her intentions: "to coax an inquisitive soul."

Of the sequence, Altieri argues: "The effect is not to push beyond the landscape to symbol but to make the processes of thinking themselves a material feature of atmosphere, as if poetry could provide a Cezannesque thickness that renders the medium as inseparably part of what and how the world gets 'realized'" ("Avant-Garde" 635). In other words, Altieri suggests that the poem not only enacts the way our thought processes create meaning about the natural world, but suggests that poetry itself is an inseparable part of that creation. It is an argument for poetry as a performative phenomena: through highlighting the interaction between the speaker's

description of the foxes, and the foxes' rejection of that description, meaning is created or constituted by the poem.

Later in the poem the speaker uses qualifying language when struggling to describe a flock of swans:

> a small flock of tundra swans
> for the second winter in a row was feeding on new grass
> in the soaked fields; they symbolize mystery, I suppose,
> they are also called whistling swans, are very white,
> and their eyes are black— (14–18)

The speaker calls the swans "tundra swans," but signals that he is not satisfied with the name because he goes on to use "whistling swans" and state that the swans "symbolize mystery." Unlike the foxes, though, the speaker undercuts his own figurative description with the qualifying "I suppose." The use of multiple names and qualifying language suggests that since describing the foxes, the speaker has become aware that the act of seeing and describing can transform the natural world to symbol, both in the sense of nomenclature, and in terms of figurative description. As a final attempt to avoid describing the swans through human intention, the speaker resorts to using simple and literal language, for example "very white" and "eyes are black."

Through this self-conscious use and refusal of poetic technique Hass makes the poem an object of inquiry—that is, one part of the poem examines another part of the poem, the outcome of which is the creation of meaning. The idea reflects Barad's epistemological notion that meaning is created through "discursive practices" where the "boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted" (828). In other words, meaning materialises dynamically through interactions, rather than through the exclusive relationship between word and referent of naïve realism. While Hass's depictions of nature arise from one sort of performative interaction—that is, they are a record of the interaction between the poet and the natural world—some poems also perform an interaction between Hass's self-conscious qualifying

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language and his figurative descriptions of the natural world. In this way, meaning is created and constituted by the poem: both poet and reader come to understand that figurative description symbolises human concerns, and that those descriptions are often mistaken for objective knowledge about the natural world.

By examining the performative themes in Hass's poems, the reading highlights the way Hass explicitly creates tension between his use of names and particulars to describe the natural world—his "fidelity" of description (*Field Guide* Preface x)—and his simultaneous questioning of those descriptions. The creation of such tension raises the questions: Why does Hass make this tension so explicit? What does Hass conclude from his inquiry? While critical attention has been paid to the different tensions that exist in Hass's poetry, for example the tension between religion and language (addressed in a series of essays by Altieri in the 1980s) or the tension between politics and language (addressed by Thomas Wesley Davis, 2002, and Roger Gilbert, 2012), little has been written about the tension between Hass's simultaneous use and refusal of names and figurative language. The next section will provide a reading of that tension, which signals a concern in Hass's poetry that is larger than undercutting individual figurative images as a way to show the constructed nature of description. The next section argues that, instead, Hass uses the tension to enact the argument between realism and poststructuralism in his poetry, and to suggest, as an alternative, that poetry can be celebrated as a pleasure in itself.

Language, Loss, and Tension

Instead of shying away from the tension created by his simultaneous use and refusal of naming and figurative language, Hass uses the tension as a strategy to explore whether poetry can ultimately represent the natural world, and if it can't, what that means for Hass as a poet. One way Hass explores this issue is through the theme of loss, especially in regards to the loss that occurs when we realise that language cannot recreate the world. That is, a sense of loss develops when the speaker recognises the gap between the world and the words we use to try to know it. These themes are particularly clear in "Meditation at Lagunitas" from *Praise,* so my analysis

will focus on this poem. [46] Like "Happiness," "Meditation at Lagunitas" makes the poem an

object of inquiry—that is, one part of the poem questions another part of the poem. In this

instance, the poem implies that we should not try to resolve the theoretical issues of language

and representation, and instead celebrate and take pleasure in the experience of poetry.

The poem "Meditation at Lagunitas" sees Hass explicitly engage with the complex

relationship between language and the world. In this poem Hass places a theoretical discussion

about the relationship between words and the world beside tangible descriptions of nature and

descriptions of the speaker's memories. The juxtaposition leads to a meditation on the nature of

the distance between people and between words and the world, which finally culminates in an

assertion about poetry. It is worth quoting the poem in full:

> All the new thinking is about loss.
> In this it resembles all the old thinking.
> The idea, for example, that each particular erases
> the luminous clarity of a general idea. That the clown-
> faced woodpecker probing the dead sculpted trunk
> of that black birch is, by his presence,
> some tragic falling off from a first world
> of undivided light. Or the other notion that,
> because there is in this world no one thing
> to which the bramble of *blackberry* corresponds,
> a word is elegy to what it signifies.
> We talked about it late last night and in the voice
> of my friend, there was a thin wire of grief, a tone
> almost querulous. After a while I understood that,
> talking this way, everything dissolves: *justice*,

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[46] Other poems explore similar ideas, but due to considerations of space, this section will focus on "Meditation at Lagunitas" which most explicitly explores the themes. For other poems that explore similar themes see "The Image" from *Praise* which meditates on the way humans reconstitute the world, and the pleasure that comes from that phenomena; "Picking Blackberries with a Friend Who Has Been Reading Jacques Lacan" from *Praise* which playfully enacts with the distance between word and the world; "Spring Rain" from *Human Wishes* which uses the idea of simulation to suggest that language—although flawed—is the only tool we have available to recreate our experiences of the natural world through imaginative phenomena; and "Spring Drawing" from *Human Wishes,* a poem that directly addresses how art represents the world, and suggests that by being aware of the artifice of our artistic representations, and of the distance between words and the world, we can appreciate art as phenomena.

pine, *hair*, *woman*, *you* and *I*. There was a woman

I made love to and I remember how, holding

her small shoulders in my hands sometimes,

I felt a violent wonder at her presence

like a thirst for salt, for my childhood river

with its island willows, silly music from the pleasure boat,

muddy places where we caught the little orange-silver fish

called *pumpkinseed*. It hardly had to do with her.

Longing, we say, because desire is full

of endless distances. I must have been the same to her.

But I remember so much, the way her hands dismantled bread,

the thing her father said that hurt her, what

she dreamed. There are moments when the body is as numinous

as words, days that are the good flesh continuing.

Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings,

saying *blackberry*, *blackberry*, *blackberry*.

In the opening lines of the poem, Hass states that two theories, that of the "old thinking" which can be read as the Platonic idea of forms (Hood 49), and that of the "new thinking," which Hass has said refers to "French philosophy, linguistic philosophy" (qtd. in Neubauer 23), are both about "loss." The different theories can be summarised by the idea that "a word is elegy to what it signifies," or simply put, words can only symbolise—rather than embody—the world. While outlining the argument, Hass uses an academic or "a surprisingly off-key tone" (Boland 25), which departs from his "usual smooth, lyrical syntax" (Gilbert 267). The tone distances the speaker from the different theories, as do his references to them as "the idea" and "the other notion" rather than "my idea" and "my notion." Hass also names some of the inhabitants of Lagunitas—the "clown-/faced woodpecker" in "that black birch"—to suggest that the conclusion that "particulars" are a "tragic" separation from the pure idea may not be entirely correct; the description "that black birch" suggests that, in this instance, particulars help the speaker recall his memory of a specific woodpecker in a specific tree.

Hass, as a poet, is primarily interested in the idea ("the other notion") that an

unassailable distance exists between the words he uses to describe the world, for example "blackberry," and the object to which it corresponds. In discussing the theory, the speaker uses the word "elegy"—that is, a poem about loss which traditionally moves from praise, to lament, and then to consolation—to imply that language is partially a lament for the loss that occurs in the translation between a word (or language) and "what it signifies" (or the physical world) (Gardner, Hoey 501). As the poem continues, Hass responds to the idea:

> We talked about it late last night and in the voice
> of my friend, there was a thin wire of grief, a tone
> almost querulous. After a while I understood that,
> talking this way, everything dissolves: *justice*,
> *pine*, *hair*, *woman*, *you* and *I*. (13–17)

All words, even those for physical objects such as a "*pine*, *hair*, *woman*," are reduced to arbitrary signs. For the speaker and his friend this causes "grief" at the loss of a direct connection between words and objects. While Hass states "everything dissolves," his poetics imply that he does not fully believe the statement. Instead, the clear list of particulars—"*justice*, / *pine*, *hair*, *woman*, *you*, and *I*"—suggests that Hass wants to resist the implication that there is no connection between words and the world. The italicisation of the list indicates it is a list of words rather than objects, which implies that Hass is not primarily concerned with the physical "*hair*" or "*woman*" disappearing, but with the way theorising language can dissolve or numb our experience of language.

The list also acts as a transition to the second half of the poem, which shifts from an academic tone to Hass's familiar conversational one. The tonal change[47] can be read as the beginning of Hass's interrogation of the "new thinking," and he focuses on specific memories in order to show how they can be recalled through language. In this way the poem enacts the

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[47] Hass has used tonal change before to signal different theoretical viewpoints. Critic Roger Gilbert identified in the poem "Berkeley Eclogue" from *Human Wishes*: "The poem's free-floating anxiety, as manifested by the intrusive badgering of the second voice, arises chiefly from Hass's desire and inability to reconcile these two kinds of information, or to prevent the second from hollowing out the first" (267). Whereas the "two kinds of information" Gilbert refers to are the sensual and the political, Hass creates a similar tension in "Meditation at Lagunitas" between the theoretical and the sensual.

argument the speaker is having with himself between two positions: first, that a "word is elegy to what it signifies," or the poststructuralist position, and second, that the world can be recalled through language, or the position assumed by realism. It is worth looking at the passage again:

> There was a woman
> I made love to and I remember how, holding
> her small shoulders in my hands sometimes,
> I felt a violent wonder at her presence
> like a thirst for salt, for my childhood river
> with its island willows, silly music from the pleasure boat,
> muddy places where we caught the little orange-silver fish
> called *pumpkinseed*. It hardly had to do with her.
> Longing, we say, because desire is full
> of endless distances. I must have been the same to her. (13–23)

Hass's concrete and specific memories appear to sit in tension with the poem's stated theory that words cannot represent the world, as the retelling dramatises those memories: the woman's "small shoulders" in his hands, the "orange-silver fish / called *pumpkinseed*," the "island willows" and "music from the pleasure boat." While the concrete and personal imagery may appear divorced from the theoretical discussion earlier in the poem, Hass uses the description of the speaker's memories, which he can only recall through language, to suggest that words perform a function that is more than elegy.

In the poem, the memory of the woman allows the speaker to re-experience how he felt in the relationship. Hass has chosen memories that are emotional and physical: they "made love," and he felt a sensation for her like "thirst." The heightened emotion evokes longing in the speaker, which leads him to recall his childhood: his "violent wonder" for the woman was "like" his feelings of longing for childhood. "It hardly had to do with her," the poem states, implying that the emotion from one experience—the woman—acts as a catalyst for the speaker to recall other memories of longing: the two memories together creating a new experience.

Critic Robert Miklitsch echoes the idea when he asserts that although words "reconstitute" the world, they can only do so in our imagination. He states:

> … words are a kind of magic, magical as life itself: they reconstitute a world, a
>
> continuous self (discourse)—neither a past world (which is irredeemably lost) or the
>
> "real" one (which is discontinuous)—but an imagined world, a world of imaginings. If
>
> there are limits to imagination, … those limits are language. (5)

The poem is in sympathy with Miklitsch's observation. The following lines suggest that while recollection through language involves loss, a certain type of "magic" occurs: "Longing, we say, because desire is full / of endless distances," the line break implying that while the speaker's memories cause him to experience longing, that experience is both "full" and "endless" at the same time. While, as Miklitsch states, the physical past is "irredeemably lost," and the speaker feels longing at the gap between his recollections and the past, the poem also suggests that something "full" happens through the act of recollection.

The idea is supported by the final passages of the poem, where the speaker questions his conclusion that words are "elegy" by returning to specific details of his relationship with the woman:

> But I remember so much, the way her hands dismantled bread,
> the thing her father said that hurt her, what
> she dreamed. (26–28)

The speaker's use of "But," and the details that show the couple's intimacy, such as "the way her hands dismantled bread," "what / she dreamed," suggest that even though distance may exist between words and the world—between memory and experience—that words still allow the speaker to engage with the world. This leads the speaker to conclude that language and recollection may be valuable in itself:

> There are moments when the body is as numinous
> as words, days that are the good flesh continuing.
> Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings,
> saying *blackberry, blackberry, blackberry*. (28–31)

Through the speaker's recollections of his relationship with the woman, he lifts "the body" to the "numinous" level of language, and is convinced there are times when the experience of the

body can recall and inhabit his memories. The idea relates back to Hass's argument that some forms of knowledge exist outside of language and can only be understood by the body, for example the lovers in "Spring" from *Field Guide* who speak "all night in tongues, / in fingertips, in teeth" (22–25). In that sense, the assertion suggests that the discourses of the "flesh" can be sparked by language and memory.

Before fully examining the final lines, it is worth discussing other critical responses, which mostly read the lines as a resolution. For example, Eavan Boland has said: "Of course the poignancy of this lies in the fact that the poem is a tapestry made from the elegies and yet is not an elegy … If anything, the poem is an affirmation, taking language and moving it steadily toward healing and resolution" (25). Altieri also interprets the "tactile evocations" of the repeated final chant as resolution, and a way to gain appreciation for how the "speech act" and memory is one way to express and deal with extreme experiences, such as loss ("Sensibility" 465–466).

On the other hand, Davis argues that the poem's close "arises out of the failure of language" and that it is an "apology … they are only words, and words are abstract" (191). Davis goes on to insightfully observe that the poem's conclusion is about poetry when he asserts the final chanted "*blackberry*" "becomes its own particular truth … That lyrical hush of blackberry, blackberry doesn't refer" (169–170), or simply put, the words are spoken for the pleasure of their sound, and not for their function as elegy. In contrast, Alan Shapiro argues that the poem's conclusion signals "the divisions we assume between experience and representations of experience, self and other, word and thing, simply do not matter: instead of longing … the good flesh can continue" (118).

But these readings of Hass's "*blackberry, blackberry, blackberry*" do not take into account the tension and contradiction Hass creates through the argument he enacts in the poem. Hass's constant movement between the ultimate failure of language, and wanting to see language as more active and productive than an elegy or signifier, suggests that he desires to

find a third option. In a sense, the poem itself can be read as an elegy as it follows an elegy's traditional movement from praise, to lament, and then an attempt at consolation. For example, at the beginning the speaker's attentive description of the "new thinking" (and his subsequent grief) can be read as imbuing the theory with authority—a form of praise—which is quickly followed by the lament that "everything dissolves." The speaker then tries for consolation by using specific language to recall his memories, such as the name "*pumpkinseed*," and suggests that, through the body, there are ways to know the world without recourse to language. Still, as critic Lisel Olsen argues, "[r]eaders who understand 'Meditation at Lagunitas' as a poem arriving at total, genuine fulfilment miss the tenuousness that makes Hass's work compelling" (par. 15). While the speaker finds some consolation, he also discovers longing's "endless distances," which lead him to the final lines and, as I argue, Hass's third option: consolation in art itself.

In a discussion about "Meditation at Lagunitas" Hass explains why he views words used in poetry as more than signifiers:

> … this poem makes me nervous … what I had been talking to my friends about, was French philosophy, linguistic philosophy, which in effect says man uses words as a substitute; he can't have the thing so he has words … I hate that idea. It is probably true. I hate it. And I think that something happens to words in art that's different. (Hass qtd. in Neubauer 23)

While Hass says he thinks that the theory discussed in the poem "is probably true," it contradicts his experience of writing poetry, where "something happens to words in art that's different." Hass also touched on the subject when discussing the poststructuralist idea of signs, stating that language "is simply not … a marker, or a sound or set of symbols representing a sign. That functional definition simply doesn't cover our actual experience of language which is much livelier than that, more radiant" (qtd. "Poets Q&A: Robert Hass." par. 8). For Hass, words become an experience in themselves, outside of their representational element, and it is this

argument that the poem performs.

The refusal of Hass's poems to resolve issues about language and representation has frustrated some critics. Shapiro states:

> [Hass] relies principally on impression and on the juxtaposition of fragmentary details … this I think … frustrates and defeats at times the intentions that lead him to a more inclusive style. If he truly desires to bring his art closer to the center of life where 'the good flesh continues,' he will have to develop a method of composition that is not so inextricably bound up with the intensity of the marginal and momentary, a method that is not, in other words, a kind of formalization of longing itself. (120)

I would argue that while Shapiro correctly identifies that Hass enacts longing with his poetics, he fails to understand that Hass does not view longing as a form of loss. The inconclusive nature of Hass's poetics can be seen as his way to make the poem an object of inquiry that performs an argument about the role of poetry in our relationship to the natural world, the outcome of the argument being to celebrate the poem as something in itself, rather than as representation—that is, rather than as a means to connect with what it purportedly describes.

More broadly, what Altieri, Boland, Shapiro, and Davis miss is that Hass, through the final chanted repetition of the word "*blackberry,*" signals the pleasure that language provides, both in terms of sound and in the bodily experience of language's "tenderness." Hass uses the word not to represent a blackberry, or even a particular moment of speaking the word, but to reaffirm the way language can constitute an experience through emotion—in this instance the feelings of nostalgia and intimacy that arise as the speaker remembers evenings with the woman, even if that experience is not truly an accurate description of the world. Equally, the repetition also suggests that there is enjoyment (Chiasson) in the "tenderness" or pleasure of saying and hearing the word "*blackberry*" aside from its associations with memory.

Hass's inquiry into the relationship between language, nature, and representation in poetry, results in a statement about the nature of poetry, or as Davis states: "All the thinking

about language, caught up in language, becomes thinking about art" (172). In this way, Hass's argument about the distance between his depictions and the world becomes not an argument for or against the poem's ability to accurately depict the natural world—that is, in the end, the wrong question. Hass's refusal to resolve the tension in his poems suggests that we also should not try to resolve these theoretical issues, lest "everything dissolves." Instead, it is an argument that the depiction itself, as an experience, is worthwhile. In this way, Hass's chanted "*blackberry, blackberry, blackberry*" can be read as a way to create a space in the poem where both the speaker and the reader are aware that our representations are recollections rather than full realisations, and through this awareness, enjoy poetry for the pleasure it provides.

Conclusion

Robert Hass's early collections—*Field Guide*, *Praise*, *Human Wishes*, and *Sun Under Wood*—explore the relationship between language and the world. Within a single poem Hass moves from depicting the natural world as particular and knowable to one that is mediated and inaccessible. In essence, Hass's poems enact an argument that he is having with himself, which is also the argument that literary theorists are having about whether language can accurately represent the world, or whether language cannot represent reality because its meaning is determined through a sign's differential relationship to all other signs.

To answer the first question posed by this thesis—What poetic strategies and techniques does Hass use to depict nature in his poetry?—we must first look at Hass's use of naming and particularities, and his portrayal of what we might call our creature selves, or human instinctual behaviour. These techniques create a complex and sometimes contradictory depiction of the natural world.

In Hass's poems, the natural world is detailed and particular—every plant and animal has a name by which it can be identified, which suggests that, through classification, the natural world is knowable, and that language can accurately represent the world. Hass's poems also imply that through naming we safely connect with the natural world, as the lovers do with the

mushrooms in "Fall" from *Field Guide*, and that the connection can help us to understand ourselves. The depiction reflects Hass's own values about that natural world: that it is important and worthy of our praise and attention.

Hass's depiction of the natural world is heavily influenced by his affection for the Californian landscape—the landscape of his home. By carefully naming the flora and fauna of California, as one would when describing a photograph of your extended family, Hass suggests a kinship or connection between the poet and the land. Combined with the clarity of his writing, Hass's techniques emphasise and particularise individual moments in the natural world— whether it is catching a fish or an encounter between a man and a raccoon. Still, if Hass states that one of the "pleasures of writing about California … was that this world was represented" (Miller par. 21), and he hopes poetry encourages a reader to "pay attention" (Hass qtd. in Ross par. 51) to the natural world, the names he uses are always laden with historical and personal meaning.

The second key element to Hass's depiction of the natural world is his assertion that humans are animals—we have creature selves. The depiction of the human animal makes Hass's poetry part of the new nature writing. Hass often uses the comparative technique of placing two unrelated scenes next to each other to show the parallels between the behaviour of humans and other animals. The comparison suggests that humans are part of the natural world, but Hass also argues that we cannot know the experience of other animals as it is "entirely apart" from our own. While Hass's poems depict the natural world as interconnected, and humans as not isolated from the nonhuman world—whether it be through connecting with the animals in his garden, or seeing his own evolution in a fish—Hass suggests that humans can only interpret the experience of the 'other' through our cultural filters.

Hass depicts the human animal as experiencing the world through two conflicting means: the body and the mind. Hass's humans are thinking beings who, while having brief experiences of our instinctual animal selves, which Hass refers to as "perfected," are distanced from the

physical world through language and rationality. The conflict between rationality and animal desire results in longing and loss. While some poems suggest that there are ways for humans to reconcile their rational and creature selves, other poems—such as "Spring" from *Field Guide* where the couple speak "all night in tongues, / in fingertips, in teeth" (22–25)— propose that instinctual experiences cannot be known by our thinking selves because such experiences create a discourse that exists outside of language.

In short, Hass's poems depict the natural world as particular, valuable, worthy of attention, and able to be known through classification. Hass's poems also depict the natural world as subject to evolution, interconnected, and inclusive of human and nonhuman. But conversely, his poems suggest that language and rationality separates us from a pure and "perfected" animal experience.

Intertwined with the methods Hass employs to depict the natural world is the second question posed by this thesis: What tension does Hass discover between his depictions and the physical world? My reading revealed that Hass uses three further strategies—showing the limitations of language, qualifying language, and the theme of loss—to imply that cultural and personal interpretations play an important part in the way we create meaning about the natural world.

Hass's first strategy, that of showing the limitations of language, draws attention to the way names and descriptions are individual, cultural, and contextual constructions. Although Hass asserts that names help us to pay attention to the natural world, his poems also suggest that the historical discourses embedded in language influence the way we create meaning about the natural world. For example, Hass draws attention to the historical origin of the name "Steller's jay" (139) in "Songs to Survive Summer" and the "Loggerhead shrike" (122) in "English: An Ode." While this allows Hass to assert that language reflects historical meanings, his poems also argue that history varies with the beholder, for example, the way the words "horse" and "parsnip" in "Weeds" are interpreted through the speaker's particular personal and cultural

associations. In this way, Hass's poems are in sympathy with Barad's notion that discursive practices—that is, what "constrains and enables what can be said" (819)—are causally involved in the way meaning is created.

In "The Apple Trees at Olema" from *Human Wishes* Hass develops his argument by suggesting that description, as well as names, is constructed rather than representative, and that meaning changes for each unique interaction between observer and object (for example, the woman's changing view of the tree as "raw" and then as "tender"). In "Iowa City: Early April" Hass describes the meeting between a man and a raccoon (and their contradictory responses) to further suggest that meaning is interactional rather than, as realism would state, arising exclusively from the relationship between sign and referent. Such a depiction implies that language is not an objective way to know the natural world—as Hass has previously suggested about names—but instead reflects performative interactions. By exploring the limitations of language, Hass's poems assert that our depictions of nature are contextual and constructed, and that we often mistake these constructions as knowledge about the natural world.

To further investigate the limitations of language, Hass uses another strategy—that of qualifying language—to signal his discomfort at using the nonhuman world figuratively. This stems from his concern that poetic description reflects human intention. The strategy sits in tension with Hass's continued use of naming and particularisation of description. That is, qualifying language undercuts his seeming trust in language to represent the world. For example, in "Dragonflies Mating," Hass uses qualifying statements such as "I think" (1), and "probably" (16) to highlight the way figurative description can reduce the natural world to symbol. By having one part of the poem—his qualifying language—perform an inquiry into another part of the poem—his figurative description, Hass turns the poem into an object of inquiry. Expanding on this idea in "Happiness," Hass makes the poem itself a performative phenomenon by enacting the speaker's process of figuratively describing a pair of foxes, the rejection by the foxes of that description, and the speaker's subsequent qualified description of a

flock of swans. Through the enactment meaning is created and constituted by the poem: in this instance that figurative description symbolises human concerns rather than being objective knowledge about the natural world.

Hass's final strategy to explore the relationship between poetry and the natural world—the theme of loss or longing—stems from the tension he creates between his simultaneous use (accurate names and particularisation of description) and refusal (limitations of language and qualifying language) of poetic technique. Hass uses the tension to enact the argument between realism and poststructuralism in his poetry, and to explore whether poetry can ultimately represent the natural world, and if it can't, what that means for Hass as a poet. By using the theme of loss, especially in regards to the loss that develops between the world and the words we use to try to know it, Hass makes the poem into an object of inquiry—that is, one part of the poem explicitly questions another part of the poem. These themes are particularly clear in "Meditation at Lagunitas" where the speaker's description of his memories sit in tension with the poem's stated theory that words cannot represent the world. Hass uses this tension—his constant movement between what philosophy tells him about the ultimate failure of language and his desire to see language as more productive than an elegy or signifier—to suggest that language is valuable in itself. In the end, Hass argues that poetic depiction, as an experience, is worthwhile, and that we should celebrate and take pleasure in the experience of poetry.

In sum, through a series of techniques and strategies Hass suggests that our depictions of the natural world are individual, cultural, and contextual constructions, and that these constructions—of which we are often unaware—reduce the natural world to symbol. Hass's poems highlight how the act of seeing and describing creates meaning, and, by turning some poems into objects of inquiry, explores the limitations of names and figurative description. Through this inquiry, Hass implies that language does not reflect an objective reality, and instead is created through interactions. Hass ultimately suggests that poetry constitutes a pleasurable experience in itself, outside of representation.

Although the purpose of this essay was not to undertake a critical analysis of ecocriticism, it is worthwhile to reflect on whether ecocriticism was useful for examining Hass's depiction of nature. The third-wave ecocritical approach used by this thesis provided a clear framework through which to conduct a close and extended reading of the strategies and techniques Hass uses to depict nature in his poems. The most valuable aspect of this approach was the inclusion of Barad's theory of performativity, which, it can be argued, is what moves the approach from second- to third-wave ecocriticism. Such an approach allowed me to provide a reading of some of Hass's techniques—the limitations of language, qualifying language, and the thematisation of loss—for their textual rather than representative purpose. In this way, the approach enabled my argument to move beyond how Hass depicts the physical world, to how his depictions are inextricably linked with his conclusions about the relationship between poetry and the natural world.

The third-wave performative approach also allowed me to identify, where present, the ethical implications of Hass's depiction of nature. For example, when showing how figurative description reduces the natural world to symbol, Hass implies that humans often use the nonhuman world to fulfil our own needs. The performative aspect of Hass's poems also has ethical implications: that the meaning created in literature influences the human use of the nonhuman world, and—as Oppermann asserts—informs future discourse. While outside the scope of this thesis, such a reading could provide ecocritics with the opportunity to suggest alternative discourses, or as critic Gregory S. Szarycz states, to "consider things provisional in-process, existing and changing over time, and in rehearsal, as it were" (153). Likewise, taking Barad's theory to her most radical ontological conclusions where matter and meaning materialise simultaneously, the approach could allow ecocritics to examine the way depictions of nature materially relate to environmental issues. While the nature and scope of this thesis meant I was unable to address either the ethics or ontological implications of Hass's poetry, I hope that other ecocritics extend my third-wave approach in order to examine the complex

relationship between a text and what it purports to describe, while highlighting the ethical

obligations that arise from writing and reading.

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Bridging Statement

Before commencing my doctoral studies, I often wrote about the nonhuman inhabitants of New

Zealand, but thought little about the relationship between my poetic representations and that

which they attempted to describe. In 2009 I wrote "The Picnic" (published in *Brief* in 2010),

which, for me, indicates the beginning of my interest in how poetic representations relate to the

natural world:

> We climbed up the gorge once,
> to Samuel Butler's hut, which happened
> to be a memorial plaque set
> in dense gorse.
>
> Yellow flowers on a khaki hill.
>
> It is a story you embellish in company—
> add the sighting
> of a Tarr, his quiet black face
> rotating in slow motion; the picnic
>
> where we laid
> goat's cheese, apples and sweet sultanas
> on a home-spun jersey
> that you still wear;
>
> or the encounter with a skink, skin wrapped
> around his skeleton, who
> when you reached out,
> slipped into the rock.

The poem foreshadows the concerns that are explored by both the critical and creative

components of my doctoral thesis—that nonhuman creatures are often central to our stories, but

that their depiction reflects our own desires rather than the creatures themselves. In the poem

the nonhuman world is intertwined with the speaker's daily life, but has been embellished in

order to provide a more thrilling story. Through the act of seeing and describing, objective meaning slips away like a "skink" into the rock.

As these themes appeared in my work I also became interested in the field of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism provided a lens through which I could examine the work of Robert Hass—whose poetry I had read for many years—to understand the techniques he used to explore the relationship between poetry and nature. In undertaking the doctorate, it was essential that the critical research not only expanded my understanding of Hass's poems, but provided me with poetic strategies that I could adapt and experiment with in my own work. In this way, the creative component of the thesis has been shaped and informed by the investigation of the critical essay.

Like Hass, I have used a series of strategies in my creative work to investigate the way we depict the natural world. A central strategy is the use of technical language and terminology from the fields of geography, biology, and glaciology. Rather than relying primarily on traditional lyric imagery, the poems use scientific discourses to suggest human emotions and situations. By bringing together these different types of language the poems place pressure on each discourse. For example, "Glaciers" uses language from the field of glaciology to describe human sexuality, mental health, and childbirth. The unexpected and out-of-context use of this language to describe human concerns is meant to subvert the discourse and imply that, because it can be used out of context, it is constructed rather than an objective representation of the world. Through such subversion the poems intend to suggest that other discourses about the natural world are equally constructed.

As with poets such as Retallack, who assert that poetry can "develop[ing] a body of work that reinvestigates our species' relation to other inhabitants of the fragile and finite territory our species named, claimed, exploited, sentimentalized, and aggrandized as 'our world'" (par. 30), I wanted my poems to suggest that humans are animals with instinctual and biological drives, and are therefore part of the natural world. These poems focus on themes of

sexuality, mortality, procreation, and urban habitats, whether that be the pack mentality of the crowd in "The Fire," the instinctual fear of the old woman in "Glass," or the way a man creates a dwelling similar to other animals in "Bees." Other poems such as "Mountains" and "Running with my Father" explore the tension between our biology and the social construction of gender.

Drawing inspiration from Hass, I have tried in my creative work to highlight the way our conceptualisations of nature often reflect human intention and imagination, rather than being a representation of the nonhuman world. For example, a poem such as "Measures" explicitly describes the use of the sea as a metaphor for emotion, and the series of poems about birds and animals—"Crow Experiments," "Pigeons," "Kangaroos," "Lamb," "Cow Skin," and "Phobias" —explore the way we imagine and use animals as a mirror for human concerns. Other poems such as such "Rescue Story" depict our perceived separation from the natural world, whereas "When the Sister Walks," "Paradise Ducks," and "The Pipeline," explore how we conceive of nature as a place of solace.

The use of these strategies in my creative work intends to call attention to the way descriptions of the natural world often reflect human culture and intention, rather than the physical world. I hope this has produced a strong and thoughtful collection about the relationship between human, nonhuman, poetry, and imagination.