

**(Re)Mapping 'Woman' and 'Nature':
An Ecofeminist Reading of *Away* and *Afterimage***

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Abstract**(Re)Mapping ‘Woman’ and ‘Nature’:
An Ecofeminist Reading of *Away* and *Afterimage***

Cindy Maureen Durack

Focusing on Jane Urquhart’s novel *Away* and Helen Humphreys’s novel *Afterimage*, and relying primarily on ecofeminist theory, this thesis considers each author’s approach to the woman/nature analogy, a metaphoric framework that aligns ‘woman’ with a debased nature and nonhuman nature with a devalued femininity. Prior to analyzing the novels, a brief overview of the origins, history, methodology, and debates relating to the ecofeminist framework provides the parameters and perspectives for the ensuing discussion. Of central concern is the manner in which the writer negotiates the dualisms shaping the various relevant categories, and an examination of language, desire, knowledge, and power in the novels exposes and highlights the cultural construction of nature. Key areas of interest include: modes of representation, reconceptualizations, disruptions and destabilizations to dualistic structures informing conceptual systems, and alternatives to traditional concepts of culture, nature, species, gender, epistemology, and subjectivity. Finally, the conclusion of this thesis will discuss the overall impact of each author’s strategy for dealing with dualisms, and will consider the usefulness of ecofeminist methodology for analyzing texts and for confronting and transforming various representations of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’.

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Once, our worldview embedded each of us within a world in which all the parts were intricately interconnected. Each of us could be at the center of this multidimensional web of interconnections, “trapped,” in a sense, by our total dependence on all the strands enfolding and infusing us, yet deriving the ultimate security of place and belonging.

–David Suzuki

A comparison of Jane Urquhart’s *Away* and Helen Humphreys’s *Afterimage* reveals many similarities between the two novels—both narratives feature female protagonists of Irish heritage: one born in Ireland shortly before the Potato Famine; the other a young married woman who must emigrate due to the consequences of it. In exile, *Away*’s Mary O’Malley and Annie Phelan of *Afterimage* long for home and for absent parents, struggle with issues of identity and creativity, and endeavour to come to terms with their past. Both novels feature omniscient narrators and weave allusions to historical facts and well-known people into the fabric of their story. In Urquhart’s novel, one character becomes inadvertently embroiled in the plot leading to the murder of the well-known Irish-Canadian politician Thomas D’Arcy McGee. Humphreys models one of her key protagonists on the celebrated nineteenth-century photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron. So, time frame, genre, choice of narrator, several thematic elements, and the protagonist’s nationality in *Afterimage* approximate those found in *Away*. But from an ecofeminist perspective these two works could not be more different. Drawing on ecofeminist literary criticism as the principle guiding paradigm, this thesis will explore the manner in which authors Jane Urquhart and Helen Humphreys come to terms with that which is considered the

central issue occupying and motivating ecofeminist activists, writers and critics today: the woman/nature analogy.

The evolution of ecofeminist criticism parallels developments in the history of feminist thought and activism and each novel reflects the influence of particular discourses and debates circulating at the time the authors were writing their novels.¹ Published in 1993, *Away* emerged at a time when works by authors like Susan Griffin, Mary Daly, and Adrienne Rich still exerted a strong influence over certain ecofeminist factions. These writers and others like them took their cues from the radical cultural feminist camp that advocated embracing a gender difference they viewed as natural or ontological. Some radical feminists enthusiastically welcome the notion of an essential gender difference and, when incorporated into an ecological framework, this perspective tends to persuade proponents to believe that the answer to humanity's abuse and misappropriation of the earth's resources, as well as to the domination and abuse of women by men, of animals by humans, necessitates the revaluation of the feminine over the masculine and, concomitantly, a return to a matriarchal society. Karla Armbruster warns that writers "most vulnerable to perpetuating dualism and hierarchy are those growing out of the tradition of radical or cultural feminism; by insisting upon essentialist connections between woman and nature, such ecofeminists oppose women and nature to male-dominated culture in the most rigidly dualistic fashion" (99-100). This thesis will show that Urquhart's novel succumbs to this strategic mode of representation.

By the year 2000 when *Afterimage* was first published, although only a short seven years later, attitudes and opinions had altered dramatically, concurrent with

advancements in a number of disciplines, most notably in the expanding sphere of ecofeminist literary criticism as it reacted to paradigm shifts resulting from emerging and evolving theories. In many ways, Humphrey's novel exemplifies recent trends in feminist and ecocritical discourses as they intersect with postmodern theories. In contrast to Urquhart's general strategy of reversal whereby the feminine and nature are represented as superior to masculinity and culture, a tactic that leaves the binaries intact, Humphreys endeavours to depict the basic conditions required for alternative representations of all the categories concerned— 'woman,' 'man,' 'nature' and 'culture'— by imagining characters and settings in a manner that rejects dualisms as viable frames for conceiving the various relationships involved and, instead, embracing multiplicity and indeterminacy. Humphreys reconceptualizes the male-female/culture-nature relationships in configurations other than the traditional oppositions produced by the dualistic concepts of Enlightenment beliefs. Urquhart's narrative remains firmly fixed within a dualistic hierarchal model while Humphreys "displaces a ladder of beings with a horizontal nonhierarchal model of difference" (Alaimo, "Skin Dreaming" 135).

The decision to evaluate *Away* and *Afterimage* through an ecofeminist lens evolved as a result of the initial disappointment upon re-encountering Urquhart's novel after ten years of academia and, more specifically, the difficulties faced when reading it from a feminist point of view. Both the hybrid nature of the ecofeminist framework as well as its interrogative, as opposed to declarative, approach opened up the scope of analysis and offered previously unexplored avenues to view aspects of the novel that, without the benefit of ecofeminist theory, might have either gone

unnoticed or been considered additional proof for viewing the novel as a dismal failure, from a feminist perspective. This thesis will show that while Urquhart's novel does end up hopelessly ensnared in the ideological trap of the woman/nature analogy, she nevertheless exposes the foundations of oppression that support all forms of domination and exploitation including Colonialism, Imperialism, sexism, racism, and specieism; her novel effectively reveals the alienation between men and women and between humans and the natural world that result from the long-standing pattern linking females with nature and opposing them to males and culture.

Chapter One, divided into three subsections, begins with a brief overview of the evolution of ecofeminist literary theory that is followed by a summary of the history of the woman/nature analogy. Relying primarily on two key texts, Caroline Merchant's *The Death of Nature* and Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, the discussion will include the historical-causal influences, predominantly during the period between 1500-1700, as well as the philosophical, scientific and religious discourses that contributed to and maintained an association between 'woman' and 'nature' from as early as the time of Plato. The final subsection of the first chapter focuses on the fundamental concepts, beliefs, approaches, strategies and goals of ecofeminism as it intersects with and informs literary criticism. Beginning with the development of ecofeminism as a social movement, the overview moves forward to present-day perspectives and very briefly touches on some of the debates that continue to engage ecofeminist critics and writers, as well as the contentious issues (often the result of misinterpretations and preconceptions) that occasionally divide proponents and give rise to detractors.

Urquhart's novel *Away*, a highly successful publication in Canada in 1993, is perhaps an ideal choice to illustrate the parameters and progress of ecofeminism for it foregrounds many of the fundamental concerns outlined in Chapter One of this study, and is representative of a praxis that reflects the early stages of this particular mode of analysis. A general discussion of Urquhart's rhetorical devices and the manner in which she contends with the question of the woman/nature analogy will be followed by a close reading of a particular scene that exposes the underlying concepts and connections structuring and supporting numerous forms of domination. These logical structures of hierarchal dualisms are then explored within the context of the male/female relationships in the novel where, in one instance, Urquhart's strategy of reversal clearly illustrates both the dangers and shortcomings of this approach. Finally, this thesis will show that the principal female protagonist's relationship with a ghost-lover closely resembles the psychological relational mode considered an alternative to the standard phallogentric subject/object model of traditional psychological discourse. Once again, Urquhart's strategy falls short because she fails to imagine an habitable space, a realistic middle ground, between opposed categories; her characters continue to find themselves the victims of binary systems of understanding, imprisoned on one side or the other of an intractable dualistic gulf.

The final chapter of this thesis applies an ecofeminist hermeneutics to a novel that exemplifies the shifts and developments of a number of contemporary theoretical paradigms. *Afterimage* incorporates the conventional attitudes and beliefs of liberal humanist and Enlightenment philosophies but juxtaposes them with

concepts and values consistent with ecofeminism. In contrast to *Away*, Helen Humphreys's novel *Afterimage* explores alternatives to dualistic paradigms; her primary setting, principal characters, plot, and rhetorical devices reveal patterns and associations that consistently eschew clichés and overdetermined associations that would contribute to or re-inscribe dualisms.

The general overview of *Afterimage* that begins Chapter Three will show that Humphreys makes a concerted effort to avoid all manner of typical metaphoric imagery. The trope of 'middleness' announced in the opening scene connects to and shapes all the fictional elements in the story: extremes are detected only on the periphery of the central narrative. A major part of the discussion that follows the general overview of the novel focuses on Humphreys's literary devices, her unusual metaphors and ubiquitous similes that resist the culture/nature opposition and the woman/nature analogy to transform the relationships in ways that reflect a non-dominative model advocated by the majority of ecofeminists.

This thesis will demonstrate that the unconventional imagery contributes to reconceptualizations of cognitive concepts that rely on habitual associations, and those associated with epistemology and the mind/body dualism will be central to this study. In the final two sections of Chapter Three, an examination of the 'light' metaphors—they appear on almost every page of the novel—suggests alternatives to the traditional beliefs and assumptions that have governed Western epistemological theories for centuries and served to sanction the distancing and/or exclusion of women, indigenous peoples and non-human nature from the realm of authorized knowledge. Bordo writes:

Insofar as the ‘spirit’s motive’ is the guiding force, clarity and will dominate; the body, by contrast, simply *receives* and darkly, dumbly responds to impressions, emotions, passions. This duality of active spirit/passive body is also gendered, and it has been one of the most historically powerful of the dualities that inform Western ideologies of gender (11).

This ideology is not confined to gender but extends to and influences, through the complicated structures of dualistic logic, constructions of race, class and species as well. The epistemological model that Humphreys imagines rejects the Cartesian ideal of the rational, autonomous, objective, solitary mind observing a separate object. Instead, she imagines a world that does not “depend on the logic of ‘discovery,’ but on a power-charged social relation of conversation” (Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 198). In *Afterimage*, multiplicity, partiality and situated knowledge replace the ideals of the Cartesian model.

The final section will focus on the manner in which *Afterimage* engages with notions of the body’s role in the production and acquisition of knowledge. This analysis will show that Humphreys finds a middle ground that more accurately reflects the body’s function in and relation to knowledge; her vision mirrors those paradigms that resist reducing the body and nature to “mere resources” by choosing instead to conceptualize them as active participants, as “witty agents and actors” (Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* 207). She refigures the body (and nature) to displace the centrality of the mind (and culture); she fictionally explores and experiments with alternatives that speak to the myriad possibilities for creating new models and flexible frameworks where “bodies have all the explanatory power of minds” (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* vii).

The conclusion of this thesis will discuss the overall impact of each author's strategy *visa vi* dealing with dualisms, and will consider the usefulness of ecofeminist methodology for analyzing texts and for confronting and transforming various representations of 'woman' and 'nature'.

Chapter One: Ecofeminist Literary Criticism

1.1) Groundwork

The dual meanings of nature converge at the site of woman, fixing her in a vortex of circular arguments: woman is closer to nature and is thus inferior; woman is inferior because nature made her so.

–Stacy Alaimo

Both the question of woman's relationship to nature and the discipline of ecofeminist literary criticism carry heavy historical burdens; while one extends back to antiquity, the other's roots are relatively young but equally divisive and controversial. Gaard and Murphy single out 1990 as the year that an "eruption" of ecofeminist literary analysis forced the academic community to sit up and take notice (5). Cheryll Glotfelty identifies 1993 as the year ecocriticism "emerged as a recognizable critical school" (Armbruster & Wallace, 1). Diana Relke claims the 1998 Spring/Summer *Much with Nature* issue of *Canadian Poetry*, featuring a number of ecocritical essays, marked the moment when Canadian critics took up David Bentley's challenge to engage with ecocriticism (8). The subject of and issues surrounding Western culture's conflation of 'woman' with 'nature' remain complex and varied, constructed as they have been over time by social, cultural, religious, and scientific discourses. Opinions regarding the beneficial and/or detrimental nature of this link constantly shift and change, and the association remains a contentious issue right up to the present day.

A cursory perusal of the literature shows that historically ecofeminists have been in general agreement about the interrelatedness of the domination of women and that of nature, but they part ways when the discussion turns to the nature of the relationship, and whether or not it might be "potentially liberating or grounds for

reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women” (Warren *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 21).

Karen Warren notes that the differences of opinion among ecofeminist theorists, critics and writers reflect the “plurality of positions” one finds in various versions of feminism including liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist feminisms (21).²

Further complicating the debates within ecofeminism are the range of disciplinary approaches and philosophical orientations available to dissect or deconstruct the woman/nature analogy and culture/nature oppositions. They include: symbolic and literary, spiritual and religious, epistemological, political, historical (causal), conceptual, empirical, socio-economic, linguistic and ethical interconnections (Warren *Philosophy* 21). Some methods intersect in their approaches while others remain firmly within their own theoretical boundaries but, again, even individual disciplinary fields are not without their own contentious issues.³

Due to the hybrid nature of ecofeminist theory—its philosophical plurality—criticism has included the argument that ecofeminism lacks a distinct ideological point of reference rendering it an ineffectual paradigm “for being so diverse as to have no center” (Gates 21). Conversely, this same feature is often viewed as a strength—Patrick Murphy argues that as an “interrogative mode” that embraces a whole host of theoretical viewpoints rather than a more reductive “prescriptive mode,” ecofeminism is capable of “ask[ing] difficult questions” and “is most formidable in its opposition to power when it challenges its own assumptions” (Murphy 4). The diversity constituting ecofeminist literary criticism reflects the theory’s foundations: “the interrelated dominations of nature—psyche and sexuality, human oppression, and nonhuman nature” considered from the “historic position of

women in relation to those forms of domination” (King 117). Gaard and Murphy argue that the “healthy diversity” found in ecofeminist theories is the product of a “recognition and positive identification of otherness” (6).

At the heart of the earliest rejections of ecofeminist philosophy was the mistaken belief that ecofeminism is essentialist, and that it promotes the principle of an ontological connection between women and nature.⁴ Some writers like Susan J. Hekman have homogenized “eco-feminists” and erroneously presumed that they all “define themselves as radical critics” who consider the association between women and nature as “a positive good” (112). While this might have been and may still be true for those ecofeminists who follow a radical feminist philosophy, Barbara T. Gates insists, “On the contrary. Inherent in ecofeminism is a belief in the interconnectedness of all living things” and that “since all life is nature, no part of it can be closer than another to ‘nature’” (20). In this way, many ecofeminists challenge hierarchal concepts of life with images and models that exemplify and advocate non-hierarchal relations.

Adding to the various arguments and further complicating ecofeminist theoretical analysis is the postmodern view that relegates ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ to discursive categories, a gesture that according to Diana Relke confines both to “ink upon paper” and ignores the glaring reality (23). Relke quotes Kovel who writes, “. . . the postmodern critique of science is true, and necessary, but also reductive insofar as it fails to recognize the material dimensions of the ecological crisis. And being reductive, it reveals its own false totalization . . .” (23). Relke argues that “actual nonhuman nature is not a text” and that disfigured literary representations have

skewed our views of it (23). In attempting to come to terms with these debates, questions, and concerns pervading the ecofeminist agenda, Gates, while organizing a course around ecofeminist literature, turned to Janis Birkeland who “gathered ideas” about what “ecofeminists have in common,” and they include: “an appreciation of the intrinsic value of everything in nature—a biocentric rather than an anthropocentric viewpoint” and the desire to see “an end to dualisms like male/female, thought/action, and spiritual/natural; and a trust in process, not just product” (Gates 21). So, while strategies, approaches, and perspectives may differ and create division, ecofeminists are united in their fundamental belief in the central role dualism plays in the conceptual construction of the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’; and they recognize the concomitant necessity of challenging androcentric and anthropocentric discourses that function to maintain opposition between various categories and uphold faulty conceptual frameworks that associate females with nature and nature with a debased femininity.

A brief account of the history of the woman/nature analogy is necessary to illustrate not only the genesis of the age-old connection—its persistence and pervasiveness—but to situate the problem within the contexts of culture, religion, society, science, and philosophy, and to frame the discussion of ecofeminist theory that follows. It would be impossible, within the scope of this project, to give a complete accounting of the development of ecofeminism. Relying primarily on the scientific historian and early ecofeminist Caroline Merchant’s study, *The Death of Nature*, this thesis will briefly summarize the significant historical moments, major figures and scientific discoveries that contributed to changing views on the relation

between women and nature. Australian philosopher Val Plumwood's critical analysis, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, considered by many to be "one of the finest pieces of ecofeminist theory around," will illustrate one of the primary theoretical orientations to emerge, one that encourages us to "rethink certain interrelated categories" (Slicer 54). In addition, the writings and theories of numerous other critics and scholars will help to elaborate a summary of the development of ecofeminist philosophy and to identify some of the central features of the contemporary ecofeminist agenda, the values, beliefs and goals that underpin this hybrid theoretical approach.

1.2) Historical Precedents

To write history from a feminist perspective is to turn it upside down-to see social structure from the bottom up and to flip-flop mainstream values.

–Carolyn Merchant

Only looking back is there a pattern.

–Louise Erdrich

The origins of the conceptual link between women and nature can be traced to the idea of “Mother Earth,” a central metaphor for many indigenous peoples, and one documented in ancient traditions from pre-Hellenic times onwards that manifests in a number of sacred names and images from the Ur-goddess Tiamat of the Mesopotamian creation myth, to Gaia the Greek goddess, the Celtic goddess Cerridwen and Isis the Egyptian mother goddess.⁵ The designations and images vary but their original connotations remain the same: Earth as nurturing mother. Carolyn Merchant points out that while this image portrayed the earth as a “beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe” there was an opposing image that centred on a “wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos” (2). Both descriptions served the patriarchal status quo as justification for the control and domination of women, particularly their sexuality, but the former more favourable mode of representation would eventually give way, over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the latter as technical, industrial and scientific progress demanded new images that sanctioned domination of the natural (read hostile and chaotic) environment (Merchant 3).

As new technologies emerged, humankind's capacity to redirect, alter, control and utilize natural resources contributed to environmental deterioration, and became the concern of early writers and philosophers; Ovid, Pliny, Seneca and the Stoic philosophers "openly deplored mining as an abuse of their mother, the earth" (Merchant 3). Later, Biblical accounts of the creation in Genesis 1 legitimated domination as a strategy to recover Eden. The three images of Eve found in Biblical narrative have contributed to a strict and restrictive discursive construction of femininity and offer corresponding ways of relating to the earth. Prelapsarian land, in its untouched sterility, corresponds to the virginal purity of the original Eve and offers the 'potential for development'. Any landscape that exhibits disorder and chaos – wilderness, wasteland, desert – becomes home to the serpent, Satan, and the fallen (seductress and whore) Eve. The fertile garden where man's hand has improved it, allowing it to "bear fruit," recalls mother Eve. In her follow-up study to *Death of Nature*, Merchant writes, "The Enlightenment idea of progress is rooted in the recovery of the garden lost in the Fall – the bringing of light to the dark world of inchoate nature" (Merchant, *Earthcare* 33).

Organic metaphors and images constructed the earth in holistic terms but eventually this perception lost favour culminating in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a mechanistic worldview came to dominance. The Scientific Revolution led by Francis Bacon (1561-1626), René Descartes (1596-1650), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and William Harvey (1578-1657) contributed to a conceptual framework based on atomism, and the assumption that nature was a "system of dead inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces." The desire for order,

at a time when all seemed out of order, prompted the search for means to predict behaviour. Order and control meant power and a simple redefinition of reality through the machine justified a rational control over nature, society, and the self. Merchant pinpoints this moment in history when “animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos” were replaced with the mechanistic model as having the most “far-reaching effect of the Scientific Revolution” culminating in the “death of nature” (Merchant, *The Death of Nature* 193).

Covering the years between 1500-1700, against the backdrop of scientific and philosophical developments, Merchant details the persistent entanglements of ‘woman’ and ‘nature,’ and uncovers the consequences of rationalist philosophy that defined each as passive object, or non-subject. The philosophy of Bacon, as the “father of modern science,” stressed rationality thus effectively excluding the lower classes and women who were viewed as closer to nature on a number of grounds and therefore, according to the logic of Western epistemological philosophy, they could not possibly possess reason. Designating nature as feminine by constantly employing the female pronoun, Bacon re-inscribed the association and justified the control and exploitation of both. He insisted nature be “bound into service,” made a “slave,” put in “constraints,” “molded,” and he encouraged the “searchers and spies of nature . . . to discover *her* plots and secrets” (emphasis mine, qtd. in Merchant, *Death of Nature* 169). Bacon’s overtly sexual and violent imagery justified the subordination of women as well as that of nature; women, like nature, needed to be dissected and controlled.⁶

Bacon refined the motives and methods of science while his contemporary, René Descartes, developed a philosophy that would “widen and deepen the chasm between what identifies humanity and what defines the world of nature” (Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 109). Known as the Cartesian mind/body dualism, Descartes’s philosophy alienated the body from the mind in a manner that eliminated any overlap or continuity creating “polarized conceptions of disembodied mind and mindless body” (112). Plumwood follows the theory to its conclusion that sets the mind of the knower, the subject, over and against the object it attempts to know, resulting in a divided self, hyperseparated from the internal and external ‘other’ (117).

The mechanical framework provided a metaphor that promoted power and order while it integrated self, society, and the universe against increasing fragmentation, the result of Protestant Reformation, emerging Capitalism and early scientific breakthroughs. Even the image of God was transformed by highlighting his “will and active power,” thereby sanctioning the human equivalent and serving to motivate those in the fields of mathematics and science to develop new and improved approaches and strategies to manage nature (Merchant, *Death of Nature* 234).

Although the mechanical model held sway, and continues to do so to the present, Merchant notes that there have always been dissenters who prefer alternative models. Early ecologically minded critics included the Cambridge Platonists Henry More (1614-1687) and Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), vitalist philosophers Francis Glisson (1597-1677) and Jean Baptiste Van Helmont (1577-

1644), and philosopher Anne Conway (1631-1679).⁷ The Platonists worked to re-establish the elemental organic unity of nature while maintaining dualisms, the vitalists altered the Cartesian dualism to a “monistic unity of matter and spirit” in order to affirm the “life of all things”(Merchant, *Death* 253), and like the vitalists, Anne Conway developed a monistic philosophical theory, claiming “there was no essential difference between spirit and body” (258). Their diverse views were united in their similar efforts to promote a view of nature that was “inherently anti-exploitive” (253).

Merchant concludes her examination of the emergence of a mechanistic worldview and all it entailed with an overview of the scientific and philosophic contributions of Isaac Newton and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, making the claim that “the world in which we live today was bequeathed to us” by these two physicists (275). Merchant offers an overview of Newton’s discoveries, but for the purpose of this thesis the most important consequence was his focus on structure as opposed to process:

The mathematizing tendencies in Newtonian thought which emphasized not the process of change, but resistance to changes, the conservation of a body’s motion, and the planets and satellites as ideal spheres and point sources of gravitational force were manifestations of the mechanical philosopher’s concern with geometrical idealization, stability, structure, being, and identity, rather than organic flux, change, becoming, and process. In mechanism the primacy of process was thus superseded by the stability of structure. (277)

The repercussions of Newton’s claims were far-reaching; the *Principia* served as a foundational text for eighteenth-century philosophers, while the mechanistic laws ordering and predicting earth and heavens served as a “cosmological exemplar” for English politics and economy. Furthermore, the conceptual framework authorized

and justified “domination and manipulation of nature” because of its emphasis on “external force and passive matter” (279).

Leibniz developed the idea of “force” and conceived of it in a mathematical equation that also contributed to the mechanical philosophy of nature. Merchant writes that his theory “was the foundation for an understanding of both the phenomenal and spiritual universe,” and there are those who argue his “emphasis on self-contained independence, internal development, and progress” promoted and supported laissez-faire capitalism (279).

Both Leibniz and Newton, unlike many of their predecessors and contemporaries, were not satisfied with the mechanical worldview and each man in his own way attempted to revitalize the cosmos. Merchant describes Newton’s experiments with the process of fermentation; he “inquired about the action of a latent vegetative spirit” produced by the “circulation[s],” “exhalations” and “gravitation,” the “cosmic chemical processes” that occurred involving the earth and the atmosphere, and that we today might refer to as decomposition, evaporation and condensation (285). Newton concluded that without fermentation, “all putrefaction, generation, vegetation, and life would cease” and he became certain that “all matter duly formed is attended with signs of life” (qtd. in Merchant 286). For Leibniz, “only the phenomenal world was mechanical; the real world of substance was organic”; “thus there is nothing fallow, sterile, or dead in the universe” (qtd. in Merchant 283). Unfortunately, it was their mathematical and mechanical theoretical contributions that took centre stage and influenced Western culture and continue to do so to the present moment.

Merchant locates the historical-causal explanations of the interconnected and analogous dominations of women and nature in the Scientific Revolution but there are others who trace the roots of this link to classical Greek philosophy and the rationalist tradition. Val Plumwood, for example, argues that the original perpetrators of the human/nature dualism (the basis of all value dualisms including masculine/feminine, reason/emotion, spirit/body) were the philosophers like Plato, and that “much of the problem (both for women and nature) lies in rationalist or rationalist-derived conceptions of the self and of what is essential and valuable in the human makeup” (*Nature, Self, and Gender* 5-6). Plumwood also describes in detail the complex conceptual interconnections between anthropocentrism and androcentrism, insisting, “within the Western philosophical tradition, anthropocentrism has often taken the form of androcentrism” and that the objective or result of ecofeminism is “not to absorb or sacrifice the critique of anthropocentrism, but to deepen and enrich it” (Plumwood, *Nature* 22).

Plumwood delineates the intricate interrelated network of dualisms that form the foundation of domination, colonization and the “oppressions of gender, race, class and nature” (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 1). She argues that “racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture” (4). Plumwood insists the fourth category, nature, provides a necessary link and more complete picture for a critique of human domination, and

she imaginatively describes a number of failed approaches to overcoming dualisms and suggests a possible answer to the dilemma:

In feminist and liberation theory, the misty, forbidding passes of the Mountains of Dualism have swallowed many an unwary traveller (sic) in their mazes and chasms. In these mountains, a well-trodden path leads through a steep defile to the Cavern of Reversal, where travellers fall into an upside-down world which (sic) strangely resembles the one they seek to escape. Trapped Romantics wander here, lamenting their exile, as do various tribes of Arcadians, Earth Mothers, Noble Savages and Working-Class Heroes whose identities are defined by reversing the valuations of the dominant culture. Postmodernist thinkers have found a way to avoid this cavern, and have erected a sign pointing out the danger, but have not yet discovered another path across the mountains to the promised land of liberatory politics on the other side. Mostly they linger by the Well of Discourse near the cavern, gazing in dismay into the fearful and bottomless Abyss of Relativism beyond it. The path to the promised land of reflective practice passes over the Swamp of Affirmation, which careful and critical travellers, picking their way through, can with some difficulty cross. Intrepid travellers who have found their way across the Swamp of Affirmation in to the lands beyond often either fall into the Ocean of Continuity on the one side or stray into the waterless and alien Desert of Difference on the other, there to perish. The pilgrim's path to the Promised Land leads along a narrow way between these two hazards, and involves heeding both difference and continuity. (3)

An important aspect and central conceptual component of Plumwood's analysis revolves around the "master identity," a term she uses to denote those who assumedly possess reason and as a consequence come to dominate all spheres of discourse, "a white, largely male elite" (23). She further qualifies the "master identity" as one constructed through the multiple exclusions reflected in the paradigms of Western culture, thus broadening the parameters that would restrict it to a "masculine identity pure and simple"(42). In her model, domination is not restricted to white Western males but expands to include the concept of a "multiple, complex cultural identity of the master formed in the context of class, race, species

and gender domination”(5). As Plumwood points out, this perspective avoids reductionism and highlights the role of culture to reveal the “deep structures of oppression”(5).

Plumwood analyses the philosophical past in order to demonstrate how the Platonic dualism of reason/nature shapes our views of reason, human identity and death. Citing this dualism as the origin of the domination of women and nature, she counters the claims of Merchant and others like her who identify the mechanistic theories of the Enlightenment period as the major influence. She writes:

Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilized, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness. In other words, nature includes everything reason excludes. (20)

Plumwood prefers to focus on dualism as opposed to atomism, and suggests that deconstructing the binaries involves “affirming and reconceptualizing the underside, nature” and “re-inscribing nature with the intentional and mindlike qualities” that Descartes removed. She writes, “once nature is reconceived as capable of agency and intentionality, and human nature is reconceived in less polarized and disembodied ways, the great gulf which Cartesian thought established between the conscious, mindful human sphere and the mindless, clockwork natural one disappears”(Feminism 5). As this thesis will demonstrate, Urquhart only partially accomplishes the task as articulated by Plumwood because, while the narrative does envision nature in terms that grant the natural world a level of subjectivity and agency, only half of humanity is “reconceived” as capable of transcending the polarization of mind and body. Masculinity and culture are inferiorized while the

categories of female and nature are elevated, attaining a status of superiority in their analogous role of victim. Humphreys's narrative avoids reversals or extremes; boundaries between masculinity and femininity, between culture and nature, and between mind and body are blurred so that all categories are, as Plumwood suggests, conceptualized in ways that challenge polarization and unsettle the mind/body divide.

Descartes, as Plumwood reveals, followed in the footsteps of Aristotle and Plato who endorsed an "intellectualist model of human identity in which all other human functions exist in an instrumental support relation to reason, which is treated as the supreme good for man, the final aim and true pursuit of the best human life" (*Feminism* 105). Where Descartes differs from his predecessors is in his conception of the role that power plays; Plato's view held that humanity's task was to control only the inner nature, since a rational cosmology ordered the planet. As technological discourses shifted the view from an organic perception of nature to a mechanistic one, machine-like nature suddenly required a controlling influence. According to Plumwood, the Cartesian mind/body dualism provided a "license for the annexation of nature" (111). In *Gender and Knowledge*, Hekman also details the consequences of Descartes's theories to concepts of nature and gender.

First, he turned that which is not subject, object, into something external to himself. He in effect cut himself off from the sensuous, female universe of the Middle Ages Secondly, Descartes created an object world of nature that is devoid of mysterious or sensuous forces. It is a world that is ruled entirely by cause and effect forces, a world that can be explained, dominated and controlled. This object world is still a feminine world but it is a world that is passive and mechanical, not mysterious and unpredictable.
(117)

The repercussions of this conceptual paradigm are extensive and cannot be overstated for they have greatly and consistently influenced epistemological philosophies and contributed to the systematic devaluation of both women and nature.

The one thing that remains consistent throughout the history of the woman/nature analogy is inconsistency. Devine describes the changing metaphors of nature in North America at the turn of the century: “When nature was chaos and disorder and needed to be civilized it was feminine; when civilization became too much, woman was seen as the civilizing agent, and wilderness became manly” (15).⁸ This last example plainly demonstrates how the woman-as-nature metaphor “remains always opposed to the male need, and the male need remains always the desirable end” (15). As well, it speaks to the complexity and scope of the subject matter relating to the conceptual links between females and the natural world that makes comprehensiveness impossible. That my historical discussion of the varying influences on the woman/nature analogy ends here in no way means to imply that Descartes had the final word. Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Heidegger, Lyotard, Cixous, Kristeva, Irigaray, just to name a few, have all contributed to the overthrow of Enlightenment and humanist philosophies grounded in dualistic concepts. Several of their theories broaden and support the ecofeminist readings in this work and are expanded upon as they appear.

1.3) Definitions, Debates and Methodologies

...ecofeminism is not simply a subset of feminism or ecology. It is in many respects a meta-feminism, if you will, offering a distinct and more broadened methodology for understanding the world.

–Cathleen McGuire & Colleen McGuire

The history of ecofeminist literary criticism begins, according to many of the experts in the field, with French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne. Credited with coining the term *ecofeminisme* in 1974, D'Eaubonne wanted to “call attention to women’s potential to bring about an ecological revolution” (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 21). Recognizing that the environmental movement lacked feminist analysis, Western women began in the 1970s to question the absence of women, animals and ecology from the concerns of many political movements. Likewise, they noted the absence of a concern for nature within the feminist movement. Theoretical works emerged to establish ecofeminism as a discourse in the early seventies; the writings of Ynestra King, Mary Daly and Carolyn Merchant provided historical analysis while the more experimental and artistic works of Adrienne Rich and Susan Griffin explored the emerging theoretical concepts through poetry and fiction.⁹ Spiritual, political, social, ecological, environmental and economic issues were synthesized as concerns and the broad lens of ecofeminism has evolved to challenge all forms of oppression including classism, racism, imperialism, heterosexism, ageism, anthropocentrism, and specicism.¹⁰

Deborah L. Madsen defines the objective of ecofeminism simply as the analysis of “the relationship between the patriarchal oppression of women and the human domination of non-human nature” (123). Ecofeminism refers to a wide range

of practices and beliefs and like feminism there are many versions and a plurality of positions reflecting its feminist foundations that include liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism.¹¹ Plumwood equates ecofeminism with the third wave of feminism.

It is not a *tsunami*, a freak tidal wave which has appeared out of nowhere sweeping all before it. Rather, it is prefigured in and builds on work not only in ecofeminism but in radical feminism, cultural feminism and socialist feminism over the last decade and a half. (39)

Plumwood points out, however, that ecofeminism differs from other feminisms in its insistence on “making an account of the connection to nature central” (*Feminism* 39). Recognizing and challenging the dualisms that define women and nature are, according to the ecofeminist perspective, crucial to unlocking all oppressive dualisms and exposing all the practices of domination within culture.

Plumwood demonstrates how the maintenance of a dualistic structure involves a conceptual system that constructs elements in contrasting pairs that include culture/nature, reason/nature, male/female, mind/body, master/slave, reason/matter, self/other, universal/particular, public/private, subject/object, black/white, up/down, and inside/outside¹² It is easy to see how the key elements of dualistic thought connect and reinforce one another, making an escape from their complex logical structure difficult. Moreover, “a dualism is an intense, established and developed cultural expression of . . . a hierarchal relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality unthinkable” (*Feminism* 47). And according to Plumwood the valued side of many binary pairs resides in its connections to the capacity for reason. While reason was presented as a gender-neutral term, “feminist theory has detected a

masculine presence” in the concept, tracing it back to Plato and the reason/nature dualism (5).

In delineating the characteristics of dualism that form the foundations of colonization – the five key features of the master model of domination – Plumwood identifies possible entry points from which to destabilize or challenge the validity of the concepts. Briefly, these features are backgrounding (denial, making the Other inessential), radical exclusion (hyperseparation, the most minute differences are exaggerated while shared qualities and continuity are denied or minimized), incorporation (relational definition, underside of dualism defined as lack or absence compared to the master identity or centre), instrumentalism (objectification, Other conceived of as a means to the master’s ends), and homogenization (stereotyping, differences among the inferiorized Others are ignored and dominant group viewed as homogenous) (47-55). Urquhart, as I will establish, utilizes these characteristics to shape a scene that ultimately exposes the inherent contradictions of the logic of colonialism, destabilizing the discourse and making the links with other discourses of oppression.

The primary function of each feature of colonialist logic revolves around the devaluing of the underside of the dualism so as to contribute to the construction of an inferior “other”; thus “the more highly valued side (men, human) is construed as alien to and of a different nature or order of being from the ‘lower’ inferiorized side (women, nature) and each is treated as lacking in qualities which make possible overlap, kinship, or continuity”(Plumwood 32). Dismantling or problematizing a dualism based on difference involves “the reconstruction of relationship and identity

in terms of a non-hierarchical concept of difference” which in turn challenges the assumptions of a ‘natural’ dominance and disrupts the structures of power so crucial to the master/slave, colonizer/colonized, male/female models (60). In *Away*, Urquhart extends the challenge to include the human/non human dualism as well.

Plumwood’s view of the evolution of ecofeminism suggests a parallel movement between the ecological movement and the feminist movement. In her essay entitled “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” Cheryl Glotfelty echoes Plumwood and compares the progress of ecofeminist criticism to Elaine Showalter’s paradigm of the stages of feminist criticism, equating the first stage of studying the representations of nonhuman nature with the *images of women* stage in feminist criticism. The next move by feminists involved rescuing lost women writers from obscurity and a similar course of action in ecocriticism attempted to breathe new life into the nature-writing genre. The final stage of feminist criticism focused on the development of theory that would expose the constructedness of gender and a similar approach by ecofeminist writers and critics examines and reveals the symbolic construction of nonhuman nature (xxii). Relke warns that one should not assume these movements progressed in a linear fashion, or that earlier phases are finished, or that they were “naive and simple” (318). The “consciousness raising” stage of ecocriticism, according to Relke, mirrors the parallel stage in feminist criticism and is ongoing.

Recognizing the intersection of feminism and ecocriticism, and their efficacy when combined, Gretchen Legler describes ecofeminist literary criticism as “a hybrid criticism, a combination of ecological or environmental criticism and feminist

literary criticism” that offers a framework through which we can analyze the various images of nature represented in literature, as well as how these representations mirror or are linked with ideologies of race, class, gender, species and sexuality (227). By examining language, knowledge, desire, and power, ecofeminist literary critics are able to highlight the cultural construction of nature. While ecofeminist activists focus on the practical problems in, and abuses of, the environment, literary critics combine the knowledge of the two fields in order to question the construction of nature as female in a wide range of literary texts. Further, they demonstrate how these representations perpetuate and maintain a “harmful environmental ethic” and are used to justify “oppression of various ‘others’ in patriarchal culture” (Legler 228).

One of the problems facing women writing within patriarchal systems has been the belief that they must choose between accepting an association with nature (naturalism) or joining/endorsing the “dominant mastery model” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 36). Ecofeminism challenges writers in relation to this belief by insisting on “nature [as] the central category of analysis” (King, *Healing the Wounds* 132). Further, Stacy Alaimo warns of the negative consequences when authors choose to avoid the issue altogether: “Taking disembodied, romantic flight [from nature] strengthens the dichotomies between the corporeal and the ethereal, the body and the mind, nature and culture” (*Undomesticated Ground* 125). In order to disengage from the “logic of colonization,” ecofeminists must challenge and reject the choices that arise from the nature/culture opposition and “affirm multiple alliances and articulations, deconstructions and reconstructions of this discursive terrain” (Alaimo,

Ground 136). Plumwood argues that "...we should reject the master model and conceive human identity in less dualistic and oppositional ways; such a critical ecofeminism would conclude that both women and men are part of both nature and culture" (*Feminism* 35). As this thesis will show, in order to explore alternatives, Humphreys adopts an antidualist approach consistent with the one advocated by Plumwood.

Regarding dualisms, Maureen Devine concurs with Plumwood and points out that succumbing to them, as some writers have done when they valorize the association between women and nature leans toward a representation of women as "helpless, but morally pure, victim[s]" and subsequently reinforces the very dualisms that were intended for critique (3). The obvious tendency in *Away*, to identify woman with a nature pitted against (man) culture, perfectly illustrates these negative consequences described by Devine; all the principal female characters as well as non-human nature in the novel are depicted as alternately misused, abused, instrumentalized, misunderstood, and as the final images reveal, eventually sacrificed to the needs of men and culture. Urquhart's failure to transcend the dualisms would come as no surprise to Alaimo who writes, "Since the opposition between culture and nature is so fundamental to Western thought ... reformulating these categories is no small matter. Attempts to reconceptualize "nature" often end up back within the very terms that they seek to transform" (*Ground* 10).

To align 'woman' and 'nature' without questioning the social construction at the heart of each term leads to charges of essentialism, muddies the waters of ecofeminist discourse, and contributes to general misunderstandings of ecofeminism.

Susan Griffin discusses the problem in “Ecofeminism and Meaning,” arguing that while ecofeminism often does recognize certain women’s cultures and practices as “closer to nature,” it does so with the understanding that the relationships are the “result of the social construction of gender and the socialization and division of labor which precede from those constructions” (215).¹³

In a similar fashion, there are those who argue that the concern women show for the environment is inevitable and simply a product of their location in the private sphere and their involvement in “saving, scrimping, buying, choosing, mulching, repairing, insulating, economizing, squashing, shoveling, reducing, reusing, and recycling” (Sandilands xii): planetary ecology mirrors housekeeping. Plumwood labels this typology “the angel in the ecosystem” (*Feminism* 9). Sandilands severely criticizes this specific approach to the woman/nature analogy. Coining the term “motherhood environmentalism,” she writes, “this articulation of ecology with neo-conservative discourses on the family is truly frightening in its implications for women. It is a naturalized morality tale of private women embodying particularistic, nuclear-family-oriented, antifeminist, heterosexist, and ultimately apolitical interests” (xiii). Further, she follows the discursive chain that leads to an image of women as simply “reacting to a crisis,” a reaction that has “nothing to do with thinking or reasoning or aesthetics or ethics” but revolves around a self-serving desire to protect home and family (xiii).

It quickly becomes apparent that tackling dualisms requires of authors complex negotiations. The strategies employed by writers of fictional texts respond to the questions and issues raised in theory and reveal a similar multiplicity that

includes: blurring the boundaries between culture and nature; exposing the dichotomies of culture/nature and male/female as false; challenging epistemologies that reject embodiment and uphold transcendence; highlighting the constructedness of gender and nature; highlighting overlap, continuity and connection between entities previously constructed as polar opposites; deconstructing and reconstructing oppressive conceptual frameworks; confronting, destabilizing and/or transfiguring associations between 'woman' and 'nature'; exposing the role of language in shaping reality; exposing inherent contradictions in patriarchal ideologies; critiquing the role of metaphor in perpetuating ideologies; exposing the contradictions, paradoxes and ambiguities of various ideological discourses; undermining the logic of dualisms.

The primary works discussed in this thesis employ a number of these aforementioned strategies and offer a broad and contrastive picture of the variety of ways two contemporary Canadian female authors are confronting, challenging, and sometimes reconceptualizing the complexities of the metaphoric framework that aligns women with a debased nature and nonhuman nature with a devalued femininity. Urquhart exposes the mechanisms that perpetuate and maintain centric structures of domination along the axes of race, class, gender and species; she explores alternatives to relational modes traditionally defined by phallogentric psychological and philosophical theories; she reveals the limitations of language to capture and express the Real¹⁴ in the human and non-human realms. Humphreys's focus revolves around various modes and effects of representation through the media of literature, photography and cartography; she highlights the role of language in

shaping reality and employs metaphors and similes to reconceptualize various categories; she blurs the boundaries of gender, class, species and race by highlighting continuity while simultaneously acknowledging difference within categories. Humphreys's conceptualizations of knowledge free it from the confines of Cartesian and Enlightenment definitions, and she challenges the Cartesian binary of mind and body to portray corporeality as not only relevant, but crucial to knowledge acquisition.

Chapter 2: An Ecofeminist Mapping of *Away*

2.1) Introduction

When I was a child I was taught to memorize a map of divisions. By this geography I learned to think of myself apart from the earth. And by the same plan the names society gave me divided me from others.

–Susan Griffin

In the opening pages of *Away*, author Jane Urquhart announces two of the major concerns of her novel: relationships between men and women and relationships between humans and nature. The female protagonists are haunted by “men, landscapes, states of mind,” (3) yet the critical response to the text to date has tended to focus on the novel’s engagement with issues of genre (Colville; Compton; Wylie), postcolonialism (Colville; Ross; Smart; Wylie), nation building (Smart; Sugars), and identity politics (Smart; Sugars). Libby Birch’s essay considers the intertextual references that inform Urquhart’s revision of the Irish-Catholic symbol of womanhood, Kathleen Mavourneen, through the character of Mary O’Malley, but refrains from any kind of feminist critique. Katherine K. Gottschalk, in an essay titled “Isabel Huggan and Jane Urquhart: Feminine in This?” approaches this author’s work with feminist concerns about space and gender role restrictions but confines her study to Urquhart’s *Whirlpool* and *Changing Heaven*. Compton recognizes “an ecologic dimension to Urquhart’s fiction” (214); however, she refrains from exploring or elaborating on this aspect. Wylie does discuss “the destruction of landscape” (42) but only in the context of its allegorical relation in the novel to history, myth, and narrative.

It seems rather odd that *Away*, a novel with such a complex and omnipresent engagement with nature, has elicited very little critical attention in this area, especially considering the Canadian preoccupation with a relationship to the wilderness.¹⁵ On the other hand, the fact that feminist critics have largely remained silent with respect to *Away* is not surprising. As previously noted in the introduction, the relationship between women and nature is often fraught with anxiety, resentment, ambivalence and suspicion; feminists in particular have wrestled with and often run from any association between the feminine and the natural world. Nevertheless, “feminist authors of fictional texts have to deal in one way or another with women’s relationship to nature, for the simple reason that character and setting are integral elements of fiction” (Devine 31).

Relying mainly on the ecofeminist methodology outlined earlier and incorporating, where necessary, other theoretical paradigms, my examination of Urquhart’s novel will focus on her particular approach to dualisms, as well as the question of whether she succeeds in re-conceptualizing the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘nature.’ Glynis Carr writes, “to restore women and ‘the feminine’ to the foreground is potentially to disrupt sexist, naturist ideology and open new spaces for alternative social visions” (124). In *Away*, Urquhart clearly foregrounds the concepts of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ and the effectiveness of her chosen strategy will be considered. The discussion will establish that while Urquhart’s narrative falls short of suggesting an “alternative social vision,” it does imaginatively expose some of the faulty frameworks and erroneous assumptions of the Enlightenment project that

continue to govern Western ontological and epistemological beliefs and, in doing so, her narrative offers up multiple entry points from which to “open new spaces.”

Spaces or landscapes old and new, concrete and imaginative, known and unknown, preoccupy the characters of Urquhart’s novel. Mary, a young woman living on Rathlin Island, just off the coast of Ireland, her daughter, Eileen, born in Canada, and her great-grand-daughter, Esther, negotiate the powers of the land and nature that are intertwined in the novel with men and (un)earthly apparitions. Before the famine forces Mary and her husband Brian O’Malley to emigrate, the narrative focuses on Mary’s relationship with a ghost, the spirit of a dead sailor conflated with elements and locations in nature. Once the family arrives in Canada, Mary’s son and husband quickly accommodate themselves to this foreign country, but Mary eventually vanishes into the forest in search of her otherworldly beloved, leaving behind her newborn infant daughter, Eileen. Esther recounts this story to herself as she prepares to spend her final night in the family home by Lake Superior (a property soon to be owned by a cement company), relegating the last half of the tale to her grandmother Eileen’s disastrous affair with a mesmerizing Irishman named Aidan Lanighan. While each of Mary’s female ancestors experiences unusual relationships with men, and passionate ties to the landscape, none of their situations rival the unique circumstances surrounding Mary and her daemon-lover.

I will demonstrate that Mary’s haunting by “men, landscapes, and states of mind” serves to illustrate the inadequacies of dualistic models for understanding and representing reality, and demonstrates how the dualist habit of mind constructs gender and nature in ways that are, in the end, destructive to all relationships. The

discussion will show that the narrative evolves out of a highly dualistic mode and that Urquhart, every now and then, questions and/or undermines certain binaries by altering traditional gendered associations, by reversing value or by revaluing the underside and, in the case of nature, by bringing the natural world into the category of the subject. An examination of language at the narrative level will show that Urquhart's approach is inconsistent and that ultimately she fails to reconceptualize the relevant categories. At the level of plot, a close reading of the relationships between Mary and two male characters—the ghost and her husband Brian O'Malley—will reveal how they expose the oppressive and limiting features of phallogentric language, principally the Lacanian 'lack' that remains beyond the expressive capacities of language. This study will then focus on a few specific scenes that, when read carefully, offer layers of complex interconnections that speak to the issues surrounding the woman/nature analogy on a number of theoretical levels. Mary's encounter with an Anglo-Irish landlord lends itself to an analysis of power based on Val Plumwood's previously described theory of the logic of colonization and provides a fictional enactment of her argument regarding the conceptual links between the "isms" of oppression. The dead sailor and his ghost/spirit in nature, when read within a psychoanalytic framework, expand interpretive possibilities to include issues of identity, gender, desire and the last frontier yet to be colonized—the unconscious. Mary's erotic encounters with the spirit in nature are, according to psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin's theoretical principles, a perfect illustration of the intersubjective relational mode (*The Bonds of Love* 1988). Despite the novel's incorporation of various alternatives to traditional concepts and theories, it

ultimately fails to destabilize the “interstructured identities and oppressions of women and nature” (Sandilands 15). It does, nevertheless, highlight some contradictions and ambiguities to expose certain false beliefs that impose division; by demarcating the central features and detrimental influences governing Western Enlightenment philosophy, Urquhart’s novel foregrounds the ideological structures where resistance and reconceptualization are required and/or might occur. In each case, the discussion will include the possibilities and potential of Urquhart’s chosen methods as well as the dangers and limitations. This thesis will show that the author’s position and approach are compatible with and reflect the fundamental tenets of cultural/radical feminism, more often encountered in the earlier stages of ecofeminism.¹⁶ More specifically, by examining the representations of power and desire in the novel, this thesis will reveal that despite Urquhart’s rendering visible the complexities of and interconnectedness between the culture/nature and man/woman dualities, in the final analysis, her novel presupposes and re-inscribes an ontological basis for the woman/nature analogy that has historically associated females with nature and distanced nature from males and culture.

2.2) Language: Narrative Level

...categories are the repositories of our beliefs about the world.
-Donna J. Pequot

Urquhart installs and confronts dualisms on many different levels; prominent among the explicit binaries in place from the very beginning of the novel are the following: man/woman, culture/nature, inside/outside, spiritual/corporeal, life/death, solid/fluid, colonizer/colonized, human/nonhuman, reality/fantasy, text/speech, rich/poor, presence/absence, domination/submission, rational/intuitive, self/other, reason/emotion and subject/object. Authors may deal with dualistic oppositions by critiquing and/or undermining the images and metaphors that associate femininity with nature and masculinity with culture. As demonstrated in the introduction of this thesis, the male/female and culture/nature dualisms are “closely intertwined, so much so that neither can be fully understood in isolation from the other” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 33). Consequently, to demonstrate the inaccuracy of one is to trouble the other.

The over-determined binaries appear within the text on a number of different levels that strongly suggest an intentional strategy. For instance, the first line of the novel ends with “extremes,” a word that appears three times in the first three pages, along with diction and images that share similar connotations: north/south, presence/absence, age/youth. Extremes of weather occur in geographical locations that are themselves extremes: landscapes found on the “most northern coast” (4), the “southern boundary” and the “extreme edge” (5). The symbolic design of the narrative also adheres to dualistic modes and relies on clichés with the masculine realm of intellectual ordering and rational abstract thought associated with culture,

the sun, solidity, and consciousness; the feminine realm in the novel is symbolized by water, mutability, the moon, dreams, and nature. Dualistic thought relies on rigidly maintained opposition—on difference constructed in ways that distort each side of the binary—and no middle ground exists in Enlightenment philosophy; the settings, characterization and themes in *Away* reproduce this paradigm and, with the exception of sporadic disruptions and minor destabilizations, remain firmly fixed within its polarizing structure (Plumwood, *Feminism* 32).

According to Maureen Devine there are two key strategies available to feminist writers when dealing with the difficult terrain of dualisms. Both involve the paradox of having to enter into and accept “one’s oppositional part in the dualism before attempting to break through it” (33). Entering the dualism paves the way for “self-perception and self-criticism,” (33) both of which are necessary for liberation and re-conceptualization. Devine writes that resolving the contradictions inherent in dualistic thought involves “complex and delicate” negotiations due to the contradictions and paradoxes involved, as well as the deeply embedded conceptual patterns that construct and support our dualistic paradigms (33). Devine also refers to critic Myra Jehlen’s alternative: “there are many ways of dealing with contradictions, however, of which only one is to try to resolve them. Another way amounts to joining a contradiction – engaging it not so much for the purpose of overcoming it as to tap its energy” (34).

Urquhart’s narrative unquestionably ‘enters into’ the dualisms but her protagonists fall short of breaking through them; they fail to acquire the self-criticism or critical perspective necessary to challenge the basic assumption of an

ontological link between ‘woman’ and ‘nature.’ Undoubtedly, Urquhart establishes and foregrounds dichotomies in order to highlight the destructive consequences of oppressive conceptual frameworks grounded in dualisms, evidenced by the countless references in the novel to division, fragmentation and loss. On occasion, when this author does subvert and/or question some of the basic assumptions involved, she confines her challenge to concepts or entities like presence/absence, light/dark, and inside/outside and very rarely, if ever, to the man/woman-culture/nature oppositions. In the case of these latter dualisms, her preferred strategy re-inscribes the binary and simply reverses the customary superior/inferior designations.

The imagery at times feminizes the landscape, while at other moments elements of the natural world are masculinized or neutralized but, upon close consideration, even those metaphors that initially seem subversive actually maintain the basic structure whereby ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ operate as complement or counterpart to ‘man’ and ‘culture.’ It will become clear that Urquhart’s narrative attempts to circumvent the failures that ensue from “invoking a familiar and feminine face for nature” or from “maternal and home metaphors” (Sandilands 181) by overlaying nature with a somewhat less familiar masculine (but still human) face. Rather than portraying “nature through its unfamiliarity, its Otherness, its enigmatic activity,” she chooses a strategy that maintains gender binaries and ontological opposition (Sandilands, *Good-Natured Feminist* 181).

As mentioned earlier, a close reading of the metaphors and images in *Away* reveals only the occasional example of subversive twists or destabilizations to customary literary and linguistic conventions that function to maintain and

perpetuate opposition. However, reversal, the more obvious and sustained narrative strategy with respect to dualisms in the novel, emerges most perceptibly in *Away* through Urquhart's treatment of the male/female and culture/nature binaries, and is one that also maintains the alignment of females and indigenous peoples with nature. Urquhart's earlier works of fiction, *The Whirlpool* and *Changing Heaven*, position the environment or setting in integral roles, central not only in the context of plot and characterization but in relation to the overall themes, and this tradition continues in *Away*. Urquhart frees elements of nature and the environment from the limits of landscape and setting to become part of the subject matter, as she allies Mary, initially Eileen, and Exodus Crow with the landscape as if it truly were another character. This nature/character, a conflation of a male ghost or spirit with oceans, lakes and streams, reverses the typical view that aligns nature, and especially water, with the feminine.

Urquhart alternates between subverting gendered tropes of nature and remaining true to traditional Western metaphors, sometimes mixing the two, and occasionally reversing or neutralizing them. Hills are compared to "a huge, soft staircase" (232) instead of a female body, the more typical analogy. Fields are "like draped tables" (233) and waves engage in conversation with the shore (240). While gender neutral, these images ultimately do little to reconceptualize the relationship between culture and nature; by employing culture to describe nature in this manner, the metaphors simply figure nature as a passive mirror of culture. Also, the fact that these metaphors appear just as Eileen and Liam leave the wilderness and travel toward civilization further reinforces the culture/nature opposition. While the

strategy of reversal figures most prominently at the level of plot and in relation to Mary's daemon lover, there are other examples where the imagery inverts classic gendered associations by aligning elements of nature with masculinity: "the dark tumescent shape of cedar bush pushed its shape" (268), and "green hills like Aidan Lanigan's shoulders and fields full of tall grass that moved in the wind like his hair" (264). While these few images may reverse the traditional woman/nature analogy by comparing nature with masculinity, in the overall design they simply serve to reinforce the dualism of male/female; Mary and her female descendants remain forever joined to the natural world through their continually thwarted desires for a type of completion requiring a male counterpart in/and/or/of nature.

The more traditional discursive association of nature with femininity also appears, surfacing most prominently in the men's conversations, particularly the sailors in the Seaman's Inn in Canada. Whereas bodies of water are most often linked with masculinity when Mary is involved—"the lake was a shield of beaten brass" (84), "today *he* was bright water with the flash of sun in it and the tumbling shadows of leaves" (98)—male characters feminize bodies of water. According to Captain O'Shaunessy, the lake impresses most when "she's working up to a purple riptide" (243) and you must "[pay] your respects to her, not taking her whims for granted, enduring her tantrums, patient with her doldrums" (246). Thus, the lake, gendered feminine and endowed with stereotypical traits, appears impatient, emotional, unstable, melancholy, demanding and self-centered. The Captain's language feminizes nature and, in a patriarchal culture where women are subordinated and considered inferior, this type of discourse works to reinforce and

authorize the domination of nature, illustrating the ecofeminist argument that “language plays a crucial role in concept formation” and that “it also plays a crucial role in keeping intact mutually reinforcing sexist, racist, and naturist views of women, people of color, and nonhuman nature” (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 27).

While most of the binaries constituting the predominant themes remain firmly fixed, a small number are undermined; occasionally, the hierarchy of the dualistic system is destabilized by revaluing the underside or by exposing the overlaps and continuities between previously polarized entities. In this way, notions of absence, darkness and passivity are altered and/or expanded. One of the more imaginative and complex reconceptualizations of the relationship between light and dark evokes the notion of liminal space, another important thematic element in the novel, and destabilizes both the presence/absence and light/dark dualisms. As Osbert Sedgewick ponders the treasure supposedly buried in the ruins of an abbey, located at “the most distant point to which a candle’s light reaches when placed in the east window of the now ruinous chapel,” his calculations lead him to conclude “the absence of light on the one hand, the absence of darkness on the other, and where the two absences meet, treasure” (46). Descriptions such as these render the terms ‘light’ and ‘dark,’ ‘presence’ and ‘absence,’ in a manner that resists opposition; if “absence of light” connotes darkness it also implies the light exists, or once existed, as part of that darkness, simultaneously suggesting a reverse potential while undermining the usual assumptions of absolute difference.¹⁷ Urquhart challenges the customary associations whereby treasure would be connected to the positive side of the binary,

light, without reversing the dualism to privilege the dark. According to Plumwood, we must develop concepts of otherness that include difference but overcome hierarchal dualisms. She explains:

It is neither a cancellation of nor a lack or absence of a specified condition, but another and further condition – a *différence* – yielding the concept of an other which is not just specified negatively but is independently characterized and with an independent role on its own behalf. (*Feminism* 58)

Urquhart manages to depict the light/dark and presence/absence binaries on a continuum of difference rather than in polarized terms, a move that avoids reversal as it revalues the underside of the dualism. While limited in the text, examples such as this do demonstrate one strategy Urquhart employs to bring to light how “dark can shine” (*Away* 226).

A simple reversal of the hierarchal binaries so as to value the underside remains a tempting strategy that many authors find hard to resist and often resort to despite its failure to address the central problem: dualisms. At times, as discussed above, Urquhart avoids this pitfall by choosing instead to collapse boundaries and revision binaries as ends of a continuum, thereby exposing the conceptual contradictions and ambiguities. When “stiff and wilful” Father Quinn fails to bring the “soft and absent” Mary back, her power to resist the priest reveals a certain strength concealed in passivity while Father Quinn’s ineffective power exposes the contradictions contained by the typically polarized terms active/passive-male/female (49). As Anglo-Irish landlords, Osbert and Granville Sedgwick’s passivity includes an ambiguous power that also blurs the lines between aggressive and passive behaviour. Always foremost in the minds of the peasants, the absentee landlords

exert tremendous negative power and influence over the cottiers and “absence of cold” precedes the appearance of Mary’s daemon lover (98). Absence plays a crucial role in this narrative, bespeaking a presence and signifying “the gap between reality and representation” (Sandilands, *Good –Natured Feminist* xxi).

“Depicting nature’s resistance” characterizes a narrative attempt to “correct our beliefs” and, by rendering the natural world in ways that speak to its agency and its existence apart from and beyond human control, Urquhart tries to make “amends for past mistakes” (Raglon and Scholtmeijer, “Heading Off” 249). In the first few pages of *Away* verbs describing nature’s actions include: “snatched,” “made off with,” “embrace[d]” (4). Nature transforms the beach (4), forces Esther to “remove the limestone dust” (10) as it continually reminds her of the destruction of her world, burns houses to the ground (11), and buries hotels in sand (11). When Brian O’Malley visits the island, the ferry must cancel a crossing five consecutive days due to bad weather and, “suspicious though he was of superstition,” Brian cannot help viewing it as a sign (54). Mary’s character enjoys a unique relationship with nature; nonetheless, even she must accept its power and autonomy: “But even on calm days this lake would reveal its beloved secret only when it chose, and showed her now a shield made of light and a plenitude of reflections from *the world of the actual*” (98 emphasis mine).

Despite the fact that some of Urquhart’s images and diction depict a nature with a certain level of influence and occasional supremacy, with an ability to shape and/or transform the geographical and psychic landscape of the characters’ lives, they also maintain the opposition between culture and nature and reinforce the

association between females and the natural world. Nature may, in these few instances only, prevail over culture to bury houses and hotels, but throughout the novel nature and culture are depicted as constant enemies in a battle that nature seems destined to lose; examples in the novel of overlaps or continuities between these categories are non-existent. And while the image of an autonomous natural world denying Mary its secrets or sharing its secrets with Eileen may contribute to the notion of nature as actor and agent, in this tale the only characters that show any interest in those secrets, or who might be capable of interpreting nature, are female or indigenous persons. Consequently, the narrative plays into the very dichotomies that it appears to be, at times, challenging.

By depicting “nature as an actor” Alaimo insists we can “radically challenge the idea that nature is passive matter, there for cultural consumption” (*Undomesticated Ground* 12). The two most obvious examples of this tactic in the novel, the ghost-in/as-nature and Eileen’s crow, fail because the strategy superimposes a human face on the natural world. Urquhart’s actors in this case leave little room for the Real, for the enigmatic and the unknown; the crow, like the ghost, speaks to impart secrets and reveal histories (but again only to female characters). In this narrative world nature serves primarily as a backdrop or resource in an anthropocentric tale and it never actually “jostle[s] or jolt[s]” its discursive construction (Alaimo 12). Urquhart’s story fails to imagine a nature that defies construction thereby denying its enigmatic Otherness. By conceiving nature in strictly human terms and within recognizable categories and according to familiar concepts, the narrative suggests we might control, predict and know nature.

Consistently, *Away* depicts a natural world “describable in terms of particular cultural conventions” (Sandilands, *Good Natured Feminist* xix). The tendency to construct non-human nature as an entity that ‘speaks’ is common, and initially appears to hold promise for altering the relationship, but Eric Smith argues against “‘participation’ of the other in the formation of the self” when the notion “extend[s] to subject-based language” (33). He argues that bringing nature into the category of the subject by “positing nature as a ‘speaking subject’” is akin to “putting a square peg into a round hole” in a move that assumes the dualities culture/nature and subject/object and affirms ontological disparity, when we should be striving to eliminate notions of “two grand epistemological poles” in favor of “a universe of relationships between entities that constantly mediate and translate each other” (31).

On this question, Alaimo concurs:

Characterizing nature as an agent, however, does not entail collapsing all differences between human and nonhuman nature . . . we need theories . . . that recognize the agency of the world but which “do not show disrespect for the otherness of nature by inscribing that agency with the cast of the conscious human mind.” (*Undomesticated Ground* 158)

Imagining animals or nature as somehow linguistically capable of communication with humans, as Urquhart does, subsumes them in our fantasy for holism and connection, and ultimately ignores and/or erases the unique identity of the Other.

2.3) Language: Level of Plot

“What the hell do you mean, outer words, other worlds?”

–Liam in *Away*

Speechlessness . . . often operates as an index of authenticity and as a refusal of the compromised world of social communication; the heroine’s silence is intended to convey the intense and complex nature of female subjectivity.

–Rita Felski

The dynamics of the relationship Urquhart invents between Mary and the ghost-in-nature correspond to many of the features of an ethical relation to the Real as outlined in Catriona Sandilands’s *The Good Natured Feminist*, a text that explores some of the ways we might begin to represent nature in a more democratic fashion.¹⁸ Sandilands discusses the inherent potential of an ecofeminist perspective that recognizes the inadequacy of language to represent the Real and “the part of the Real that is also part of nature” (180). Conflating the ghost of Mary’s dead father with nature allows for a multi-layered complex envisioning that considers questions related to the human/non-human relationship, the mind/body dualism, the male/female dualism, the opposition of logos and eros and, most significantly, the limits of language.

Away is interspersed with allusions that lead to a number of linguistic theories shaping the novel. As old Eileen begins her tale, she suggests young Esther should “try to understand, but try not to interpret” since “any interpretation is a misrepresentation” (12). In this instance Urquhart quotes, almost verbatim, Jacques Derrida whose radical approach to decentering the Cartesian subject includes a rejection of the hermeneutic tradition whereby readers attempt to uncover the subjective meaning of the author. As part of the Deconstructionist “rallying cry,”

Derrida insists “every interpretation is a misrepresentation” and the reader need not look for the “true” meaning, but should instead produce a meaning that emerges through his/her own engagement with the narrative, a meaning that the reader “graft[s] onto the text, producing a creation unique to that particular reading” (Hekman 67-68). Derrida’s attack on the hegemony of the subject includes a critique of the phallographic system of language that constructs women (and in the context of ecocriticism, nature) as inferior and more importantly, in relation to this overall study, he “reveals more clearly than any other postmodern figure that at the root of logocentrism is a set of inflexible binary oppositions” (Hekman 26). In this way, Urquhart artfully informs the reader of her intention to engage with language’s role in relation to representations of ‘woman’ and ‘nature.’

In *The Language of the Self*, Jacques Lacan informs us: “it is the world of words which create the world of things . . .” (39). That language participates in the shaping and creation of our perception of reality is now a relatively undisputed fact, and, according to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, our language system is incapable of articulating the Real, but must rely on the Symbolic system that is “marked by a fundamental lack, a core of representational impossibility” (Sandilands, *Feminist* 83). In *Mary*, we encounter a vivid fictional example of the dynamics involved in articulating a subjectivity that is fragmented, where “absence is fundamental” and where the inadequacy of language to represent experience materializes (83). The repressed and hence unspeakable misery surrounding the disappearance of her father, as well as the *jouissance*¹⁹ that manifests partly in her songs and poetry, the result of her erotic experiences with the dead sailor’s body and the ghost in nature,

can be accounted for most effectively in the context of Lacan's psychoanalytical theory of language.

Urquhart's repeated use of the word 'trace' leads directly to Lacan. Significantly, it first appears within the Irish triad in the novel's epigraph: "The three most short-lived traces: the trace of a bird on a branch, the trace of a fish on a pool, and the trace of a man on a woman." Hekman interprets Derrida's definition of trace as difference, or "that which always escapes, is deferred in the attempt to define absolute knowledge as presence" and for Derrida the 'thought of the trace' always escapes the binarism that is the hallmark of the Being of presence" (25). Sandilands elaborates on the Lacanian conception of trace:

To Lacan, the symptom marks a past encounter with the Real, with jouissance, with inexpressible joy or horror. The symptom is a trace of the specific experience of lack; the experience is necessarily repressed in the Symbolic, returned and given meaning as a symptom in the Symbolic that repressed it. (*Good-Natured Feminist* 189)

The foundational hypothesis underpinning Lacan's theory asserts that the phallus organizes the symbolic universe and as "the source of the symbolic itself" it remains "the root of all meaning in language" (Hekman 84). Because woman lacks the phallus she is always "Other," and while some feminists resist and renounce his theory, claiming it to be the "very epitome of phallogocentrism," many recognize the value of Lacan's assertions that include a recognition of femininity as constructed, not essential (Hekman 85). It remains beyond the scope of this work to detail Lacan's theory so, for the purposes of this discussion, an examination of the role of language at the level of character and plot will rely on Lacan's model primarily as it

has been interpreted and applied to literature by feminist writer and critic Julia Kristeva and ecofeminist author and critic Catriona Sandilands.

In *The Good Natured Feminist*, Sandilands writes, “the Real, like the repressed, has been with us all along” and that it “lurks as a limit to language . . . in the gap between reality and representation, on the unreachable horizon of universality” (180). The part of the Real that is part of nature remains elusive, beyond the realm of representation; therefore attempts to speak for nonhuman nature are always, “to some extent, a misrepresentation” (180). An ethical relation to the Real, according to Sandilands, includes a validation of partiality and multiplicity. And, more significantly, she writes, “nature often appears in ecofeminism as the failure of representation, as ‘lack’ in Lacanian terms” (181).

Mary’s early childhood experience of losing her father but never seeing a body to confirm his death, leads to the repression marked by an “absence” that “became absent” (*Away* 36). The loss remains so completely removed from her memory that Mary’s only recollections occur in dreams where her “father’s sail collapses into a *green* horizon” (36 emphasis mine). The thread linking Mary’s father to the drowned sailor, to the ghost, and to nature appears in the narrative as the colour green, traditionally associated with growth, renewal, vegetation and nature. The short passage referring to Mary’s father contains the colour green three times: Mary’s dreams related to his disappearance are a deep green, the room is “bathed in blues and greens,” and the horizon that swallows her father’s sail is green (36). Mary compares the dead sailor’s body to elements in nature and, when she imagines the ghost, she desires to “breathe this green” (37) with him, whereas the other male

characters, including her husband Brian, are most often associated with “muted colours”(47) and the colour brown, also connotative of the earth but with less positive nuances: autumn, melancholy, dependability, practicality and, in the context of Christianity, with spiritual death or segregation.²⁰

The appearance of the drowned sailor on the shore triggers something in Mary that allows her to encircle the lack, to recognize the trauma of her father's death without articulating the specifics, “a remembrance of an experience of something beyond the Symbolic” (Sandilands 191). Again, Urquhart reveals the theoretical praxis shaping her narrative when Mary's “landscape . . . shrank to a circle”(7): Sandilands repeatedly refers to the act of “encircling” the Real as a strategy to overcome its hidden position in ideological discourse (188). Suddenly, for Mary, “the *real* . . . was a hand shimmering under water, distorting in the liquid atmosphere” (47 emphasis mine). For Mary, the drowned sailor, and later his spirit in nature, manifest the symptom of “a trace of the specific experience of lack” that is “necessarily repressed in the Symbolic, returned and given meaning as a symptom in the Symbolic that repressed it,” as an “encounter with the Real, with *jouissance*, with inexpressible joy or horror” (Sandilands 189).

Immediately following her encounter with the sailor, Mary ceases to communicate with those around her; she confines her speech to song and poetry in a manner consistent with Kristeva's theory. Kristeva appropriates and adapts Lacan's claim that female *jouissance* exists as a consequence of woman's position outside the phallic signifier, and she insists it “contains a radical potential” (Hekman, 85). She develops a theory of the semiotic and symbolic whereby the semiotic precedes

the constituted subject and, as Hekman argues, “the dichotomy between the semiotic and the symbolic is central to an understanding of Kristeva’s view of the subject”

(89). Hekman explains:

. . . the semiotic is the Freudian unconscious, the realm of drives and instincts, the symbolic the realm of the superego (1987:5); the semiotic is nature, the symbolic culture; the semiotic is the realm of woman’s *jouissance*, a realm that escapes day-to-day temporality, the symbolic is the realm of masculine time, patriarchal ordering (1986a). (89)

According to Kristeva, the semiotic is transgressive and appears in prose and poetry whenever we find the symbolic being challenged—being subverted from within—and that it can be found in writing by both males and females alike. The potential in this paradigm is overshadowed by an obvious predicament: the theory locates the feminine in the unconscious and the masculine in the conscious realm, re-inscribing an ontological disparity. Defending her, followers insist that what Kristeva is “trying to do is not to define a female essence, or to create a feminine language opposed to masculine language. Rather, she is trying to define the feminine *in* language and its potential for creating a new subject, a subject in process” (Hekman 90). The fact remains that despite the beneficial elements that include a redefinition of the Cartesian subject, Kristeva’s theory is founded on a dualistic premise.

The impression of an ontological-based epistemological disparity between males and females develops in *Away* with the principal male characters at the beginning of the narrative, Father Quinn and Brian O’Malley, contrasting sharply with Mary. The men’s rational, ideologically circumscribed debates and conversations are juxtaposed with Mary’s emotional, intuitive, rather romantic and fantastic songs and poetry. A worried Father Quinn tells Brian, “and she’s only

speaking in verses and songs” (33). The novel does little to destabilize or trouble the gender stereotypes that support the binaries of masculine reason and female irrationality. Even Eileen, a character who remains firmly grounded in so-called reality, often appears to behave illogically and continually succumbs to volatile emotion; as a young woman in a world of her own, Eileen’s character contrasts with her constant, logical, rationally-minded brother Liam.

Mary’s inability to speak of her experience on the beach and, later, to share with those around her the various encounters with her daemon-lover illustrate the “limits of representation” that exist, the part of nature “beyond language”; the ghost, like the Real in nature, is not translatable into human speech (Sandilands 180-181). Mary’s relationship with what could be described as nature’s masculine essence causes her to “appear to herself as embodied, as unfinished, as a creature of the sensuous present,” all of which eventually contributes to her sense of partial selfhood within the world of the Symbolic (Sandilands 183). When she grasps the impossibility of a reconciliation or integration of the two worlds, Mary chooses the freedom of partiality and uncertainty in the Canadian wilderness over the confining closures of ideological fullness, the absolutes produced in the Symbolic, in culture.

Early on, as Mary returns to ‘normal’ and her husband teaches her to read and write, “traces of songs and poems” flicker at the edges of her mind, “songs she had remembered and forgotten at the same time” (60). Eventually, the Symbolic triumphs: the “repetition of the lessons, in time, robbed them [the songs and poems] of their strange significance” and Mary forgets “a foreign shore spilling from a pale hand” (60-61). The overwhelming power of the Symbolic also impinges upon

Brian's ability to connect to his own sense of the Real and to the Other. As a young boy, the game he plays with his mother speaks to questions of the adequacy of language to represent the Real, as well as to the issue of intersubjectivity²¹ and Brian's ability to call Mary back.

The reason Brian succeeds in reaching Mary and drawing her back into the world of the Symbolic, when all attempts by her mother and the priest fail, is entirely due to his recollection of a game he once played with his mother. By asking Mary "What way are you?" Brian communicates in a manner that promotes intersubjectivity (57). The question makes space for and relies on articulations of being, of how one perceives one's self in the world and of how one experiences and sees the world. Brian's empathic means of relating replaces the typical prescriptive mode that relies on questions like "who are you?" that would circumscribe the response within the pre-set boundaries and categories constructed according to culturally sanctioned roles and expectations, a manner consistent with the subject/object relational mode. While pondering his desperation and intense desire to win Mary over, Brian

Suddenly and inexplicably . . . remembered his mother and the game she had played with him when he was a boy – a guessing game of question and response centring on the *objects* in their cabin. "What way are you?" they would ask each other until the accumulated answers brought the solution to the puzzle. Once, when he had been the fire and trying to confuse his mother, he had *felt language grow and blossom in his mouth like flowers*. "What way are you, Brian?" she had asked, and at the age of eleven he had said, "I am hot and difficult and lie under an open roof. I send my thoughts to the sky. I consume myself but am forever being rebuilt by others. Without me you would starve and freeze and your stories would remain untold. (55 emphasis mine)

In a manner consistent with Kristeva's theory, Brian's empathic moment influences him in a way that nourishes his poetic sensibilities: "he had never, he knew, written or spoken better since" (56). His articulations broaden and deepen the concept 'fire' and convey a kind of ontological status or a living subjecthood to the object, an approach that, when extrapolated to the realms of human/human and human/nature interaction, offers a wealth of possibilities for overcoming dominative systems of discourse and representation. It illustrates an expressive mode that attempts to capture the particularities of a 'thou' rather than trying to conquer an 'it.'²² In "Nature and Silence," Christopher Manes suggests humanity's shift from an animistic perception of the natural world has silenced nature and that we need to recognize that "there is also the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves and waterfalls" in a "world of autonomous speakers . . ." (15).²³ Brian's poetry in this scene illustrates Mane's strategy for "recovering a language appropriate to an environmental ethics," one that reverses the shift in order to see nature/Other as an animistic presence rather than a symbolic one. By granting nonhuman nature an animistic subjectivity of "shifting, autonomous, articulate identities" we can transcend the human/nonhuman boundaries so that "speech is not understood as some unique faculty, but as a subset of the speaking world" (Mane 18).

Unfortunately, Urquhart undermines the obvious benefits of these aforementioned alternatives—while the scene with Brian's mother and the one shortly after with Mary may suggest men are capable of accessing the semiotic and of relating intersubjectively, this ability must first be learned at a mother's knee. In this story, females appear to have an ontological capacity for accessing the semiotic, to

connect with nature and with the Real, and for relating in a subject/subject mode, while males must first be taught how.

The major problem with Urquhart's imaginative rendering of the Lacanian notion of lack revolves around her own attempt to represent the 'trace,' to render the Real, a move that ignores the basic principle she seems to be staging: that "human language about nonhuman nature can never be complete" for, as Sandilands insists, only when we can "acknowledge its [linguistic] limits is the space opened for *otherworldly* conversations" (185 emphasis mine). Urquhart's effort to transcend the limits of language in order to fully embody the Real re-enacts the hubristic human belief that we can honestly and authentically (without a prior agenda or bias) interpret, reproduce or represent the Other. Sandilands elaborates on this dilemma:

To argue that these "Other" actors are apart from human discourse is to miss their profound effect on the constitution of human life; to argue that they can be subsumed into human discourse is to ignore their separate agency, their Other-worldliness, their wildness. (184)

Urquhart, makes an obvious attempt to encircle these 'Other' actors and to capture the 'profound effect' of absence, loss, the inexpressible Real in and of nature but, unfortunately, she fails to transcend the reductive habit of painting nature with only the most familiar colours.

2.4) Power: Exposing and/or Undermining the Logical Structure of Dualisms

... the invisibility of nature's interiority, like the invisibility of women's interiority, is threatening precisely because it threatens the balance of power between man and nature, and between men and women.

–Evelyn Fox Keller

Things have a life of their own . . . It's simply a matter of waking up their souls.

–Gabriel Garcia Marquez

The location of Mary O'Malley's home, an island off the coast of Ireland in the nineteenth-century, enables Urquhart to foreground many of the embedded Enlightenment assumptions regarding gender, nature and culture. Writing of the importance for feminists to bring nature into discourse, Catriona Sandilands suggests, "by conceptualizing the domination of nature as a hierarchal process of oppression similar to other forms of domination, nature becomes a political problem linked to and interconnected with other forms of oppression" (*Good-Natured Feminist* 195). Overlapping and interconnected oppressive ideologies analyzed in the following discussion of *Away* include racism, sexism, Colonialism and specieism, and Urquhart's narrative successfully portrays the linkages between them by way of Plumwood's five features characterizing the logical structure of Colonialism. These features that offer entry points from which to undermine the dualisms of all oppressive ideologies comprise backgrounding, radical exclusion, incorporation, instrumentalism and homogenization (*Feminism* 60).²⁴ By privileging one side of the binary and devaluing the other, these features of a centric structure "put an omnipotent subject at the center and construct others as sets of negative qualities" (Harstock qtd. in Warren, *Ecofeminism* 336).²⁵

The Sedgewick brothers represent omnipotent subjects in relation to a number of centric structures in the narrative, and they exhibit traits and attitudes consistent with Western Enlightenment philosophy; as Anglo-Irish landlords they function metonymically as Colonialism and Imperialism. Unlike the absentee landlords in England, Osbert and Granville choose to remain in their Irish ancestral home in a state of “charmed mystification” (39); their surroundings and the local peasantry providing the brothers with the materials and inspiration they need to paint, write poetry, and dabble amateurishly in scientific research. The brothers clearly signify culture in contrast to the peasants’ nature; they are colonizer to the colonized, and they are the rational scientific collectors who attempt to put “County Antrim under glass”(39).

That the brothers represent colonialism is to state the obvious, but the manner in which they are rendered—bumbling, benign, oblivious—diverts attention from their complicity and culpability in the oppression of the racialized lower class Catholic tenants. By portraying them as cartoon-like, humorous, and inoffensive Urquhart subtly implicates passivity, and a simple extrapolation from Colonialism to anthropocentrism serves to remind us of our own culpability; by refusing to vilify the brothers Urquhart shows that one need not be a vicious monster, a cruel tyrant, or aggressive and opportunistic to contribute to the oppression of women and the ‘death of nature.’ Plumwood singles out and criticizes women for this particular form of culpability, writing:

Western women may not have been in the forefront of the attack on nature, driving the bulldozers and operating the chainsaws, but many of them have been support troops, or have been participants, often unwitting but still enthusiastic, in a modern consumer culture of which they are the main

symbols, and which assaults nature in myriad direct and indirect ways daily” (*Feminism* 9).

The Sedgewicks’ father, Henry Austin the first, objectifies the land in his attempt to dominate and control it, to “create suitably romantic and lengthy walks” (41). Serving as a prime example of culture shaping nature, his behaviour reflects the Romantic view proliferating in nineteenth-century England of constructed nature as a refuge and source of aesthetic and spiritual inspiration. His effort to alter the natural landscape to suit his own aesthetic sensibilities illustrates the colonization of nature as Other and more specifically the act of ‘incorporation’ described by Plumwood:

The colonized with their “disorderly” space are available for use without limit, and the assimilating project of the colonizer is to remake the colonized and their space in the image of the colonizer’s own self-space, own culture or land, which is represented as the paradigm of reason, beauty, and order. (“Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism” 339)

The brothers’ relationship to nature and the environment is also an idealized one that, while less invasive and manipulative than their father’s, remains equally destructive and mirrors their relationship to the Irish tenants. The Sedgewicks’ instrumentalization of nature, of the various animal and plant species and of the peasants, illustrates an aspect of the self/other relationship whereby the self “uses both other humans and the world generally as a means to its egoistic satisfaction, which is assumed to be the satisfaction of interests in which others play no essential role” (Plumwood, “Nature, Self and Gender” 19). The brothers’ behaviour, while not malicious or overtly oppressive, carries its own set of negative consequences due to its denial of connection or dependence, viewing Others (human and non-human) simply and solely as resources for their own fulfillment. Instrumentalism, as

Urquhart so obviously demonstrates via the Sedgewicks, weakens and distorts not only human interaction but extends to, and damages in much the same way, the human and non-human relationship.

The Sedgewick brothers highlight the relationships between centric structures that make possible a transfer of metaphors “between different kinds of centric oppression and the reinforcement of the ideologies which support one kind of centric oppression by the ideologies of another” (Plumwood, “Androcentrism” 339). The Sedgewicks remain oblivious to the severity and scope of the hardships of their Irish Catholic tenants, an attitude consistent with backgrounding whereby the “colonized are denied as the unconsidered background to ‘civilization,’ the Other whose prior ownership of the land and whose dispossession and murder is never spoken, admitted” (Plumwood, “Androcentrism” 339). As they collect stories and folklore, the brothers romanticize the harsh reality in poetry and painting. Their ability to remain impassive to the plight of their tenants illustrates another feature of the logic of Colonization identified as radical exclusion: set apart as Other, constructed as inferior and lacking in reason, associated with Nature, the colonized Other remains excluded through an exaggeration of traits including ‘primitive’ and ‘uncivilized.’ Plumwood writes, “identification and sympathy are cancelled by this denial of continuity and kinship” (“Androcentrism” 339). While discussing the “terrible hardships in the West,” (65) Osbert’s sadly humorous remark on the unremitting poverty and suffering highlights the distance between subject and object produced by a detached rationality, the guiding principle of empiricism and of the Colonial attitude, as well as the signpost of Cartesian subjectivity: “Always have been” he

says, and then adds, “Some of them without windows and, as a result, without views” (65). Similarly, Osbert’s “mania for natural history” leads him to collect specimens with “little heed to the gorgeous small world he was disturbing” and, in case we miss her point, Urquhart adds, “His specimens would gain significance and reality only when he got them home, put them under a microscope, and accurately reproduced them on paper” (85). Nature, for Osbert, is not “something that can be valued independently of human interests” (Warren, *Ecofeminism* 329). The thread that unites the five features in Plumwood’s model of Colonialism and makes possible the transfer between structures that relate to gender, race and species is the denial of agency or purpose to the devalued side of the dualism, be it woman, indigenous person or the natural world. As Subjects-masters in this complex structure, the Sedgewicks view the Irish peasant as raw material that gains value only when it serves their creative needs. In a comparable manner based on the same ideological perspective, they feel free to impose their own goals on nature, rendering it valuable only as a means to their ends.

The encounter between Mary and Osbert Sedgewick begins when he notices her at a distance collecting seaweed. His own activity of collecting specimens quickly forgotten, and the “sea anemones . . . left to perish on the sand,” he excitedly heads towards her in the hopes of learning about her experience of being “away” (86). Osbert’s actions and attitudes in this scene correspond to and enact the five features of centrism as they manifest in the logic of Colonialism, androcentrism, and anthropocentrism. In just a few pages, Urquhart reveals the interconnectedness of the assumptions and beliefs that support and justify not only the domination of

women by men, but also the control and exploitation of non-human nature by human beings.

Osbert's ignorance regarding the tradition of gathering seaweed leads Mary to conclude that "this man had been blind" to all the "replicas of Mary" who had, for centuries, participated in this difficult labour (87), and foregrounds the features of the logic of Colonialism founded on the accepted wisdom of dualistic frameworks. Despite the fact that he and his brother have lived among and studied the Irish tenants for years, they remain unaware of those aspects of the peasants' daily lives that do not contribute to their own scientific and artistic endeavours (instrumentalism), and as a result they fail to recognize their "trace" in the land (denial and backgrounding) and the ingenuity with which the Irish peasant transforms an infertile earth to a state of productivity. The connotations of "replica" include the colonizer's attitude toward a colonized other; they—the uncivilized, the primitive – are all the same (homogenization), devoid of reason and agency, "interchangeable and replaceable units" who "appear in stereotypical terms" and remain "all the same in their deficiency," while diversity among the inferiorized Other is ignored (Plumwood, "Androcentrism" 339). More importantly, according to Plumwood, homogenization "supports both instrumentalism, incorporation (relational definition) and radical exclusion" by producing a binary and dividing the world "into two orders" (*Feminism* 54). The translatable ideology underpins all the 'isms' and serves to confer a sense of naturalness and inevitability to Osbert's ascendancy over the Irish (race and class), over Mary (gender) and over the sea anemones (species).

Urquhart's narrative reveals how Osbert's worldview combines androcentric, anthropocentric, and Colonialist beliefs, as well as how these beliefs depend on the concept of homogenization. First, the landlord offers Mary assistance with her basket of seaweed, taking for granted her inferior strength based on gender assumptions. When he learns of her purpose, "to make the plants grow properly," he is "greatly surprised" by Mary's strength and perseverance as well as by her shrewdness and ingenuity in overcoming the obstacles of an almost uncultivable landscape (87). These observations jar his sensibilities since they contradict his assumptions regarding both gender and race; as the colonizer, Osbert needs to define himself against a certain stereotype (the colonized). Still more shocking and unnerving is Mary's forthright demeanour and inquisitive nature characterized by what Osbert views as her audacity in asking him about his activities. Again, his reliance on racial stereotypes and the qualities associated with gender and class are challenged and he thinks, "Curiosity was not a state of mind he associated with these people. Imagination, superstition . . . but certainly not curiosity" (88). The defining characteristic of the 'master' and/or Subject in Plumwood's theory is reason and "sets of dualisms . . . are linked through their definitions as the underside of the various contrasts of reason" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 21). When Mary or her kin exhibit rationality, rather than the devalued and feminized traits consistent with discourses of an inferior other, it contradicts everything Osbert believes; Mary undermines "comfortable stereotypes of superiority" and consequently Osbert's sense of certainty and existing worldview (Plumwood 54).

Racism, sexism, and anthropocentrism come together in a complex tableau as two unlikely figures discuss a tidepool. Urquhart fills in the distance between subject and object that, in Enlightenment models of knowing, “looks like mere empty space” (Alaimo, “Skin Dreaming” 130), and Osbert remains unable to “clearly define” Mary’s behaviour (*Away* 89).²⁶ Her inquiries into his penchant for collecting the sea creatures initially annoys him, and Urquhart allows this character’s recollections to illustrate the genesis of a colonized psyche:

Osbert had a brief, inexplicable memory of himself as a child, standing in a large, cold room with a smoking fire at one end, holding up a single sheet of paper towards his mother who was giving it but cursory attention. “What has Granville been doing?” she had asked. The drawing had been of a tenant’s cabin with a corpulent chicken dominating the roof. His mother, he now realized, was interested in neither the subject matter nor her child’s rendering of it. “Why,” she had asked, “have you not been drawing your Cave Walk?” There was something in the open, questioning face of the woman before him [Mary] that brought to mind the child that he had been then. (89)

Eventually, stirred by these memories of his own uninhibited childhood wonder and curiosity, Osbert agrees to show Mary the tidepool. This moment of connection contains a spark of recognition, on Osbert’s part, of an overlap or kinship linking them, for long ago he too enjoyed the pure and untainted inquisitiveness he now glimpses in Mary. Osbert’s recollection exemplifies part of the process whereby the master/Subject learns to split off, deny or construe as alien, those qualities appropriate to the Other in order to maintain hyperseparation between dualisms.²⁷ The resulting false dichotomy eliminates the possibility of overlap between pairs. Mary’s behaviours imply continuity and overlap in the contexts of gender and class, and challenge Osbert’s belief in “separate ‘natures’”(Plumwood, *Feminism* 49). The

entire episode continues to destabilize notions of a polarized difference between the Anglo-Irish landlord (male, culture, colonizer) and the Irish woman (female, nature, colonized) while Mary's perceptions of the natural world provide alternate models for thinking about and relating to nature.

In the context of Plumwood's paradigm of the 'master' identity, Mary refuses to fit neatly into the categories whether they are class, race, or gender. By showing herself to be different from other women – her knowledge about Rome indicates a certain level of learning and intelligence, her interest and willingness to ask questions belies passivity or apathy, her physical strength and perseverance correspond to traits normally gendered masculine – she no longer appears interchangeable or stereotypical either as a woman or as a member of the Irish peasant class. Mary disturbs Osbert's familiar delusions—the legacy of rationalism—his realist certitude. Confused by her erudition and assertiveness, Osbert thinks of how “he rarely felt so uncomfortable in the presence of another” (88).

Osbert's discomfort signals cognitive dissonance, a crack in the ideological foundations that justify his dominant position and function to maintain hierarchal dualisms and opposition. As Plumwood makes clear, the colonizer's relationship with both human and non-human Others turns on the ability to deny and cancel any sign of their independence (*Feminism* 191). Additionally, all “isms” of oppression require radical “unbridgeable separation” (*Feminism* 51) that allows for a view of the Other as not only different, but inferior. Mary bridges, even if momentarily, the chasm constructed in colonial and patriarchal discourses by revealing her physical and intellectual independence and by exposing the shared characteristics between the

polarized categories of man/woman, colonizer/colonized, human/non-human. She draws Osbert into rapport made possible by a much denied similarity; Mary displays courage, strength, ingenuity (qualities typically associated with the master identity), but perhaps the trait that contributes most to her ability to communicate and connect with Osbert is her interest in the natural world. Even in this, Mary challenges the usual assumptions and stereotypes. “The civilized/primitive contrast maps all the human/animal, mind/body, reason/nature, freedom/necessity, and subject/object contrasts,” and constitutes a logical structure that denies the underside of the binary the capacity for reason (Plumwood, *Feminism* 45). While Mary’s interested approach does not adhere strictly to an objective empiricist perspective, she nevertheless displays a degree of interest equal to Osbert’s that includes reason and stems from a desire for knowledge:

They squatted together on the sand within a rocky enclosure, whispering and pointing to things that were almost invisible, this strong communication between a peasant woman and a gentleman being so nearly impossible that neither thought consciously about it until later. Osbert told the woman, whose name he discovered was Mary, the Latin names for the many species that he knew, and she listened attentively, then asked, to his great private delight, if the Romans themselves collected and drew tiny sea creatures. (89)

The “brief flash of understanding” conferred on Osbert is the consequence of a moment of intersubjective empathy. In this scene, Urquhart interrogates the barrier, the rigid socio-cultural boundary erected to separate the “rough weave of a shawl” from the “Harris tweed” that creates and upholds the illusion of a polarized difference (90). The momentary rupture that occurs as Mary mediates between Osbert who was “manufactured somewhere else” and her Nature/nature decenters the various hegemonic narratives that rely on a structure of binary opposition (90).

Mary's observations and contemplations begin immediately to articulate an alternative to traditional narratives of nature, one not yet colonized by discourses of art and science; choosing not to distance, abstract or categorize the anemones, she engages instead with the particularity of the objects as they exist in nature. Upon first peering into the tidepool Mary remarks, "It's lovely . . . a garden like this. Colours I'd never thought about. See how calm and clear . . . like a mirror with our faces in it, *except that behind our faces there's a whole world of things alive and being beautiful*" (90 emphasis mine). The habit of constructing nature to reflect our own limited views of reality results in an erasure of its difference and its continuity. Mary's view embodies nature and liberates it from the "position [of] passive mirror of culture into a position as actor or agent" (Warren, *Ecofeminism* 229). Mary's analogy suggests not only nature's opacity but alludes to the impossibility of ever fully knowing another person; externals convey only partial truths and leave "a world of things" hidden away (*Away* 90). And while Mary does anthropomorphize the anemones, she avoids language or images that assign gender, focusing instead on the interconnectedness of the vegetation and sea life. Her verbal sketch bestows a sense of agency and organization that contradicts the Enlightenment belief that nature consists of inert particles dependent on outside forces. When the anemones unfurl their tentacles in a "slow dance" they do so "ceremonially" or, with a purpose (90). Mary hypothesizes that the "small weeds" and "creatures" know each other because they exist in the "same current"(90). Through Mary, Urquhart echoes sentiments of quantum physicist Elizabeth Dodson Gray who, in *Green Paradise Lost*, writes "that 'inert matter' is full of life, that objects are 'patterns of energy,'

and that they participate in a continuous dance of energy” (qtd. in Legler 232). Mary recognizes and appreciates the uniqueness and independence of this miniature world without feeling compelled to unsettle it in an investigative fervour of indifference; she disentangles the desire to know from the desire to dominate. Mary ‘knows’ nature in an intuitive and respectful manner that bestows agency and acknowledges distinctiveness. She teaches Osbert that there is a natural world outside the parameters of his artistic and scientific colonization and she models a non-exploitive and non-destructive organic relationship based on a horizontal, non-hierarchal concept of difference. The apparent benefits of this character’s approach must be balanced with the recognition that, once again, Urquhart portrays ‘woman’ as interpreter, teacher, go-between or empathetic mediator between ‘man’ and ‘nature.’

Until this moment, Osbert’s view of nature is typical of nineteenth-century attitudes and conforms to those discourses described by Merchant that represent nature as inchoate matter in order to legitimize its exploitation and domination. Mary’s embodied knowledge, on the other hand, remains free from the influence of Western epistemic criteria that demands rational objective detachment, a split between mind and body; Mary exhibits a corporeal-based empathic attitude to nature that contrasts with Osbert’s detached objectivity. Mary directs and refocuses Osbert’s gaze and sows the seeds of an awareness that alters his perceptions of, and ultimately his relationship with, the environment. She sensitizes him to the realities of the dominated: the Irish, women, and nature. A close reading of Mary’s attitude toward and beliefs about the natural world and its inhabitants sounds surprisingly similar to the positions, beliefs and suggested conceptual revisions that form the

foundations of contemporary ecocritical scholarship. Mary communicates her capacity to view the tidepool as a world unto itself as she tells Osbert she “would like to be able to walk in a field like this. These colours. These dances” (91). As Mary Lugones cautions, it is only by “traveling to someone’s world” that we come to know “what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes,” and only then are we “fully subjects to each other” (qtd. in Alaimo, *Ground* 128). Mary does the next best thing by maintaining epistemic humility and entering this world of the Other through empathy and imagination. Caught up in her enthusiasm, Osbert offers to “capture some specimens” for her and her response captures and distills the sentiments expressed by much ecocritical writing:

The woman did not answer but rose, instead, to her feet. Then she shook her head. “Why would I take this world apart so that it could never be again?” she asked, looking down at Osbert, at the tidepool. “If I could go into this world I would go and come away again and leave it undisturbed –the small caves, the beautiful creatures. I would take none of that away with me”. (91)

Mary’s ethics and beliefs counter the human-centeredness of the dominant Western outlook on nature: she neither treats nature as radically other, nor does she homogenize it, but instead recognizes its diversity and complexity. The denial of dependency on nature, characteristic of the logic of oppression, allows the Sedgewicks to underestimate the threat posed by the imminent potato blight and contrasts with Mary’s heightened awareness of nature’s beneficial contributions – the seaweed for nourishment, the turf for warmth, the cow for milk – to the Irish peoples’ well being. Her non-hierarchal model of difference recognizes dependency and foregrounds a nature vehemently backgrounded in the Enlightenment model. Mary’s connection to the natural world raises and illustrates another much-debated

question in feminist circles regarding the legitimacy of viewing certain women (and as this discussion has shown, categories related to class and race may be substituted in this debate in place of gender) as justifiably closer to nature by virtue of their lived experience and material conditions, and not simply as a consequence of gender. Urquhart underscores the distinction with the marked contrast between the landlords' mother's detached relationship to the land and Mary's interconnected and organic one; Mary's awareness is experientially grounded. Unfortunately, Urquhart confines this apparently innate ability to connect empathically with nature to the lower class female characters, and only those male characters that reap the benefit of Mary's teachings (or their mother's wisdom in the case of Brian) are able to partially overcome their colonizing tendencies. As a result, the connection between 'woman' and 'nature' and the opposition between 'man' and 'nature' is reinforced and eventually overshadows all other attempts at challenging or transforming the dualisms.

2.5) Desire: Gender and the Strategy of Reversal

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made:
Those pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
—William Shakespeare*

Loss, absence, separation, fragmentation—these words and variations of them appear repeatedly in Urquhart’s narrative and, as the lived consequences of “extremes,” they too convey important subjects and themes. Mary’s erotic relationship with the dead sailor and his spirit embodied in nature offer important interpretive possibilities in relation to these themes, to issues relating to the dualisms of mind/body, self/other, Symbolic/Real, rational/irrational, reality/fantasy, man/woman, nature/culture, subject/object. This thesis will demonstrate, by way of a close reading of Mary’s relationship with the ghost, the inadequacy of reversal as a strategy for dealing with female desire, and will then show how, as metaphors develop relationships beyond the visual, the interactions between Mary and her ghost begin to mirror those described by psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin. When mapped according to Benjamin’s theory of intersubjectivity, the fictional relationship reveals both the advantages and dangers inherent in this particular relational mode for articulating female desire, and the detrimental consequences of having to choose between modes. And because the daemon-lover is conflated with nature, parallels can be drawn between the limitations placed upon human-to-human interactions and the similarly flawed relationship between humans and the natural world produced by Western Enlightenment assumptions that hide and/or deny interconnectedness.

Further, spatial representations that form an important part of Benjamin's theory lend themselves to an extrapolation from the human/human interface to one between human and non-human (in this case human/ghost) entities as they suggest alternatives to epistemologies that rely on subject/object distancing and domination; these spatial metaphors offer new ways of conceptualizing both subjectivity and relationship.

Urquhart's narrative offers a plethora of possibilities for discussing the novel from an ecocritical stance, but the most interesting and sustained metaphor revolves around women's relations with men and nature. It begins when Mary encounters a drowned sailor on the beach, and continues through her relationship with her daemon-lover—a conflation of her father's ghost, a dead sailor and nature. As with most elements in the story, Mary's principal relationships with men exemplify extremes and represent two distinctly opposed forms of relating to the Other: the intrapsychic and the intersubjective relational modes. Intentional or not, the rendering of Mary's relationship with the spirit or ghost, as it appears to her in the landscape, perfectly conveys in fictional form the fundamental features of what Benjamin describes as an intersubjective relationship.²⁸ Beginning with the drowned sailor, Urquhart moves Mary's character from an inverted version of the traditional plot of male heterosexual desire (intrapsychic mode reversed: female-subject/male-object), to a psychic model of female auto-erotic desire (intersubjective mode: subject/subject), and ends with a conventional marital union wherein female desire must remain suppressed in accordance with socio-religious dictates and gender expectations (traditional intrapsychic mode: male-subject/female-object).

According to Benjamin, the intrapsychic mode that has traditionally ruled gender relations relies on a dualistic, hierarchal and oppositional model while an intersubjective mode, usually associated with female desire and self-discovery, is characterized by interdependence and fluid ego boundaries. Benjamin writes, “The phallus as emblem of desire [represents] the one-sided individuality of subject meeting object, a complementarity that idealizes one side and devalues the other” (“A Desire of One’s Own” 98). The intersubjective mode views the act of relating as a process, a flow of mutual recognition where subject meets subject. In *The Bonds of Love*, Benjamin offers an alternative to the Freudian understanding of female desire and the father-daughter bond, claiming “the problem of woman’s desire has led us to the missing father” (114). In the simplest of terms, Benjamin claims that the lack of opportunities for girls to identify with the father creates a desire (what Freud mistakenly identified as ‘penis envy’) that is actually nothing more than a “longing for . . . a homoerotic bond” similar to the one experienced between fathers and sons, an ideal love “untainted by submission” (“Desire” 88).²⁹

The “missing father” in *Away* could be, and has been, easily overlooked. Mentioned only once in the novel, in a brief passage that reveals his death by drowning, Mary’s father is the actual ghost in this tale. Memories of her father consist of a “departing sail,” a “coffinless” wake, and “women wailing”; we learn that, “she waited for him to return for three years until even his absence became absent” (36). Changing the critical lens from magic realism (a genre that relies on only a vague correspondence between the visible and invisible)³⁰ to one based on a psychological perspective (that views Mary’s ghost as a highly imaginative and

concrete projection of her subconscious mind) brings the implications of this loss into sharp focus. A simple shift in hermeneutics gives rise to a significant connection between a dead sailor washed up on the shore and Mary's long-awaited-for father whose body was never recovered.³¹

Urquhart's rendering of Mary's relationship with the dead sailor evokes a striking sensuality and sets the stage for contrasts between various modes of relating to the other. She structures the scene in a manner reminiscent of sonnet convention, a poetic form aesthetically structured on the man-culture/woman-nature dualities where the male artist objectifies the female muse with tropes that compare feminine beauty to entities in nature.³² The scene on the beach reverses the traditional sonnet configuration, and engages with the challenge facing female poets and writers described by Margaret Homans:

Given a literary form constructed so clearly to the specifications of male desire, women writers did not often choose to write romantic lyrics, for to do so was either to repeat the traditional quest plot, in linguistic drag, or to take up the position of the silent object and attempt to speak from there. (574)

Urquhart's prose version relies on sonnet conventions and illustrates the ineffectiveness of both the aforementioned options:

Mary heard the barrels creak as they touched and separated in the current. She heard the surf pant. But mostly she looked at the young man whose sodden shirt she held firmly in her hands-the dark curls pasted to his left cheek, the eyebrows like ferns, the lashes resting on bones beneath his eyes. She absorbed, in these few moments, more knowledge of a man's body than she ever would again. One of his arms rested, palm upwards, in the water, the sleeve torn open at the spot where his elbow bent. She saw the fortune lines on his hand, the blue rivers of veins under the marble skin, the creases on the vulnerable places of wrist and inner elbow. She saw the Adam's apple and tendons of his exposed throat and the hollow between his collarbones just above his chest. By grasping his shirt she had revealed one of his nipples; the sun had dried the dark hairs around it so that they moved like grass in the

breeze, as did the similar hairs that grew down from his belly towards the mystery that his trousers held. Fabric was glued by sea water to his legs and Mary could see the shape of the hard muscles of the thigh and the sharp slice of shinbone, and then the marble skin and blue veins of his bare feet. In the time it took the sun to travel from one cloud to the next, Mary had learned so much of him that she would have been able to scratch the details of his features on a rock or mould an exact replica of him from clay. (7)

Replacing the unattainable virginal female with a physically present but dead male represents the inverse of the traditional sonnet trope whereby a hypothetically living muse (female) remains completely silenced and objectified by poetic convention, often to the point of appearing dead. The irony continues once we learn, later in the narrative, that Mary not only marries a man, but gives birth twice and yet her sexual knowledge and *jouissance* remain confined to a relationship with a corpse and later a ghost or wilderness spirit—the narrator tells us “she absorbed, in those few moments, more knowledge of a man’s body than she ever would again” (7). The plot of traditional heterosexual desire is appropriated and transformed, reversing the hierarchal power structure of the dualisms. “To gender the subject female and to portray nature as male [or the male as connected to nature] reverses the gender dynamics of wilderness tales and epistemological paradigms, ‘jamming the theoretical machinery itself’” notes Alaimo and, while this may be true, the strategy hinges on an inversion of patriarchal values, leaving intact the underlying dualisms that support exploitive hierarchies (*Ground* 156). These challenges and difficulties surrounding the expression of female sexual desire, of finding a language and a model suited to the task, are not restricted to poetic discourse but plague writers of fiction as well.³³ The traditional discourses of the past circumscribed a woman’s sexuality according to ideologies of gender and nature built on the foundations of

dualisms in a paradigm that conceives the male as the desiring and active subject and the female as the passive and silent object of his desire.

Desire, normally the exclusive privilege of the male poet/lover/subject, is in this case located in a female whose gaze objectifies a male corpse, while metaphors of nature used in unfamiliar ways contribute to the erotically charged mood of the passage. Body parts habitually associated with female beauty and fetishized—hair, skin, eyebrows, and nipples—are compared to elements of the natural world in much the same way that sonneteers (male) employed nature to venerate the physical beauty of the beloved (female). Eyebrows are “like ferns,” veins are “blue rivers,” and the hairs surrounding nipples are “like grass in the breeze”. The scene exposes the failure of reversal as a strategy to counter the binary system: displacing the male into the position of object in the subject/object dyad requires he be silenced in death. To grant femininity subjectivity through reversal demands “passivity . . . devolve onto the masculine,” a move that according to Benjamin is “hardly . . . acceptable” (*Shadow of the Other* 40).

The dead sailor, considered from a psychoanalytical perspective, initially functions as the male other, a substitute for Mary’s father against whom she can construct her female desire without being required to take up the subordinate position of object in the usual subject/object dyad; however, in this case the “phallus as emblem of desire” undergoes a conceptual transformation (Benjamin *Desire* 98). Mary’s eroticism is liberated from the constraints of male-defined heterosexual desire because the power of the phallus to organize desire dissipates for Mary who, as she prepares the dead sailor for burial, equates his groin to “a dark flower” (16).

In this instance, Urquhart transforms an over-coded metaphor; the comparison subverts the usual symbolic link between the penis and phallic power (flowers connote femininity, female beauty, passivity, vulnerability, purity, gentleness, and contribute significantly to the symbolic patterning that associates ‘woman’ and ‘nature’) thereby discursively destabilizing the dualistic hierarchal opposition between man/woman based on stereotypical gender qualities assigned in accordance with biological sex. The metaphor subtly and simultaneously calls attention to the inherent contradictions and then re-conceptualizes associations previously construed as contraries in a manner that suggests an overlap, a similarity that troubles the usual opposition and concomitant hierarchal connotations. For Mary’s character this experience marks the emergence of her libido, a sexual awakening that is soon followed by a transition to an intersubjective relational mode facilitated by this image of the penis as a flower that defamiliarizes iconographic gender codes, destabilizes gendered binary oppositions, associates men as well as women with nature, and transforms the masculine structure of the look that is more commonly referred to as ‘the male gaze.’³⁴

In conventional plots of male desire metaphors are specular³⁵ and French feminist theorists including Irigaray, Cixous and Wittig “link ocularcentrism with phallocentrism and point to the importance of touch and smell over vision in female relationships” (Merchant, *Earthcare* 65). As well, “a culture that privileges the phallus . . . also privileges sight, because it is only by visual criteria that women’s bodies can be said to be missing something and that the male body can therefore be

said to have the advantage” (Homans 572). In an essay that examines the role of rhetorical devices in the construction of gender, Margaret Homans concludes:

Underwriting both the plot of male desire and the plot of metaphor is a hierarchal power structure implicit in both, a hierarchy that permits one term—whether the romantic (male) subject or one term of a metaphor—to claim authority to define the other—whether the feminine object of romantic desire or the second term of a metaphor. (573)

Urquhart’s metaphor challenges the notion that women lack something that only men possess and disrupts both the hierarchal structure within the male-subject/female-object dyad as well as the authority of floral metaphor to serve exclusively as an emblem of femininity. Feminist geographer Gillian Rose argues that “only hegemonic readings of the body encode bodies into two absolutely different kind” and that “appeals to biology cannot establish a binary gender opposition” because “human bodies do not neatly divide into two genital types” (80). Urquhart situates her character in the position of female spectator and, working within the phallogentric economy of meaning, manipulates and contests its conventions. The metaphoric transformation makes it difficult to idealize the phallus given that it re-values women’s genitals and dethrones sight as the preferred sense.

As Mary’s character acquires a desire of her own, unmediated by the plot of masculine heterosexual desire, she no longer needs to enact it according to a specular (male) model that depends on visual representation (for sight, as it has been traditionally defined, implies distance and abstraction and would simply repeat the closures of masculinist vision), but can experience and explore female eroticism that, according to Irigary, “takes more pleasure from touching than from looking” (25-26). A close examination of Mary’s otherworldly encounters reveals a libidinal

economy stimulated and sustained primarily by the sensory organs and tactile sensations: “he had washed into her arms, and he would crash over her” (24), “cool and as smooth as beach stones”(84), “slick-thighed” (37), “He enveloped her like her own skin” (24), “he was the touch of this light” (98), “anything solid was an impediment” (37); as well as by auditory sensations: “his song” (21), “she heard the rocks of lakes and oceans rattle in the cavity of his skull”(84); by the sense of taste: “fire and salt” (24), “salt-lipped” (37); and by olfactory stimulation: “the smell of the sea” (24), “breathe this green” (37). These alternatives to visual stimulation articulate a desire that expands the parameters of conventional models of heterosexual desire constituted according to the subject/object paradigm; they rely on proximity and mutuality rather than distance and objectification. In the context of the human relationship with nature, this alternative way of knowing nature would eschew the scientific model—with its insistence on and confidence in detached objectivity—in favour of knowledge based on embodied knowledge that relies on a combination of the senses. In this instance, understanding proceeds from a “rationality that does not re-inscribe mind separate from body” but imagines it as a “knowing through corporeality, through sentient body” (Debold et al., “Embodying Knowledge”102).

The desire—physical and emotional—illustrated in the various passages where Mary and the daemon-lover unite remains diffuse and reciprocal. In Mary’s fantasy world, objects are not fetishized and metaphor is replaced by metonymy, providing a sense of contiguity rather than discursively constructed correspondence—it is often difficult to discern where Mary’s corporeal self ends and her sense of the ghost’s

physicality (made possible by his conflation with nature) begins while, unlike the dead sailor, the daemon-lover's body denies comparison with elements in nature since they often *are* part of nature as well as culture, a mingling of elements in the environment, constructed artefacts typical of culture, and the memories of Mary's father that consist of ships and sails :

“Just below the surface,” she began, “with the tatters of your shirt around it and the fluid between us, the flower of your hand turning in the ocean's mind, your arm a bright banner, your forehead an approaching sail. My own arms pushing wind aside to plunge them into salt. Let me breathe this green with you and be with you. Our breastbones touching.” (37)

While metaphor relies on selection, substitution and similarity to create a vertical hierarchy, metonymy's foundation lies in combination and contiguity to create a horizontal structuring of the elements involved. Mary's lyrical imaginings employ metonymic imagery to convey the sense of interconnectedness, the extremely tangled web of connections that link all of the actors: Mary, the daemon-lover, nature, culture, and Mary's father's spirit. Sadly, in *Away*, these non-hierarchical, non-dominative conceptualizations that connote connection and continuity occur only during Mary's altered state, a manifestation of the semiotic that results when she escapes the Symbolic, effectively maintaining the polarization between male/female, mind/body, conscious/unconscious and culture/nature. This kind of imagery does offer many possibilities for an advantageous re-visioning of the relationship between human and non-human nature, and for transforming clichés, habitual attitudes and rigid categories in order to counter the culture/nature opposition. Numerous examples of this alternative approach to figuring nature and the human/nature

relationship are identified in Humphreys's novel *Afterimage*, and will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

2.6) Intersubjectivity: Benefits and Dangers

Where the bog ends, there, where the ground lips, lovely is love, not lonely.
–P.K. Page

The move away from a traditional conception of heterosexual desire grants Mary a subjectivity that no longer requires reversal—the model that constructs man as passive object while leaving the dualistic structure intact—but represents one of the specific characteristics of the intersubjective mode: a rejection of the dualistic hierarchal model so as to be replaced by a subject/subject non-hierarchal model. Subject meets subject for, although Mary often initiates the appearance of the ghost or “builds him” through the “craft of reconstruction,” he in turn occasionally reveals his own agency and subjectivity by refusing her request: “He came, sometimes, when she had given up hope altogether that he would touch her, and often, it was true, he did not approach her at all” (98). Extrapolating this alternative to include humans and non-human nature grants the underside of the dualism subjectivity, a strategy advocated by a number of ecofeminists. As Glynis Carr suggests, positing “consciousness as part of nature” would transform discourses of knowledge from the ‘knowledge as power’ paradigm to a “knowledge as intimacy” model, a shift that would diminish discourses of domination in favour of discourses of “interrelatedness and interdependency” (Carr 179-180).

Benjamin’s alternate concept of the intersubjective psychic mode where two subjects meet stresses the role of spatial representation to mutual recognition, and the “experience *between and within* individuals, rather than just *within*.” Benjamin warns that “simply finding a female counterpart to the phallic symbol does not work” and her suggestion is to “find an alternative psychic register” to the one

represented by the phallus (*Bonds* 124-125). This relational mode that finds expression in spatial rather than symbolic representation emerges in *Away* through Mary's interactions with the ghost in nature, and reveals a correspondence to what Benjamin describes as the "discovery of her *own* desire, without fear of impingement, intrusion, or violation" (128). Benjamin uses the example of Psyche to elaborate on the paradox of experiencing a true sexual awakening alone. Like Mary, Psyche's sexual desire surfaces when she "is freed from . . . idealization and objectification" (such as that represented in the earlier scene at the beach by Mary and later in the men's varying responses to her newly aroused sensuality and fecundity). Awakening in a bed of flowers, [Psyche] has the "opportunity to discover what is authentic in [her] self" (129). Mary's awakening occurs when alone with a corpse, and continues to develop with a fantasy partner who grants her subjectivity even as he maintains his own. Benjamin writes:

Since there is no systematic theory of [an] alternative to the phallic order I must simply propose an exploration. My premise is that recognition of the other is the decisive aspect of differentiation. In recognition, someone who is different and outside shares a similar feeling; different minds and bodies attune. In erotic union this attunement can be so intense that self and other feel as if momentarily "inside" each other, as part of a whole. (*Bonds* 126)

Urquhart writes: "Her arms were full of him, he entered her and passed right through her. He enveloped her like her own skin and she a stone sinking under his weight" (24). And further on, "His cool flesh passed through her body and became the skin she would wear inside her skin" (84). Boundaries between bodies are blurred, becoming flexible and permeable in a parallel to the psychological space Benjamin describes.

To elucidate the concept of space and its role in intersubjective relations, Benjamin suggests we “begin with the holding environment between mother and baby” that “expands in the transitional area, the child’s area of play, creativity, and fantasy.” For children there exists a simultaneous awareness of the mothers’ sheltering presence that makes room for their “freedom to imagine, discover, and create” (*Bonds* 126).³⁶ Urquhart invests nature with a subjectivity that allows it to be characterized as a “holding environment”; the space where Mary learns, imagines, explores and creates (essentially alone) in the secure presence of the other (in this case, an Other that might well be identified as Father Nature). Moreover, the narrator tells us that:

If [Mary] had been asked to describe him, she would have said that he was the exact spot where the sea touches the land, the precise moment of the final reach of surf. That was the place and the time of him. She would forever, then, seek shorelines and beaches. (25)

Mary describes a liminal space for how does one determine the exact spot where “the sea touches the land”? Does the surf ever truly achieve a “final reach”? The place Mary describes transcends the limits of time and space, and eludes the categories of universality, finality, and absolute truth—“nothing being more complicated or unique than the breaking of the surf” (*Away* 110). This particular representation of space offers an alternative for discussing the manner in which conceptions of identity based on forms, shapes and spaces might be changed without being erased; it imagines boundaries that are maintained yet flexible. In a similar manner, feminist scientists like Donna Haraway suggest we begin to view ourselves, in relation to animals and other non-humans organisms, as companion species,³⁷ a

move that would enable us to construct all living creatures along a continuum, where boundaries are less rigid, overlaps occur, and difference and similarity exist *between and within* species. The edge of the sea where water and land meet forms a border that constantly shifts to create change and offer possibility, and as a metaphor for relationships, it suggests separation and connectedness, distance and closeness, and movement in the space between, like the “interior of the body and the space between bodies [which] form an elusive pattern, a plane whose edge is ever-shifting” (Benjamin “Desire” 94).

Interdependence is crucial to the theory of intersubjectivity and this quality is also reflected in the metaphor of the seashore—for the shoreline to exist both elements of water and earth are required; continuity and difference exists for the land extends out beneath the visible boundary and the tides cause the sea to advance and recede over the earth. The image illustrates the notion of two subjects mediating their own and each other’s subjectivity. The space illustrated in this metaphor offers a conceptual alternative to the Western view that insists on unity, stability, structure, opposition and autonomy. Rather than a terrain of polarized ‘extremes’ similar to those encountered at the beginning of the novel, this particular topography evokes fluctuating boundaries, transition, convergence, accommodation, moderation, similarity and difference, a process, a “play of existence” (Madsen 127). The freedom that Mary recovers/discovers in this liminal space allows her to become the agent of her own desire and not simply an object of someone else’s, thus destabilizing the male-active/female-passive binary, and illustrating yet another feature of the intersubjective mode: “[it] assumes the possibility of a context with

others in which desire is constituted for the self. It thus assumes the paradox that in being with the other, I may experience the most profound sense of self” (Benjamin, *Desire* 92).

The essence of Benjamin’s theory is perhaps best expressed by a line of Tagore’s poetry: “On the seashore of endless worlds children play” (qtd. in Benjamin, *Bonds* 127), and the place and space that permits Mary to imagine and experience intersubjective encounters in the narrative is the shoreline. Entering the ocean Mary experiences a freedom, both physical and psychological, from the conventions and constraints produced by a governing masculine authority. It is precisely this new mode of being that contributes to Mary’s sensuality; the *jouissance* that the islanders detect results in the comical attempts by the men to suppress and/or ignore the desire she arouses in all of them, including Father Quinn. The priest’s concerted effort to find a husband for Mary illustrates the denial of “women’s desire, agency, self-determination” that is the “necessary condition for the orderly reproduction of patriarchy” (Carr 130). Mary’s non-reproductive pleasure subverts the patriarchal discourse of desire produced by traditional models; it transgresses sexual boundaries as it alludes to miscegenation: love between a mortal and a ghost.³⁸ Voicing narrative conventions that have haunted authors for centuries, Father Quinn insists, “[d]eath or marriage” remain the only options for Mary because they are “[b]oth natural” (27). In a similar manner, nature has been discursively constructed, at various times and different places, as an adversary that requires monitoring and control in order to defend against its malevolence, and/or as a nurturing sanctuary (Mother Nature) where our physical and emotional needs and

desires may be met. In both cases, nature, like woman, must submit to the demands of the dominant patriarchal mould and its concomitant expectations.

The fluid boundaries between self and other that characterize the intersubjective model simultaneously require and produce empathy. The “aching sorrow” (84) Mary feels illustrates this facet of the intersubjective relational mode that, when extrapolated to a human/non-human context offers another potentially useful alternative to traditional structures and relational frameworks. Referring to the between and within dimension of her theory, Benjamin writes: “It refers to the sense of self and other that evolves through the consciousness that separate minds can share the same feelings and intentions, through mutual recognition”—a psychic state responsible for Mary’s and Osbert’s brief moment of connection on the beach discussed earlier in this thesis (*Bonds* 125). Mary feels an “aching sorrow” when the ghost reveals “all the sorrows of young men”; his recounting of the many ways they die, the “dancers, poets, swimmers,” prompting Mary to recognize that “their distant blood ran in [her] veins” (84). And further in the narrative, the ghost enables Mary to know nature in a similar way when showing her a forest:

The woods suggested, in their uncertainties of space, transparencies of light—their rumours of entities glimpsed, then lost—that some magnificent event was always on the edge of taking place, and Mary knew her own presence in the forest, or the forest’s presence in her, was such an event. (99).

This last excerpt could be a description of the Real in nature as Sandilands describes it, and suggests an alternative to the culture/nature dichotomy that also echoes another feature of Benjamin’s theory: perceiving and representing nature as part of us, within, as well as a “holding environment” where between retains meaning as

well, collapses the boundaries that would polarize the two terms and suggests similarity and difference, intersections and overlaps; the interpenetration of culture and nature, male and female, human and non-human, body and mind.

Benjamin insists that intersubjectivity is neither exclusive to females, nor a mode that can or should exist without the intrapsychic because “it is essential to retain [the] sense of complementary, as well as the contrasting, relationship of these modes” for, failing to do so, “one falls into the trap of choosing between them, grasping one side of a contradiction that must remain suspended to be clarifying” (“Desire” 94). The ability to hold two opposed ideas in their minds at the same time eludes Urquhart’s characters; Mary fails to retain the sense of self that develops through her intersubjective experiences; when she re-enters the world of the Symbolic all that remains is the trace, “something hidden inside her, a lost thing” represented in her dreams by “a stone, a song, a green eye, the interrupted gesture” (*Away* 75). Relating exclusively in an intersubjective relational mode is neither sustainable nor satisfactory for it results in a loss of self, a relinquishing of control to the other, reflected in this narrative by two events. Mary’s recognition of “something in her” that “wanted finishing” is immediately followed, in the narrative, by memories of another young woman who “danced across a moor and over the cliffs at Rathlin to her death” (75). The only possible stimulus for such an act, in Mary’s imagination, involves a “pale” dance partner with “a torn shirt and liquid eye” whose ability to enflame the woman’s desire is inextricably linked with “every colour of rock, turf, and sea swirling” (75). Brooding over the woman’s repressed sensuality and creativity, Mary considers her own that also must remain buried: “[it] was in

herself, in her own beliefs, to dance like that, though she kept the idea hidden. And it was in her also to twist a sentence into a song if she chose to sing at all” (75). Later in the narrative, when the family emigrates to Canada, Mary abandons herself to the Other in nature, to her daemon-lover. Concerning this dilemma Relke writes:

Just as there is a point of balance between separation and connectedness, so too is there a fine line between intersubjective connection and erasure of identity through sustained merger. Sustained merger . . . is . . . a tyrannical form of subjectivity—a subjectivism as extreme as objectivism, its polarized opposite. (*Greenwor(l)ds* 246)³⁹

Urquhart’s character fails to integrate the two modes—they remain polarized and represent another instance of reversal in the novel—and as a result she remains unable to articulate a language of female sexuality, pleasure and creativity to replace the silencing rhetoric of male desire. In a fashion reminiscent of Edna Pontelier, the protagonist of Chopin’s *Awakening*, Mary appears to face a choice between marriage and death; rather, that is what Father Quinn’s character—the hegemonic voice of patriarchal convention in the novel—would have us believe. Whereas Edna drowns herself in the sea, Mary resorts to a third alternative, the merits of which are debatable. Mary refuses to be the blank background for male exploits; opting for solitariness and exile she attempts to escape masculine authority and male-determined relationships. Mary chooses to resume her discovery/recovery of what is “authentic in [her]*self*” (Benjamin, *Bonds* 129).

In the world Urquhart’s characters inhabit, the culture/nature, man/woman, human/non-human binaries remain a given, and their attendant assumptions and expectations cannot be transcended, but remain firmly intact through to the novel’s end. A century ago Chopin chose death over submission for her female character

while Urquhart's contemporary, Margaret Atwood, decides on a return to culture for her protagonist in *Surfacing* who, like Mary in *Away*, ventures into the forest in an attempt to escape the limits of culture and learn the language of both natures, the nature we hold within and the nature that holds us. Devine comments on Atwood's choice, writing: "The sophistication with which Atwood deals with the issue of ecological ideology belies the compromised ending. Atwood backs down in the end rather than break through the boundaries; it is as if she had touched them, found a wall, and decided to stay comfortably within" (139). The same might be said of Urquhart yet, notwithstanding its failure to overcome the Western humanist frame, *Away* does contain a subtle counter-discourse that at times recognizes the contradictions and ambiguities embedded within it as it simultaneously foregrounds the high cost to humanity and the natural world when we rely on, maintain and proliferate rigid dualistic frameworks.

We might be tempted, in our own habitually dualistic mind-set, to interpret Mary's self-imposed exile as a kind of madness. Describing Chopin's nihilistic alternative for her character, Madsen writes: "But of course there is no formal expression available in [Edna's] world with which to articulate her experience of the Imaginary or, from that, an authentic feminine identity—outside the masculine order of the Symbolic, there is only madness and death" (115). Similarly, in Mary's world there appears to be no way to articulate the Real, or an authentic feminine identity.⁴⁰ The character's self-imposed exile, her act of self-erasure, illustrates an alternative response to the lack of scripts available to women outside domesticity and death. Urquhart disregards narrative convention that would simply re-inscribe the confining

rhetoric of patriarchal discourse; instead, she creates a character that walks out of the narrative for seven years. Moreover, Exodus Crow's revelations concerning Mary's life during that time, and her state of mind, show that Mary was anything but mad during her self-imposed exile from civilization. Like many authors before and after, Urquhart identifies dualisms as the root of the problem but remains unable to envision an escape from their tangled hold on our consciousness. In a rather subversive move, Urquhart's protagonist, when left with no other alternative, exits the story. Mary's descendants fare no better when they move in the opposite direction, leaving the wilderness for urbanized society. They inherit Mary's desire for another mode of being along with her awareness of "something hidden," a condition that compels them, Eileen and Esther, to spend their lives waiting for a ghost.

The subject/object of Mary's desire, a conflation of a masculine ghost and nature (specifically water), is evocative in the context of an ecofeminist reading and facilitates a transposition of theoretical frameworks from the male/female binary to the human/non-human one. Extending Benjamin's paradigm to culture/nature relationships offers a multitude of possibilities for reconceptualizing the culture/nature dichotomy and altering our perceptions and attitudes toward the natural world and its nonhuman species. First, the conception of nature as an actor and/or "active agent" shifts epistemological approaches away from the traditional scientific models of domination, discovery and control to models that recognize nature's (the object's/the other's) contribution to the "conversation" (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophies* 35). Secondly, the novel illustrates the workings involved

in “the unobtrusive mediation of the other” (Benjamin, “Desire” 94), primarily through Mary’s observations and interactions; *Away* renders the intersubjective mode appropriately as one that aids the process of self-knowledge; through the ghost in nature Mary absorbs an awareness of her self (a sense of her own unfinished or incomplete subjectivity, of her agency in relation to female desire, and of her creative capacities) and of the world (historical, geographical, ecological), the transmission of which is made possible by a relationship that, as demonstrated, is portrayed in a manner consistent with Benjamin’s theory. Examples representing this particular kind of knowledge, in ecofeminist literatures, include Native claims that much of what we have learned regarding hunting and edible flora and fauna came directly from observations of non-human nature. Thirdly, the ghost and the richly symbolic space he inhabits, represented in the novel by the margins of earth and sea and its attendant qualities, offer associations that correspond to a re-visioning of the epistemic relationship where “the image of nature as ‘coding trickster’ conveys the sense of play, interaction, and agency” (Warren *Philosophies* 35). All three elements are very much in evidence at the water’s edge when Mary encounters the ghost-in-nature, arguably Urquhart’s version of the “coding trickster.” Fourthly, the novel’s representations of knowledge suggest an alternative to the rational scientific methods; through Mary’s character and her attitudes and approaches to all Others, *Away* illustrates the “feminist epistemology based on noninstrumental way[s] of knowing” (King 118). Unfortunately, unless we consider them in isolation from the larger narrative, these alternatives also point up the

inadequacies and ineffectiveness of strategies that, perhaps inadvertently, re-inscribe the very binaries they might eventually overcome.

All these strategies represent Urquhart's attempt at re-envisioning the polarized terms subject/object, man/woman, and culture/nature; while she does expose ruptures in the boundaries operating in certain binary structures, she falls short when it comes to gender and the categories of culture and nature; imagining the possibility of alternative conceptual frameworks that might include a shifting process of flow back and forth, a tension held in balance between subject and object, between separation and connectedness, between dependence and autonomy within the primary categories eludes her. Despite all the aforementioned advantages and potential alternatives to traditional dualistic modes, many problems persist: the all-pervading dualities remain in place and fail to energize or transform the narrative in any positive way, while the woman/nature analogy perseveres to the end. Urquhart may revise the myth of nature as female by imagining a masculine spirit, but she also preserves the androcentric/phallogentric paradigms that position 'man' at the centre of all things for, "[i]f he shown his light elsewhere she would disappear" (*Away* 258).

Chapter Three: An Ecofeminist Mapping of *Afterimage*

3.1) Introduction

It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story.

–Thomas Berry

They are tragedies, but they are also the stories we have, the ones available to us.

–Isabelle, *Afterimage*

Afterimage is a narrative about narratives and the art of representation. Dense with intertexts and allusions, it considers the way various literary genres, as well as cartography and photography, mediate and construct our identity and our worldview. Humphreys employs these key ideological tools to pose challenging questions about various categories of identity, most prominently gender and class. Books, maps and visual images are depicted in the novel as mediums that restrict, repress, confine and dictate our subjectivities, but that also “offer us identities to inhabit, constructing and circulating a systematic regime of images through which we are constantly invited to think the probabilities and possibilities of our lives” (Holland & al. qt. in Jobling 1). Humphreys confronts many postmodern challenges as she searches out and imagines alternatives to the either/or stance that continues to prevail in contemporary discourses; her novel resonates with ecofeminist attentiveness and provides numerous strategies for dealing with the woman/nature analogy and the culture/nature opposition.

Without resorting to reversals, Humphreys demonstrates how, through individual and collective exploration, critical reflection and experimentation,

“totalizing fixities” and “hegemonic structures” can be challenged, de-centred and changed in ways that contribute to a recognition of nature as a “dynamic cultural construct,” and she demonstrates how “the separate entities of woman and nature” can exist “in other relationships of difference beyond opposition” (Devine 4). *Afterimage* includes a number of alternatives to the dualistic paradigms that continue to inform epistemological and philosophical theories and ideological systems; in evidence are innovative ways of thinking about similarities and differences between and among the categories ‘culture,’ ‘nature,’ ‘man,’ and ‘woman’ when liberated from reifications related to gender, species, race or class; the novel innovatively engages with the politics of representation, specifically in relation to the issues of gender and desire, power and resistance, language and knowledge. While all these topics may enter into the analysis at some point, the final two categories, language and knowledge, constitute the primary focus of the discussion that follows.

Beginning with a general overview of *Afterimage* through an ecofeminist lens, the analysis will focus on Humphreys’s intentional and sustained approach to nature and landscape imagery, one that successfully avoids conventional tropes and codes. A close examination of language at the level of narrative and plot evinces the author’s refusal to view language as a phallogocentric barrier; Humphreys’s strategy does not entail a dramatic overthrow of the medium (as advocated by those who support *écriture féminine*) but suggests a manipulation of it so as to render a more accurate representation of reality, one that welcomes the ineluctable contradictions, ambiguities, and uncertainties as it evokes connection and continuity without ever eliding difference. Specifically, in *Afterimage* metaphors and similes represent the

various categories in a manner that avoids re-inscribing the age-old polarities that would perpetuate the woman/nature analogy.

Following the section on language, the thesis will concentrate on the novel's engagement with various issues connected to knowledge— how it is acquired, who creates it, and what constitutes valuable knowledge. Epistemology's role in and impact on the woman/nature, subject/object, and culture/nature debates remains a crucial domain that, in spite of advancements in both the physical and social sciences, still requires challenge, revision and transformation. Humphreys responds to these demands by re-conceptualizing knowledge in a fashion that reflects many of the imaginative theories and frameworks emerging from current feminist and ecofeminist discourses. Primarily, she troubles the boundaries between the mind/body and subject/object binaries to imagine an epistemic model that reconsiders the roles of woman/object/body/nature in epistemological discourses.

3.2) Locating *Afterimage* in the Ecofeminist Terrain

“There are many forms of domination, many borders, operating at different scales, and we continue to be situated within and by them. It seems important to thematize the construction of these boundaries and to understand the complexity of this boundary construction in ways that take us beyond the dualities of center and margin.”

–Geraldine Pratt

On the second page of *Afterimage*, we learn the protagonist’s destination is “Middle Road Farm,” an address that subtly conveys Humphreys’s overall strategy, one that marks *Afterimage* as distinctly different from *Away* in its approach to both the culture/nature opposition and the woman/nature analogy. From the start, the imagery suggests that nature’s relation to culture is variable, flexible, overlapping and interdependent, clearly signified in the introduction to the setting: “A sign on the gatepost says Middle Road Farm. The last two words are obscured by brambles,” leaving “Middle” the only visible word to a passer-by, thereby depicting a nature that asserts its agency and signifying power and also announcing one of the novel’s central motifs (8). Kirby claims that an address is a “densely signifying marker in ideology” and this image alludes to the overlap between culture and nature, suggesting both are equally involved in the construction and naming of this locale and announcing from the very start that this narrative will not be about separation and alienation, but will illustrate an alternative that attempts to locate a middle ground, or a hybrid landscape, where culture and nature are not diametrically opposed but where they constantly interpenetrate, interact and intersect (“Thinking Through the Boundary”182). In place of extremes—the consequence of the dualistic paradigms of Enlightenment philosophy—the location of Humphreys’s story troubles boundaries and questions binary oppositions as it attempts to uncover or (re)locate

the erased or obscured ‘middle.’ Despite being temporally positioned at a time that might arguably have been the high point of Colonial Imperialism, and thus a society saturated by the polarizing ideologies of humanism, scientific empiricism, Enlightenment values, and Cartesian rationalism, it is only the novel’s secondary characters and peripheral or ancillary locations that reflect these ideals (in *Afterimage*, those characters portrayed as adhering to and maintaining patriarchal order are also intolerant, narrow-minded and boring). Humphreys imaginatively fuses old and new; she locates her principal characters, plot and setting in 19th century England, but she interprets and develops them through a contemporary lens that, as this thesis will demonstrate, is compatible with and reflects an ecofeminist approach.

Briefly, the plot involves three major characters and one principal setting. Humphreys’s key characters defy stereotypes and represent the actual diversity and complexity recognized by and called for by ecofeminist philosophy. Annie Phelan, a young Irish housemaid orphaned and displaced by the famine, displays an erudite and rational engagement with the world around her, and consistently defies expectations related to gender, class and race. Annie’s employers are Isabelle and Eldon Dashell, members of England’s gentry class who both choose to ignore many of the obligations, behavioural rules, and social expectations related to their class. Like Annie, they too subvert many norms, including gender—Isabelle is single-minded, assertive, aggressive, and autonomous, and displays, but eventually suppresses, lesbian desire. Isabelle’s liberal-minded and tolerant husband, Eldon, displays many character traits normally associated with femininity including

passivity, empathy, and emotion. The plot turns around these three characters, occurs over the course of one year, and highlights the impact Annie Phelan has on their lives. Each character struggles with issues of identity and self-fulfillment: Annie wishes to know her personal history and wonders if any close relatives remain alive in Ireland; Isabelle craves recognition for her art, cutting-edge in both form—photography—and content—unconventional versions of traditional stories and subversive representations of gender; Eldon dreams of exploring and mapping far away places, especially the icy North, in a manner that would go beyond the boundaries of hegemonic cartography. Eldon recognizes and criticizes the various discourses related to females and the land that function to oppress and exploit both.

Humphreys endeavours to depict the basic conditions required for alternative representations of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ by portraying characters and the environment in a manner that acknowledges both differences and similarities within and across categories, and crucial to this undertaking is the capacity to embrace ambiguity and contradiction. Sandilands insists that the overwhelming desire for ideological fullness prompting us to construct and then rely on theories that maintain an either/or system should be replaced by an approach that allows for a “more flexible, open-ended version of subjectivity,” one that makes room for and acknowledges the “unsymbolized kernel around which discourse circulates” (xxi). Letting go of our need for certainty, order and clarity to acknowledge the unknown, the ambiguous, and the unruly or the “gap between reality and representation” (180) would, according to Sandilands, enable us to develop “an ethical relation to the Otherness of the Other, to nature, to the Real” (181).

Throughout the novel, the main characters convey uncertainty and contradiction as they articulate the capacity to hold two conflicting ideas in their minds simultaneously, beginning with Annie's response when Isabelle asks her if she is Irish: "Yes and no" answers Annie, further explaining, "Born Irish. Raised English" (11). Ambiguities, partialities and contradictions extend beyond realities such as these to emotions; comparing themselves to animals hiding in the dark while developing Isabelle's photographs, Annie "feels both panicky and calm" (37). In a scene that engages with species discourse as it intersects with gender and versions of femininity—purity versus carnality—Isabelle charges into Eldon's library, her "wild and crazed" appearance, her hair "loose from its pins," and her "panting" inducing Eldon to associate her appearance with insanity, insatiable sexuality and animals; he feels himself "both attract[ed] and repel[led]" for he "approves of the wantonness and disapproves of the madness" (43). The ability to psychologically hold and suspend contraries, articulated by Benjamin in her theory of intersubjectivity discussed earlier, occurs frequently, as in, for example, Isabelle's objective for her art: she contemplates how she needs "To control what was happening. To let it happen" (120). Annie judges an intimate discussion with Eldon ambiguously: it was "wrong and pleasant" (57). And when Annie fears Isabelle plans on drowning her for art's sake, she tells her "I thought that you wouldn't. But felt that you might," a sentiment that also alludes to the Enlightenment polarization between reason and emotion (61). Annie's collarbone is "frail and solid" (64); Eldon views the Crystal Palace as "both a triumph and a disaster" and he describes his uncharacteristic attempt at heroism as "both brave and reckless"(69); and "the restless intent of the

natural world both reassures and frightens Isabelle” (133). All these examples represent an attitude that resists the confining frameworks of dualism by complicating the either/or choices; as a result, the binaries required to support and transmit dualistic philosophies are destabilized. Many ecofeminists insist this psychic mode would contribute to and promote the climate of tolerance required to overcome the master narratives perpetuating ideals of certainty and universality.

Narrative devices that symbolize or re-inscribe dualisms and rigid boundaries are de-emphasized in *Afterimage*’s principal narrative—they hover around the edges of the main plotline, de-centred as it were from the focus of the narrative, represented by minor characters and distant locations. The absolutes or universals operating in the background of *Afterimage* are installed to expose the erroneous or inadequate ideologies supporting them. The colonial ideology of the ‘centre’ (core, hub, focus, focal point, heart) is transformed: the ‘middle’ (median, medium, average, intermediate) with its less-, and sometimes non-hierarchal connotations replaces the ‘centre’ in *Afterimage* and generates alternatives for conceptualizing the various categories and relationships. Centre and margin are replaced by a continuum that does not erase the opposing elements or reverse values, but attempts to fill in the space between. Caren Kaplan maintains that “models predicated on binary oppositions cannot move us out of the paradigms of colonial discourse, nor can they provide us with accurate maps of social relations in postmodernity” (62). Humphreys’s narrative re-conceptualizes the various categories in ways that respond to the suggestions and, in some cases, the demands articulated by ecofeminist critics; she, in effect, addresses Kaplan’s challenge:

We need to know how to account for agency, resistance, subjectivity, and movement or event in the face of totalizing fixities or hegemonic structures without constructing narratives of oppositional binaries. (62)

Authors and critics like Kaplan who operate within an ecofeminist methodological framework identify language, and specifically the use of metaphor, as one of the principal mediums contributing to and shaping the division between the culture/nature and man/woman oppositions. Devine insists “that language is power and meaning” and that feminist critics who focus on “ ‘phallogocentrism’ as a system of signification . . . show its negative impact on women, and develop their interest in language as a space that has been repressed by that phallogocentric discourse” (93), while Geraldine Pratt counters this attitude: “metaphors are only that: representational strategies that help us to think and articulate certain ways of being” (13). The novel suggests Humphreys would agree with both Pratt and Devine, but her approach focuses less on attacking or undermining the existing linguistic system and more on recognizing the possibilities that exist to transform meaning in small but significant ways. Humphreys engages the “more subtle relationships in language that determine the way we think, the expressions and analogies that frame our images and metaphors” in order to resist conventional imagery that contributes to detrimental definitions of nature (Devine 32). In *Afterimage*, it quickly becomes very apparent that the author has made a concerted effort to eschew the use of the traditional metaphoric structure—tenor and vehicle asserting similarity with concomitant hierarchical value attributed to one side. The majority of metaphors in the novel remain gender neutral while transforming the basic dualistic structure associated with this literary device. Humphreys comes close

to completely eliminating clichés and over-coded metaphors, choosing instead to rely on similes for the imagery, a device that overtly announces the fact that it operates discursively to connect two unrelated (but not always) entities in a manner that implies resemblance. The following discussion will show that her imagery exchanges patriarchal metaphors of “conquest and mastery” with imaginative alternatives that connote relatedness, intersubjectivity, and multiplicity, while remaining relatively free of hierarchal constructions that would infer superiority to one side of the equation while devaluing the other (Carr 116).

Like the metaphors and similes in *Afterimage*, key motifs are also free of the usual gendered associations; they include: fire, water, earth and air, boats and fishing, maternity and the birth process (all three characters are associated with the birth process as metaphor for self-actualization and creativity), expeditions, ocean-going journeys, floating, falling, and descending to earth, but perhaps the most significant motif is the ubiquitous light imagery, for it engages with epistemological questions by exploring, challenging and revising assumptions regarding the foundations and acquisition of knowledge, most obviously the role of sight. In *Earthcare*, Merchant writes, “The change from mythos to logos inherent in the rise of written texts and visual symbols meant that illumination, light, and seeing were associated with truth and power” (64). The word “light” appears on almost every page of the novel, but the metaphors and similes imagine it in very different terms than those traditionally associated with this element; whether literally or figuratively, light is granted depth, texture, and multiplicity of form and function, and linked as

frequently to fiction and instability as to power and truth. The implications of Humphreys's light imagery will be discussed in detail later in the thesis.

Books and maps, the supposed arbiters of reality, are foregrounded thematic devices in the narrative that function as metonyms for empiricism, imperialism, and colonialism and, as such, represent two primary conduits of ideology. Like most of the literary devices in the novel, however, they are deployed in order to reconceptualize literature and cartography in a manner that simultaneously decentres their hegemonic power as it recognizes their potential for exploring, constructing and reconceptualizing issues of identity and the relationship between human beings and the land. Humphreys refuses to succumb to the postmodern notion of a powerless subjugated subject; rather, she sees the relationship between ideological discourses/systems and subjects as interactive and never complete—Annie Phelan fictionally enacts the *sujet-en-procès* of Kristevan theory.⁴¹ Once again, the narrative representations strive toward a 'middle ground' where the construction of identity, whether human or non-human, resists notions of universality, fixity, centre and margin. This strategy of replacing various paradigms that revolve around notions of 'centre' and 'margin' with the less hierarchal concept of the 'middle' remains constant throughout the narrative, and creates the thematic thread that connects all the narrative elements in *Afterimage*.

Along with recurring tropes of 'middleness,' patterns of connection and overlap are ubiquitous, among them Humphreys's use of synesthesia; some examples include: "listening to the dark" (27), "soft darkness" (79), "lit with sound" (82), a "flame like a whisper" (87), and "whole notes of the bells dropping ripe into

the silence” (122). By incorporating imagery that connotes this kind of sensibility, Humphreys challenges boundaries between visual and aural, and visual and tactile senses, but more importantly in the context of ecofeminist theory, this move also decentres sight from the privileged position it occupies in positivist science and rationalist epistemological discourses (not to mention its role in language given that metaphor relies on sight to produce meaning and discursively create associations).⁴² According to theorist Trinh Minh-ha, “vision as knowledge is the ideology ... which postulates the existence of a central unshakable certitude.”⁴³ Synesthesia contributes to the narrative’s ongoing attempt to undermine the mind/body dualism; the novel portrays “perception” as “midway between mind and body,” suggesting that knowledge “requires the functioning of both” in a way that demonstrates how each is “mutually implicated with the other” (Grosz 94). As this thesis will soon establish, Humphreys’s narrative also imagines the body as an important actor in the epistemological equation; it no longer occupies the position of object, pure matter, an abject obstacle to knowing, but is envisioned as a “means of connection,” and “a place of power, knowledge, and liminality” (Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground* 136).

The notion that knowledge relies on and frequently incorporates physical senses other than sight is not radical or recent, but has been traditionally elided, erased and/or devalued. Recently, feminists in various disciplines have begun to challenge dominant epistemological values, and ecofeminist literature reveals an ongoing interest in this debate.⁴⁴ Autodidact Annie Phelan combines traditional modes of learning (primarily reading) with the less valued approach known as ‘embodied knowledge’— “knowing as grounded in bodily sensations, typically, what

feels right.”⁴⁵ This form of knowledge, discursively associated with females and primitive peoples, and commonly considered instinctual, has consequently been linked with animal behaviour and with nature to further exploit and solidify the woman/nature analogy and culture/nature opposition. This mode has, by and large, been designated less reliable than the rational (masculine) objective mode routinely favoured by science that, until very recently, was highly valued as the sole means of arriving at absolute and unquestionable Truths/truths; prompted and assisted by embodied knowledge, Annie subverts the trope of binary structure to problematize a number of normalizing discourses and traditionally accepted givens.

Searching for Truth/truth consumes Annie and both her employers, Isabelle and Eldon Dashell, unorthodox members of the British gentry class—as mentioned, each of these principal characters struggles with issues of gender, desire, power, autonomy, creativity, and self-actualization. Humphreys imaginatively “articulate[s] the extraordinarily complex and simultaneous interaction of gender, class, race, and sexuality” to engage with a politics of difference that recognizes not only the supposed dissimilarities between genders and between humans and non-human nature, but also the diversity within the categories of female, male and nature (Blunt and Rose 6). Humphreys works from the assumption that gender is neither totally essential nor entirely the result of discourse; her characters convey more fluid sex and gender identities; she avoids reversals and instead presents a more restrained and complex approach to subject constitution. The ideological boundaries that would confine women and men to limited and limiting gender roles are in evidence, but are represented as permeable, discontinuous and the result of discursively constructed

assumptions and beliefs, and not solely predetermined by biological sex. In the same manner, as this thesis will demonstrate, boundaries between nature and culture are not polarized and fixed, but contain unstable and overlapping characteristics. In either situation, when an element exceeds the margins of its definition or the binary pair is disrupted, it effectively confuses the entire system.

In her role as female photographer, Isabelle disrupts a number of binaries; most obviously, the subject-male/object-female paradigm is challenged and not simply as a result of her artist/photographer role, but largely due to the manner in which she wields the camera, using it to explore her own desires in much the same voyeuristic manner typically considered the prerogative of the active masculine subject.⁴⁶ Isabelle assumes the position of seeing subject and attempts to colonize, in this case, the female object of desire (Annie, who also resists the binary that would fix her as the passive element in the Cartesian equation of active subject/passive object). The postmodern critique of the Cartesian subject has prompted some feminists, following in de Beauvoir's footsteps, to demand women be "admitted into the realm of the subject" (Hekman 78). For many, the problem with this approach remains the traditional Enlightenment definition of subjectivity predicated on masculine values such as autonomy, independence, transcendence, rationality and the belief that only a disembodied detached subject can acquire knowledge by observing a passive object. As Hekman points out, this "leav[es] the dichotomy intact and attempt[s] to turn women into subjects along with men" (78). An alternative approach, fictionally represented primarily by Annie and Eldon, involves redefining the category of the subject so that it "occupies a middle ground between

the constituting Cartesian subject and the constituted postmodern subject” (79). Because Isabelle’s desire to know tends to stem from a desire to dominate, she exemplifies de Beauvoir’s woman-as-subject. Constructions of identity that embrace multiplicity, as those found in *Afterimage* do, can be extrapolated to include representations of the environment as well, and the heretofore habit of associating women with nature and men with culture becomes untenable, and necessitates a transformation of previously held concepts and connections; writers may accomplish this task with innovative language and imagery.

3.3) Language: Transforming Associations and Representations

Woman's relationship to language intersects with ecofeminism primarily on two levels: woman-as-subject on the narrative level, and, on the semantic level, the use of metaphor that reinforces the dualism it would like to deconstruct.

–Maureen Devine

Genius, in truth, means little more than the faculty of perceiving in an un-habitual way.

–William James

A close reading of literary devices in *Afterimage* further confirms the claim that Humphreys's novel is shaped by the belief that finding a middle ground represents one possible response to a number of postmodern dilemmas. In this case, metaphors and similes assist in the task of re-conceptualizing the categories of culture, nature and, by extension, those of man and woman as they engage with an overarching ecofeminist concern: the manner in which the relationship between humans and non-human nature is depicted in literature. Destabilizing traditional views and accepted wisdoms remains a difficult task—even the most well-intentioned author often fails when confronted by the paradox of having to “use the phallogos to undermine it” (Devine 95). While theorists like Irigaray and Cixous promote the idea of a language exclusive to women wherein “signifiers challenge the very concept of universality,” (96) they are often criticized, for ultimately their strategy allows the dualisms to remain intact.⁴⁷ Humphreys addresses this challenge at the semantic level by transforming metaphors and similes in ways that resist and/or challenge traditional models that perpetuate opposition. Devine writes, “the creation of new semantic imagery allows authors to reconceptualize relationships and the self” (98). Further, she points out that the subtlety with which metaphor enforces ideology, circumscribing and mediating the human relationship to non-human

nature, makes it especially challenging to ecofeminists and authors with ecofeminist sensibilities (99). Humphreys avoids extreme approaches to this dilemma and chooses instead to follow her own advice; just as the novel suggests transforming inherited stories to reflect our ever-changing and particular realities, her imagery suggests writers need not be confined by the phallologos, but can develop it imaginatively to create new tropes and connections that counter ill-conceived and erroneous assumptions and beliefs to better reflect our lived experiences.

Prior to examining specific passages in the novel, it will be helpful to consider the broad rhetorical effects produced by Humphreys's particular use of the literary devices of metaphor and simile. The effect of her specific strategy—ubiquitous similes and atypical metaphors—initially induces the false impression that the novel contains relatively few metaphors, while the seeming predominance of similes highlights the discursiveness of the associations being made. Simile places the emphasis on similarity, whereas metaphor more often asserts that one thing *is* another thing, and not just *like* another thing. Incorporating an abundance of similes enables Humphreys to draw attention to the linguistic constructedness of the various analogies as she invites the reader to consider how the two objects *compare and contrast* with each other. Metaphor equates or concretely identifies one concept or object with the attributes of another, stressing 'is' instead of 'like,' whereas the simile explicitly announces itself as a literary and cognitive tool meant to enhance and/or clarify meaning. To understand how metaphor operates as an important mechanism of cognitive reality, Lakoff deconstructs the metaphor "Life is a journey" as an example:

Here, life is understood in terms of a journey, or the domain of traveling. More formally, metaphor is mapping from a source, or secondary domain (journeys), to a target or primary, domain (life). (qt. in Peuquot 124)

Further, and more important in the context of this discussion, Peuquot adds:

To understand a metaphor, a person must recognize the juxtaposition and be familiar with the source domain: the domain being mapped onto. The mapping is tightly structured in that there are *ontological correspondences* between the two domains on an element-by-element basis . . . The domain mapping allows a rich collection of correspondences and *generalizations* to be inferred. (Peuquot, 125 emphasis mine).

Conventional metaphors have persistently envisioned and constituted nature through the lens of gender, deeply influencing our understanding of and approach to the environment and it is precisely this reason that makes them a central focus for ecofeminists when examining literary representations of nature. According to Virginia J. Scharff, “Gender, the bundle of habits and expectations and behaviours that organizes people and things according to ideas about the consequences of sexed bodies, is a crucial, deep, and far-reaching medium through which we encounter nature” (xiii). Colonizing discourses including those of religion and science maintain hegemony over indigenous peoples, women and non-human nature by representing them according to patriarchal needs and desires, and metaphor functions in cultural discourse as a vehicle to perpetuate and reify ideological beliefs and assumptions that, in turn, support and maintain the patriarchy.

Ecofeminist critics have focused a great deal of attention on the negative impact of language in general, and literary devices in particular, that connect women and the earth in a manner that perpetuates and supports an ontological basis for the woman/nature analogy and, consequently, preserves and perpetuates the opposition between culture and nature. Humphreys’s novel responds to these issues by

recognizing the reverse potential (or the middle ground), the beneficial transformational possibilities of metaphoric constructions that assist us in expanding our understanding by ordering our world according to alternative connections and altered social codes. Metaphors are circumscribed by codes and connections based on existing definitions within delimited categories; it follows, then, that altering the definitions of woman, man, nature and culture, as Humphreys does, leads to and necessitates modifications in our perceptions of our selves, and our place in and relationship to the natural world, since “metaphors and cultural representations structure material relations (and vice versa)” (Pratt 13). Alternately, transforming metaphors by refusing to rely on clichés and habitual associative patterns contributes to the discourses aimed at expanding definitions and broadening categories; metaphors can and should echo new and improved philosophies and not reflect harmful out-dated ideological concepts—Humphreys’s imagery exemplifies the possibilities that exist when rigorous attention is paid to both the dangers *and* the potential of language.

Metaphoric patterns and associations in *Afterimage* offer up a number of alternatives to conventional imagery starting with the novel’s immediate setting, one that remains relatively free of heavily coded topography; there are no striking oppositions between mountains and lakes, earth and sea, fertile marshes and arid deserts, dark forests and cultivated plains; no single natural element is consistently aligned with a specific gender. The principal characters interact with the landscape and nature but do not attempt to control it, exploit it, or idealize it. The landscapes of city (culture) and country (nature), the categories of rural and urban, are treated in

much the same way that all elements in the text are: as different yet similar, as neither all one nor the other. Just as Annie thinks how “different from London” the “narrow lane” seems with all its sounds of birds and “insects busy in the hedgerow,” she recalls listening to the “tumbly voice of a nightingale” walking one night in the city (7). The countryside that surrounds Middle Road Farm is neither aligned with femininity nor with masculinity. The house the Dashells reside in “seems to fit so perfectly into the landscape that it appears to have grown there, as naturally as a tree”—an image of culture and nature that does not position them as mutually exclusive entities. Instead, Humphreys reserves the sense of opposition for the houses Annie has lived and worked in: Portman *Square*—“straight up and contained” (27), a dark, stifling, lifeless house strictly governed by the rules and codes of patriarchal society; the other, Middle Road Farm, a haphazard residence of “strange unfolding rooms” (16) that change and grow in response to the needs of its owners, a place where “someone always seems to be going up and down the staircase,” where “a window shuts” and “a window opens” and where social conventions and ideological beliefs of all kinds are constantly being questioned, ignored or challenged (27). The opposition, in this case, resides firmly within the margins of what would typically be considered part of the category of culture, the built environment—the ‘man’-made structures. Sherry Ortner maintains “the categories of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ are of course conceptual categories—one can find no boundary out in the actual world between the two states or realms of being” and Humphreys’s narrative constantly endorses this perspective (72).⁴⁸

The landscape and the natural world in *Afterimage* are represented as integral to the physical (sustenance) and psychological aspects (cognitive development as well as self-understanding and emotional well-being) of the characters' lives but in a manner that refrains from romanticizing or idealizing it. With the exception of character Robert Hill's personal and artistic aesthetics (included to contrast with Eldon by depicting the stereotypical elitist male artist who objectifies nature and women), nature is not distorted, repressed or controlled. When Isabelle considers the apple in her still-life composition she perceives nature merely as nature, freed of any strong overtones or symbolic connections between tree/apple/woman to universal "human truths," an attitude that is repeated by the author at the narrative level as well (23). Nature does not speak to the characters or exist, in the principal setting, solely as raw material to be exploited or degraded.⁴⁹ The immediate narrative maintains a balance between humans and non-human nature to depict an atmosphere of harmony and organic unity, especially evident in the passage describing the preparations for winter, an "expedition" made possible by the fruits and vegetables, the "carrots, potatoes, the hard bitter truth of an onion" that will see them through till spring (140). Humphreys does contrast this with another reality: the Crystal Palace, the Great Exhibition of 1851 where the "commodities of the world became desirable to the average man and woman" (70). Eldon judges it "both a triumph and a disaster" based on his recognition that by showcasing the treasures and exotic products of the world the Crystal Palace gives rise to rampant consumerism, fuels capitalism and increases dependence on Imperialism, ultimately generating additional incentive to instrumentalize animals and the environment, and to

subjugate indigenous peoples in order to procure the various treasures and exotic goods.

Despite the natural world's obvious contributions to the central characters' welfare and comfort, Humphreys refrains from making any of the classic associations that would evoke images of maternal nurturance and home economy; there is no sign of 'Mother Nature' in this story, notwithstanding the fact that motherhood remains a very central issue and recurring motif at the narrative and symbolic levels. As well, connections and associations between the primary characters and the environment challenge the traditional gendered models that rely on and perpetuate opposition between culture/nature, man/woman or that connect women with nature. As this thesis will demonstrate, Humphreys avoids clichés and habitual associations to reinvent metaphor in a number of ways that include atypical personification and intentional complexities in the usual hierarchal relationships between tenor and vehicle, as well as unique and unexpected associations that demand a reconsideration of the entities involved.

The literary device known as personification, used extensively in prose and poetry to explore our relationship to nature, may expand our ability to grasp abstract concepts and ideals but it often does so at nature's expense. Unless employed with extreme care, anthropomorphizing elements in the natural world tends to reduce nature to a mirror of human behaviour and often proves detrimental since the representations inevitably include elisions and omissions that deny the unique qualities of the Other. In her attempt to hold fast to a middle ground, Humphreys incorporates personification but does so only to illustrate nature's agency and

creativity outside the human sphere of control and she does so in a way that pictures “the object of knowledge . . . as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource” (Haraway 198). While consistently maintaining gender neutrality, Humphreys depicts the bi-directionality and interpenetration of the human/non-human relationship. Examples in the narrative include, “Sunlight makes bright flowers on the stone floor” (19), “Over the grey, stone wall the apple trees make a puzzle of the sky” (18), “There are no birds opening windows of song in the summer sky . . . ” (49), “Eldon blinks from the sunlight rushing the windows” (102), “Eldon can . . . feel the rough hand of the wind in his hair” (111), “The moon has lit another cloud into the shape of another world” (116), “ . . . the garden opens its arms to the last traces of summer” (133), “Ice has made a lace on the edges of the streambed” (160), and “The sun, cast out from the clouds, hooks a finger into the room, creates a thin band of light for her to walk through” (191). While these images anthropomorphize nature, they do so in gender-neutral terms that conceive of nature as independent of, yet interconnected with humanity; they illustrate nature’s participation in culture and a culture interdependent with nature; they blur the boundaries between categories and they add a new dimension to the human/non-human dynamic by questioning the role of the ‘object’ in the construction of knowledge and art.

Images of the sun drawing flowers, trees forming a puzzle and ice fashioning lace conjure up visions of human artistic creation and various activities related to the individual’s capacity for imagination, abstract thought and intellectual ordering, yet the artist in this instance is nature. The domains being metaphorically mapped—art

and nature—have never been considered “two closely related conceptual domains”⁵⁰ but rather two knowledge domains historically conceived as polar opposites. The metaphors not only suggest a less bifurcated trajectory between the two spheres, but also raise questions regarding the genesis or creative source, the original inventor of the various forms: do these metaphors signify an imposition of our own knowledge structures on the natural world—purposefully employed to assist us in visualizing a particular image? Or do they suggest that human beings’ inspiration for designing puzzles and creating complex patterning originated in nature? Or, perhaps the answer lies somewhere in the middle. Had Humphreys chosen to use simile in these instances, had written instead that the apple trees were making the sky *look like* a puzzle or the ice made patterns that *looked like* lace, the rhetorical implications would include the hierarchal value system that positions human creativity and intellect over and above the random workings of an irrational, chaotic, passive and amorphous nature, thus re-inscribing the pathetic fallacy that reduces nature to a passive mirror of culture. Humphreys’s imagery grants nature agency and includes the suggestion that culture mediates nature and nature mediates culture.

In addition to the overall impression of nature’s simultaneous independence from and interconnectedness with human beings and culture, numerous images in the novel undermine and/or resist the nature/culture dualism by confining the comparisons to elements and entities within nature. Humphreys disrupts the more characteristic dualistic structure that would associate elements in nature with constructs and entities attributed to culture—a blueprint that more often than not maintains the hierarchy and, subsequently, culture’s superior position. Instead,

“Stars in the sky” are compared to “thorns” (28); the “smells of coal” are likened to “the dusky bloom” of flowers (37). And in place of the customary alignment with domesticity (and consequently femininity), or the conventional imagery that implies a disordered, unappealing nature improved by the designs of culture, the garden is a “dark ocean” (131).

Creating metaphors in new and unusual configurations allows Humphreys to disrupt their basic dualistic structure, and one way she accomplishes this is by incorporating multiple tenors and/or vehicles. For instance, in the following metaphor, the tenor is intellectual activity—thought, memory, language—the vehicles, in this case, wind, rose bushes and water: “A wind moves the branches of the rose bush on the other side of the glass, a slow wave, the rise and fall of words in his head” (142). The domains being mapped are the cognitive workings of the human mind (the prime signifier of culture and in this case the target domain) and the source domain meant to contribute to a greater understanding of the primary domain is the natural world, nature—culture’s antithesis, but in this instance the authoritative or instructive side of the metaphor. The actions or motions of the intellect are likened to the natural powers of air and water currents, the actions and reactions within nature that cause movement and create flux.

The most interesting rhetorical devices in *Afterimage*, from the perspective of an ecofeminist critique, are the ubiquitous similes. Like all the metaphors in the novel, they continue to destabilize dualisms as they offer alternatives to traditional images of and connections between nature and culture. Significantly, comparisons made in what could be considered a typically anthropocentric fashion, one that

employs non-human nature to account for human appearance or behaviour but in doing so often demeans nature, are few; one occurs in relation to a character who intrudes on Isabelle and forces her to consider her 'place' in society. When the vicar visits, hoping to convince Isabelle to assist the church financially, "[h]is wheedling, reedy voice sounds as foreign to her as if it belonged to an animal, was the song of some plain, undistinguished sparrow" (121). Although this image fails to flatter the sparrow, the comparison does draw attention to Isabelle's inability to decode nature—Humphreys refrains from suggesting or imagining, anywhere in her novel, that humans might be capable of translating nature's voice, a strategy that holds an appeal for some but sets in motion a number of insurmountable conundrums.⁵¹ Other examples—"Crouched in the dark in this small hole of a room they are like animals, hiding"(37), "Eldon feels like a cornered animal" (180), "In fact, he's becoming more nervous and darting his head about like a startled animal" (220) "Her other hand she tucks in against his ribs, each one as slender and small as a chicken bone" (214)—are rather benign and make clear Humphreys decision to wield caution when employing literary devices to compare humans and animals—similes encourage a contrast and comparison but do not necessarily propose an equivalence. When Humphreys restricts the juxtaposition of human and non-human nature to simile she not only enhances our understanding by expanding our cognitive connections, but she creates or enables the reader to feel a sense of empathy and connection with the Other without ever reducing the animal to a mere object; the sense of continuity or similarity exists without eliding or erasing difference. The imagery evokes a kind of

knowing through empathy in contrast to distancing and objectification, the hallmarks of empiricism.

In a similar manner, Humphreys troubles the margins that would separate nature and culture according to the production and valuation of knowledge. The predominant thematic current relating to epistemology is, in this case, explored through the relationship between the written word and the natural world. When books are said to resemble “strata in a glacial bluff” a whole set of positive connotations emerge that collapse the discursive boundaries established between the conscious human act of recording history and nature’s inability to partake in the very activities that define culture and render it superior (17). Strata, defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as “a bed of sedimentary rock, usually consisting of ‘layers’ or ‘laminae’ of the same kind, representing continuous periods of deposition,” represents nature’s unique method of recording history, the ‘natural’ equivalent to the cultural artefacts produced by humans –in a manner of speaking, nature’s library. Because of strata’s function in the acquisition of information in various fields including geography, geology, anthropology and sociology, the simile alludes to nature’s role in providing humans with a wealth of information about everything from ancient weather patterns and elemental disruptions (floods and volcanic eruptions) to animal migration patterns and changes in human socio-cultural practices. On the other hand, the simile simultaneously alludes to the rigidity and oppressive power of knowledge systems and beliefs that, like strata, are the product of sedimentation: strata preserve information but do so in a manner that fixes it in a palimpsest. The *comparison* and *connection* made between nature’s record keeping

and our knowledge systems exemplifies what Relke refers to as “the realm of the organic and the realm of the symbolic overlap[ping]” (321). Rather than evoking ideas of absolute difference, the simile allows a consideration of similarities and intersections between terms previously conceived to be poles apart.

Like the images that work to disrupt the margins between art and nature, some of the similes in *Afterimage* invite a comparison between nature and technology. When Humphreys writes: “She waves her hand at the camera, the solitary stillness of it like a heron standing stiffly in a marsh,” she once more employs nature as the source or secondary domain to enhance awareness and understanding of a primary or target domain, reversing the more typical metaphoric construction whereby nature is mapped according to culture (174). The representation of the sun as “an open shutter poised above them” maps the domains of nature and photography (121). Rather than implying or re-inscribing a culture/nature divide that then dictates an ontological difference, the images suggest continuities, similarities and points of intersection between categories.

Humphreys’s imagery demonstrates the ways in which nature can be effectively *and* respectfully represented through language; she shows how the natural world can contribute to concepts and cognitive mappings without being reduced to objects or twisted and deformed in order to fit human desires and fears. Most significantly, her imagery depicts nature as an active object of knowledge, a nature that “neither speaks itself nor disappears in favour of a master decoder” (Haraway 198); it remains “free[d] of humanistic and Romantic interpretations” that ultimately distort the issues (Devine 50). Humphreys’s nature is also liberated from

“totalizing language” that assimilates nature to it; she develops “contextual language,” a term or concept that describes a manner of expression where one “assimilates language to the situation, bends it, shapes it to fit,” (Cheney 120). Humphreys resists imposing “a symbolic order upon the literature, the natural, denying its ‘thouness,’ killing it in order to exploit it for the signifying purposes of the author” (Donovan 78).⁵² Donovan describes this strategy as “an epistemological mode that enables a genuine reciprocity of information sharing, where the “thing” is not elided but attended to” and reaching a truth does not require that anyone’s “realities are ignored, where all are consulted, where all have their place in the story of the moment,” all of which leads to a “non-dominative epistemology” (87). Scharff observes that “humans have in common the curious practice of knowing nature through the categories by which we know ourselves” (xiii); while that may be true, Humphreys expands the possibilities by imagining the reverse: her characters know themselves, their culture and their current technologies by way of nature and various “companion species.”⁵³ *Afterimage* clearly demonstrates that “what we know and how we know can be not only examined but also manipulated, altered, and perpetually renewed through linguistic processes” (Simpson 122).

3.4) Knowledge: Alternative Models

“ . . . for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge . . . ”

–Virginia Woolf

According to the Cartesian epistemological framework, dual ontologies “sharply separate the universal from the particular, culture from nature, mind from body, and reason from emotion” (Jaggar and Bordo 3). Ecofeminists recognize the inadequacy of the Cartesian model and its fundamental gender biases that have prevented females and all things associated with the feminine entry into the realm defined as knowledge by associating them with the underside of the abovementioned dualisms. As a result, issues related to epistemology in general, and the body in particular, have become prominent themes in feminist theory and writing and many ecofeminists continue in the effort to explore, reconstruct and revision this deep-rooted legacy of an “obsolete and self-deluded world view” (Jaggar and Bordo 4). Alaimo writes: “The body is a crucial site for contestation and transformation, precisely because ideologies of the body have been complicit in the degradation of people of colour, women, and nature” (136). Humphreys engages with the challenge of re-conceptualizing concepts and beliefs about knowledge production, knowledge acquisition as well as the sensitive and ongoing debate about what counts as knowledge. A very brief discussion of the way Humphreys employs metaphors related to ‘light’ in order to expand and redefine epistemological concepts will precede a more in-depth discussion of her strategies at the level of narrative and plot that challenge the Enlightenment definitions of knowledge (Truth) based on unity, transcendence and universality; she counters the dominant paradigms by envisioning

knowledge as intimacy rather than as power—the fruits of a complicated web of interconnections, multiplicities and situatedness—and she re-casts the body’s role in the production and dissemination of knowledge. This thesis will show that Humphreys’s model of knowledge challenges the traditional philosopher’s “fantasy for transcendence” and imagines the body as a site where nature and culture intermingle (Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* 227).

Humphreys incorporates the patriarchal standards of knowledge—light and vision—into a framework that resists opposition and hierarchy but does so without postulating an essential femininity: Humphreys’s rejection, throughout the narrative, of an ontological dualism strongly suggests she is advocating a feminist epistemology compatible with writer and scientist Donna Haraway who “thinks we can do better than viewing the sexual nature of our bodies *either* as simply biologically determined *or* as blank pages for social inscription (social inscription which is typically disguised as biological determinism)” (Grassie 10). Resistance to hegemonic discourses—portrayed mainly through the character of Annie Phelan at the narrative level, and through ‘light’ imagery at the level of language—corresponds to many of the alternatives to traditional empirical and scientific models outlined by Haraway in her oft-quoted essay, “Situated Knowledges.”

Humphreys’s praxis resembles Haraway’s theoretical approach: both aim for a middle ground. Rather than rejecting vision outright as many feminists attempt to do, Haraway claims “vision can be good for avoiding binary opposition” and our insistence on “the embodied nature of all vision” will allow us to “reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a

conquering gaze from nowhere” (188). Further, she calls for “writing that metaphorically emphasizes vision again” but a vision that is “partial, locatable, critical” (189-191). Both the ubiquitous light imagery and the narrative’s focus on photography accomplish this goal in *Afterimage*.

Because epistemology and empiricism have been so closely linked with the sense of sight and the act of observation, light remains the foremost element symbolizing knowledge; “the epistemological value of sight” is based on the assumption that it reveals with “clarity and precision” (Grosz 97). As a literary trope alluding to Truth/truth and wisdom, light imagery traditionally connotes purity, brilliance, clarity, transparency, and an *unmediated* access to certainty and incontestable fact. The author, once again, engages with notions of ‘in-between-ness’ as she troubles the efficacy of vision with imagery that suggests qualities in light beyond the obvious ones normally associated with it. The imagery challenges related Enlightenment models that, when taken to their logical conclusions, systematically exclude women, animals and the natural world, but it does so without incorporating the strategy of reversal. According to Haraway, “the topography of subjectivity is multidimensional; so, therefore, is vision” (193). *Afterimage* portrays light as “weak” and “whispery” (8) or “high and harsh,” making “objects outside the room seem transparent” (12). Often, light’s ethereal qualities take on a more substantial or tactile appearance (frequently evoked in images of liquidity), in accordance with Humphreys’s strategy to paint the senses as translatable, but also to suggest the interpenetration of the polarized realms of mind/body and abstract/concrete; light transgresses the borders of dualistic categories—it has a

material presence: “The air swims with light” (22), “the sunlight runs through his beard” (22), light “sieved” and “dribbled” (116) and “the light from above strikes that back of her head, like a sword” (126). In imagery that reverses the usual connotations whereby light symbolizes life, Isabelle imagines her babies, “their blood-slick bodies, slippery as fish, having swum from their dark ocean out into the light that killed them” (99). The hegemony of accepted truths and authorized knowledge is evoked through light imagery as well when Annie questions her eyesight, doubting and debating whether she has seen Eldon walking outside: “She knows the power that light has. What it can make you see” (158). Despite Isabelle’s clear unobstructed (and technologically augmented) vision, she constantly sees what she wants to see while photographing Annie. Isabelle’s readings of Annie’s body language and facial expressions are coloured by the “stories that people know,” shaped by the parameters of her knowledge, and influenced by her own desires (63). Totalizing ideologies depend on the illusion of vision as transparent, infinite and universal and Humphreys’s light imagery undermines this delusion. Like most entities in the novel, light exceeds the boundaries that would categorize it according to pre-established assumptions based on dualistic models originating in Enlightenment beliefs but, again, Humphreys is careful to avoid reversals; light in *Afterimage* can be both harmful *and* beneficial to vision.

Just as the narrative avoids valorizing one side of any binary, whether light/dark, mind/body, or culture/nature, it also refrains from collapsing them in an attempt to suggest unity and oneness, a holism that would reduce the elements;⁵⁴ rather, Humphreys emulates Merleau-Ponty’s example which is to “take up and

utilize the space in between, the ‘no-man’s’ land or gulf separating oppositional terms” (Grosz 4). And once again, we find the trope of the ‘middle’, or what Grosz refers to as the “excluded middle” that “predates and makes possible the binary terms insofar as it precedes and exceeds them, insofar as it is uncontainable in either term” (94). Humphreys negotiates the predicament surrounding unity versus fragmentation by moving beyond these two choices. Recent theories have encouraged feminists to “get beyond, not only the number one—the number that determines unity of body and self—but also to get beyond the number two, which determines difference, antagonism, and exchange” (Bordo 226). It is worth quoting Bordo extensively:

For Cartesian epistemology, the body—conceptualized as the site of epistemological limitation, as that which fixes the knower in time and space and therefore situates and relativizes perceptions and thought—requires transcendence if one is to achieve the view from nowhere, the God’s-eye view. Once one has achieved that view (has become *object-ive*), one can see nature as it really is, undistorted by human perspective. For postmodern Suleiman, by contrast, there is no escape from human perspective, from the process of human making and remaking the world. The body, accordingly, is reconceived. No longer an obstacle to knowledge (for knowledge in the Cartesian sense is an impossibility, and the body is incapable of being transcended in pursuit of it), the body is seen instead as the vehicle of the human making and remaking of the world, constantly shifting location, capable of revealing endlessly new points of view. (*Interpretations of René Descartes* 227)

Bordo goes on to suggest we begin to see the body as an “epistemological metaphor for locatedness” and to, once and for all, abandon the dream of “epistemological conquest” (229). One detects a comparable version of Bordo’s revisioned epistemic philosophy at the core of Humphreys’s story, beginning with her choice of three main protagonists, all equally crucial to understanding the story and propelling the plot, rather than one key character.

The combination of many consciousnesses simultaneously aware of various aspects of self and other, but clearly limited by their ‘locatedness’ presents a picture of knowledge consistent with the imaginings of a number of ecofeminist theorists – heightened awareness, original insight and enhanced knowledge typically occur in Humphreys’s plot as the result of collaboration and *mediation* between subjects and objects, between “material-semiotic actors” and not as a consequence of an autonomous, unbiased, detached subject’s observations and/or manipulations of a passive object.⁵⁵ In this case, the human being, like the map, the book, or photograph functions as a medium. Smith defines the mediator as “not subordinate to other, more ontologically valid entities, but rather [it] is an entity, like all others, existing in and through relationships” (36). And once mediation is recognized as a constitutive activity as well as the nature of relationships between entities, there are no longer any reasons to limit ontological divisions to two: “because mediation is the nature of existence, purity is not valued, much less possible,” therefore “nothing can be entirely of nature or entirely of culture” (36). Smith articulates the positive implications of such an epistemological paradigm for nature: “If we understand ourselves as mediators as well as mediated, then we don’t have to worry about “rendering” a pure but silenced other, because we will understand that there are more relationships than just linguistic ones” (38).

Throughout the narrative Annie mediates the complex intersections of similarity and difference within and across the categories of gender and class. When Annie questions the patriarchal scripts Isabelle relies on, asking “[A]m I always to be full of sorrow ma’am?” she makes it possible for Isabelle to recognize the

inadequacy of the master narratives that shape women's lives, and Isabelle realizes she has a choice, that "[m]aybe, as a woman, she should resist these stories, not embrace them?" (63). At the same time, Isabelle mediates Annie's subjectivity and identity by way of her tableaux and their various female characters including Guinevere, Ophelia, Sappho and the Madonna; in some cases they supply words and a context for reality; at other times, through actively taking on (physically, emotionally and intellectually) the identities and subject positions, Annie can consider and critique the truthfulness of the normative and oppressive discourses they are meant to maintain. The "webs of connection" supporting and enabling the ongoing mediation between the characters reflects the interrelations of subject and object that Haraway insists upon; the characters' positions in the narrative "constantly shift and realign themselves vis-à-vis one another" so that as subjects/objects they "are anything but fixed and stable" (Simpson 21). They illustrate "the fundamental inter-implication of the subject in the object and the object in the subject" (Grosz 95). Annie's role as mediator relaxes the boundaries between subject/object in the epistemological dialogue; she is meaning-maker and not simply a vessel for Isabelle's objectifying gaze.

The relationship that develops between Eldon Dashell and Annie Phelan also exemplifies an ecofeminist alternative to the usual subject/object structure as defined by Enlightenment and humanist epistemological models. Annie's memories of Ireland, of the famine and her family working on the road to nowhere, mediate Eldon's sense of himself and the world in a number of ways, and when Eldon shares his cartographic facts of Ireland with Annie, it changes the way she understands and

knows her homeland. According to gender and class mappings between the dualisms subject/object, male/female and master/slave, Annie is clearly aligned with the devalued side of the binaries; however, the narrative disrupts this system by portraying less rigid boundaries between the categories; just as non-human nature in the novel clearly contributes to human understanding, Annie subverts the standard whereby an 'object' of knowledge "is a passive and inert thing" (Haraway 197). She may be Eldon's opposite (and inferior) according to oppressive discourses of class and gender, but she shares more personality traits and has more in common with him than she does with Isabelle (undermining gender assumptions). Annie contributes greatly to Eldon's perceptions of the famine with stories that relate her family's particular hardships; although Eldon "has thought about the famine a great deal . . . he never imagined it so vividly as he did when Annie told him about the famine road" (66).

The interactions among the central characters are consistent with the concept of situated knowledge where "accounts of the "real" world do not, then, depend on a logic of "discovery" but on a power-charged social relation of "conversation"" (Haraway, 198). Humphreys's characters recognize and articulate the relevance of situated knowledge to epistemological concerns, exhibiting a stance Haraway describes as "a doctrine of embodied objectivity" to counter the empiricist version of objectivity that "distance[s] the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power" (188). She also suggests we transform the metaphor of vision to reflect the partiality and embodiment of all forms of vision so as to counter the myth of a universal vision obtained by way of privileged

epistemology. Primarily through his consideration of maps and their susceptibility to physical perspective, Eldon extrapolates the significance of locatedness to all discourses; he realizes how so much depends on where one stands, land or sea: “one wouldn’t be thinking about where they were in the same way, using the same relational codes” and “there wouldn’t be the same sense of opposites”(113). And as for the desire to transcend materiality—the body, matter, nature—he thinks “how odd that was, trying to position oneself in relation to the expanding, unending universe” and “using the unseen to locate oneself in a place we already are” (113). Annie’s musings relate to the immediate moment as she contrasts and compares herself and her employer; noting a similarity between them—her loss of two brothers and Eldon’s loss of two male children—but she also recognizes her inability to fully appreciate how he might feel. Eldon “doesn’t see the world her way,” not only because of differing religious beliefs, but also due to the complex intersection of gender and class, and the role they play in situating the knowing body:

Annie looks down at Eldon’s hands, fingers spread. They are smooth and white, a gentlemen’s hands. Annie looks at her own hands. They are thick and red and the skin is cracked and rough as tree bark. They are working hands, the hands of a maid. How can she possibly *know* anything of his loss? His children are not the same as her brothers. His world is not the same as hers at all. (55)

And again, later, Annie thinks, “how different their [the Dashell’s] sense of being alone must be” (83). In both cases, similarities and differences exist side by side simultaneously contributing to and limiting access to knowledge, while difference is “theorized *biologically* as situational, not intrinsic,” a move that “foregrounds knowledge as situated conversation at every level of its articulation” (Haraway 200). In a moment of speculation prompted by Eldon’s wish that he might share a meal

with Annie, the supposed inappropriateness of “these two types of people,”—master and servant, English and Irish— together in public, Annie articulates a reality that speaks to both the contingency of identity and the significance of locatedness to epistemology:

“If we were different people, sir,” says Annie, “who is it we would be?” She has often thought how accidental her life has been in some regards. If Mrs. Gilbey hadn’t plucked her from the workhouse when she was a child, if she hadn’t been converted into a servant, would she have gone to work in the coal yards or in a factory? Would she perhaps have been working in a public house? If some woman had stood on a chair in a bar where she worked, and sung about her under-things in a voice loud with beer, would Annie have laughed along with the others? Would Annie have been the one to offer her a free drink? (53).

Annie and Eldon reiterate Susan Suleiman’s claim: “to be aware of the specificity or the limits of one’s views is to realize that unchanging truths, even about something as concrete, as biologically “fixed” as the human body are impossible to arrive at” (2).

3.5) Knowing Bodies

But even the most ethereal philosophers must inhabit bodies that are always liable to interrupt the contemplation of abstract ideas with unruly urges to eat, sleep, and procreate.

-James McKusick

If women are to have epistemic credibility and authority, we need to reconfigure the role of bodily experience in the development of knowledge.

-Linda Martin Alcoff

The woman/nature analogy and the culture/nature binary are the product of, connected to, and help generate and support another misguided assumption—that the mind and body are distinctly different elements separated by rigid boundaries between an inner self (mind) and an external world (body); the body is seen as an impediment to objective reason and Truth. The mind/body dualism stems from the Cartesian ideal of reason based on a separation of *res cogitans* (mind) from *res extensa* (body). This formulation soon “succeeded in linking the mind/body opposition to the foundations of knowledge” and in doing so, positioned the mind over the body and over nature, both the body’s nature and the natural world (Grosz 6). The separation of “mind” from everything “not mind” launched a dualism that would hold sway over philosophical thought for centuries, despite the fact that in “everyday life, there seems to be a manifest connection between the two” (Grosz 6). In the Cartesian view, the body becomes an object, simple matter, and the senses, movements, and processes are considered of a “lower-order” and therefore ‘natural’ or primitive (Grosz 8). Traditional Western theories relating to knowledge and reason—concepts, ideas, abstract thought, judgement—have attempted to exclude the body and corporeality completely; by elevating the mind and establishing it as the

sole source of knowledge, philosophy has created a disembodied epistemology that relies on transcendence, a move that excludes females who are, as a consequence of their connection to the birth process (not the only reason construed to prove the female's connection to nature but perhaps the most compelling due to its ineluctable link to fertility and the rhythms of nature) considered immanent or closer to nature than their male counterparts, therefore ontologically lacking, and incapable of true transcendence. Jane Flax asks: "Given the disjunctions posited in postmodern philosophy between sign/language/male/culture and body/nature/female, what could the body *say*?" (103).

Portrayed as it is, as "an inter-face, a threshold, a field of intersection of material and symbolic forces," Humphreys's novel suggests the body has much to say (Alaimo, *Ground* 136). She conceives of alternatives to the usual epistemological approaches that place mind at the centre by re-visioning the body's role in the production and acquisition of knowledge.⁵⁶ Gaard & Murphy insist, "reclaiming the body is important work for ecofeminism, particularly since human (male) identity has been equated with the mind alone, and the body has been variously raced, animalized, feminized, and naturalized in order to be seen as inferior and antagonistic to the process of culture" (9). Largely through the character of Annie and her mediating role in relation to Isabelle's and Eldon's insights and revelations, and theirs in relation to Annie's, Humphreys explores the many ways the body participates in knowing one's self and the world around the body, the "holding environment" where "experience can be transformed in the process of self-discovery" (Benjamin, *Desire* 96).

Humphreys does not confine the significance of corporeality to the female characters—she emphasizes the significance for both males and females of a living body embedded in nature. The Enlightenment philosophy that conceived of transcendent masculinity and immanent femininity are challenged at the level of language with metaphors that suggest all humans, regardless of biological sex or discursively constructed gender, are embedded in bodies that are equally embedded in nature. Eldon imagines his wife as a “shore” and “his hands the waves” (181) and his wife thinks of him as “a shore her body had once sought” (238), images that undermine stereotypical gendered associations that typically align femininity with fluidity and flux and masculinity with solidity and constancy. And, in keeping with her general assumption that all humans, men included, are the victims of dualistic thinking, in *Afterimage* it is the dominant culture and the various centric structures related to gender, race and class that shackle humans and non-human nature. Eldon distains his “clean, thin, weak hands” (54) for despite their class appropriateness his “sickly” body prohibits him from traveling and renders him less masculine according to the cultural definitions of that term—he desires the “hands of a climber or sailor” (54). Eldon is no less and no more connected to nature or culture than his female counterparts; his body bears the material reality of nature’s affect —“I was a sickly boy and a sickly young man” and the discursive pressure of culture’s constitutive powers (53). Eldon, ignoring the economic realities of lower class life and the gender disparities that restrict freedom, ironically desires to be Annie’s “equal,” which to him means a stronger body and the physical freedom he misguidedly associates with her lower class status (53). Along with Isabelle’s stained hands that

mark her as Other and subject her to discrimination within her own class (her inability to deliver a healthy baby also marks her as inappropriate in the context of gender categories – the ‘biology is destiny’ argument fails in relation to Isabelle), Eldon’s predicament exposes the negative side of being on the valued side of any binary, but more importantly it speaks to the need to develop models of the body where no one mode, norm, or ideal comes to represent the complexity and unpredictability that actually exists.

Elizabeth Grosz argues that a new model for concepts of the body should include the capacity to “see animate materiality and the materiality of language in interaction” (22) and Humphreys’s narrative accomplishes this in a number of ways, the most predominant one being by way of imagery relating to the word ‘word.’ Challenging the assumption that language belongs strictly to the realm of the mind (culture), words take on a material quality: they “ripple” and “eddy” around a room (28); they “crack(s) and split(s) in the cold air” (161); and the Bible becomes a “box of words” and a “hard brick” in Annie’s hands (14), and they have the ability to comfort her like a “blanket” (58). And in a line that distills and articulates Humphreys’s overarching theme– that we construct our reality by engaging with the stories, theories, concepts and language at our disposal but adapt them to reflect more accurately our lived experience–words are “a place to land, a place to push off from” (170).

The “materiality of language” that Grosz refers to also emerges in the novel when words are represented as the living embodiment of human thought. After telling Eldon of her past, Annie “feels the words gone from her body. With the

lightness of moths they fluttered out of her mouth and now they are lifted on the breeze, away from her” and Eldon “feels the gravity of Annie’s words pushing him to the ground” (51). Upon seeing snowdrops, Annie finds “the sudden sight of them so unexpected, like words you didn’t mean to say that blossomed on your tongue and surprised you with their truth” (243). The physical sensation of language that Annie describes contributes to the recurring trope or notion in the novel that words are “live, organically logical apparatus” (Simpson 35).

While many of these aforementioned examples only hint of a relationship between language and its material effect on the body, there are others that do so more explicitly. As Annie worries about the “state of her soul” she moves her hand over her Bible and hopes “the words will leak out, swim into her body” (55). When Isabelle reads Sappho aloud to Annie, the passage effectively imagines the interaction Grosz describes:

The words of the poet slide right into her heart, lodge under her skin. And they will stay there, she thinks, these words, until something urgent and entirely present sets them free. That’s what Tess and Wilks were doing, letting the words out, bleeding the words’ fever from their bodies. Words like these that had found them somehow and wouldn’t let them go. (93)

Later, when Isabelle tells Annie that she thinks of her as “the only person in the world who truly cares for me,” it instantly unlocks emotions Annie was experiencing but lacked the ability to articulate (205). Annie ponders her startling and urgent physical response to Isabelle and decides her “body acted by itself” because “it was the words . . . The words slid under her skin so surely and cleanly that she didn’t even feel them until they’d lodged in her heart” (206). The words had “found [her] somehow.” In each of these examples, rather than simply representing an event,

language both instigates and gives meaning to an experience by way of its impact on the body. Language breaks through the barrier that would confine it to the realm of representation to enter into the realm of experience, as Humphreys makes the power of words visible; she portrays language (mind) and materiality (body) as “fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependence, but never fully collapsed into one another” (Slicer 62). Bordo speculates: “it is precisely at the border where ‘body’ and ‘mind’ confuse themselves that the constitutive experiences of selfhood are found” (*Interpretations* 312). Her hypothesis is perfectly portrayed in the above-mentioned example for the words and their effect at the physical and psychic levels constitute an aspect of Annie’s subjectivity not yet recognized or comprehensible to her until the very moment the words are spoken and produce a physical response. The narrative rises above the split between body and mind by imagining discourses as living in and through the body; words and the intellect are not separate from sensation and the body. The imagery challenges the physical and non-physical boundaries, especially evident in a line that combines all three motifs—light, words, and embodied knowledge: “There is a patch of light at Annie’s throat, like a word lying on her skin” (64). In *Afterimage*, self-knowledge and insight accrue as the consequence of an oscillating flow within the organism and not as the result of a mind’s separation from or transcendence over a body.

The scene with the most significant impact with regards to reconceptualizing the relationship between the body and knowing, especially the transcendent-like moment of epiphany, occurs when Annie inadvertently inspires Eldon to augment his appreciation of the explorers who ventured to the North by experiencing his

Arctic fantasy corporeally as well as intellectually. She inspires Eldon to connect with the landscape by transforming the text (and map) into lived experience. Although Eldon's character already displays a healthy distrust of disembodied masculine reason, his dependence on details in books and the images and contours on maps limits his ability to grasp the scope and severity of the hardships and day-to-day challenges endured by the men he admires and envies, the particular and the mundane facts that often escape (are erased or elided from) historical records. Annie's focus on one seemingly insignificant detail, cold wet boots, leads to Eldon's life-altering encounter; the *re*-union (to refer to his experience as a joining of the intellectual/spiritual and the corporeal suggests they are actually separate entities) of mind and body allows Eldon to experience the North in a way that surpasses anything he accesses through brain power alone; Eldon engages in "storying [him]self as an embodied being in landscape" (Davies 14). He comes to recognize the discrepancies between the material realities of the adventurer's experience and the exalted literary and historical representations. His unexpected journey endows Eldon with a greater understanding—later, while pondering the surveyors in the Canadian wilderness he no longer romanticizes their lives or professions for "he knows that the reality of that man's life was nothing even close to the heroicism Eldon had imagined for him" (200).

The kind of truth that Eldon discovers, one that depends on the emotions and physical sensations as a feasible addition to intelligence and knowledge, recalls the "pre-Enlightenment definition of "courage" as "the capacity to speak one's mind with all one's heart" or, in other words, to re-connect emotion with rationality, the

mind and the body (Goldberger & al. 105). Eldon gestures towards this particular concept of truth when he admires Apian's "heart-shaped map" that "joined the inner and outer universes together" in a manner that made the world seem "both infinite and fragile," and in a way that leads Eldon to intuit a connection between human beings and the natural world, between the "boundless elliptical oceans" and the "blood stuttering in his chest" (67).

Eldon and Annie learn from felt experience that emanates from the threshold of mind and body, from feeling and thinking rather than from a privately held subjectivism. When Annie runs her finger around the contours of Ireland, Eldon "understands this, it is what he does as well. How he has to touch something to make it real, to really see it" (111). Likewise, when Annie models for Isabelle the corporeal sensations and her 'gut emotions' are inseparable from her intellect; they inform her growing sense of the incongruities and discrepancies that exists between normative discourses and heterosexist fictions and a woman's lived experience. Annie's embodied knowledge helps her call into question the authority and veracity of an assortment of literary archetypes that distort or deny the lived reality—it becomes her conduit to alternative interpretations of the stories and myths and enables her to resist and reject a number of traditional representations of femininity. She feels "shaky most of the day, as though she'd suffered a bad fright" after posing on the ground as a frantic, lovesick Guinevere (65). Later, when posing as Ophelia, Annie feels "the pulse of the water playing against her hand" and her sense of her own body in nature leads her to know nature in her body, and to conclude, "I am alive, and I am everything"(64). A moment earlier, she knows with certainty that

“Ophelia wouldn’t want to drown herself on such a fine sunny day” because she “would have thoughts and feelings that had nothing to do with Hamlet at all” (64). Annie’s character relentlessly explores and questions the “one-dimensional, static, lifeless image” of the heroines of cultural and narrative convention as she searches for images that more realistically represent female subjectivity (Heilmann 171). In *Afterimage*, Humphreys realizes the female protagonist of Carolyn Heilbrun’s vision that discovers for her self “an identity not limited by custom or defined by attachment to some man” (*Womanhood* 72). Annie’s autonomous female character muddies the dualisms by restoring the excluded middle, a move that undermines the culture/nature polarity and disengages woman from the analogy that would align her with nature and oppose her to man.

In a passage that could easily be describing Humphreys’s specific approach to the mind/body question, Bronwyn Davies writes:

Bodies are subjected. Bodies learn to recognize themselves through clichés. Bodies learn to separate mind from body. Yet bodies can also learn to use the very powers they gain through being subjected to turn their reflexive gaze on the discursive practices and the habituated ways of being those practices make possible, making them both visible and revisable, and opening up the possibility of developing new ways of knowing. (168)

We encounter this ‘new way of knowing’ in *Afterimage* mainly through Annie’s character; she achieves it for herself and encourages it in Eldon and Isabelle by way of mediation. Derrida defines a “medium” as that which stands between opposites by revealing the confusion of those opposites . . . an element that envelops both terms of an opposition” (Hekman 165). On the same subject, Mantovani writes: “The roots of ambiguities of everyday situations lie in this extremely mobile co-construction which take place between actors and their environments” (137). With these explicit

definitions in mind, I would argue that Humphreys does not confine her mediums to literature, cartography and photography, but expands them to include the human being (embodied in nature but also producer and product of culture) and the natural world. Through Annie, the other characters develop a capacity to identify cultural ideals and the normalizing discourses of race, class and gender; they begin to resist the systemic power relations that divide them from their embodied desires (Isabelle to a lesser degree than Eldon). Freed of hierarchal and oppositional constructions, humankind and nature enact the epistemological conversation that Haraway envisions for an ethical approach to science and objectivity. By not “taking flight from the denigrated side of the dualisms,” Humphreys’s narrative effectively “reconceive[s] the body and nature in such a way as to confound the dualisms themselves,” and, in doing so, she “enacts feminist epistemologies of embodied knowledges, thereby countering the dominant paradigms of distance and objectification” (Alaimo *Ground* 145). Annie is the conduit to subjugated knowledges, those overshadowed by binary models of mind/body, self/other, male/female, and culture/nature. The novel performs a similar function: it avoids reinforcing dualistic perspectives of nature as it highlights the role of language and ideology in subject constitution and works to imagine and uncover the ‘excluded middle’. *Afterimage* renders our ‘discursive practices and habituated ways’ visible in order to explore and reveal alternatives in the hopes of ‘developing new ways of knowing’ and being in the world.

Conclusion

The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchal dualisms of naturalized identities.

-Donna Haraway

Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one.

-John Berger

Jane Urquhart's novel *Away* and Helen Humphreys's novel *Afterimage* share a number of central subjects: gender and identity, Colonialism and Imperialism, geographic and psychic dislocation, the politics of race, class and gender, alternatives to patriarchal ideologies, the deconstruction of Enlightenment values and beliefs, boundary crossings, epistemological alternatives to Cartesian rationalism, and the politics of representation, to name but a few. However, once the novels are treated to an ecofeminist methodological intervention many significant differences emerge. This study has demonstrated how both authors deal with the problematic terrain of patriarchy and its construction of the dominant ideals of Western society in relation to 'woman' and 'nature,' and analysed their distinctly different approaches.

Urquhart's narrative accepts the culture/nature division and endeavours to elevate the category of nature; she apparently takes for granted an ontological difference between categories and her novel attempts to reverse the values so that 'woman' and 'nature' replace 'man' and 'culture' in the superior position. Urquhart's narrative romantically valorizes the connection between the feminine and the natural world; all but one female character possess some special means of understanding and communicating with nature, and this hereditary gift/curse that afflicts only women (and one Native character) reifies the notion of an essential nature. In a gesture that further solidifies this connection as well as the opposition

between culture and nature, Mary is subdued by culture (the logos), by men, and by her embodiment (immanence); she feels most whole and ‘grounded’ during her two pregnancies. Meanwhile, when Mary’s daughter Eileen participates in culture, represented in the novel most prominently by politics, all hell breaks loose, clearly illustrating Urquhart’s leanings:

Nature, in cultural feminism, referred to the experience of reproduction, the continuity of generations, the creation of life, the inherent bodily connection to the planet. Where men experienced separation from biology, disdaining the body and the material world (and oppressing women) en route to a necrophilic transcendence of nature, women, by virtue of their reproductive labor, lived their lives through nature, through a grounding in the body and cycles of life” (Sandilands 11).

Humphreys, on the other hand, portrays sexuality in a manner that is not oppositional nor is it a-sexual. The novel represents a sexual multiplicity that challenges notions of an essential feminine or masculine nature and, at every turn, she undermines the idea of an unbridgeable opposition between culture and nature in a manner that reflects a number of ecofeminist strategies. The imagery in *Afterimage* destabilizes the boundaries between masculine and feminine and between culture and nature, whereas *Away*, from beginning to end, depicts an intact and ostensibly insurmountable gender binary and culture/nature opposition.

Characterization in Urquhart’s novel continues this motif of irreconcilable contraries by remaining true to gender stereotypes with male and female characters incapable of questioning or crossing the imposed gender divide. In *Away*, Mary O’Malley abandons her family and exits the narrative in an attempt to escape the confines of heterosexist fictions, and her female ancestors become heir to and bear the burdens of their gender. Humphreys liberates her characters, both male and

female, from a strictly oppositional role and/or function by blurring the gender boundaries meant to control and direct desire. Annie, Isabelle and Eldon depart from traditional patterns and roles and, as a consequence, revise their own and each other's stories. Annie Phelan, throughout the novel *Afterimage*, attempts to break free from narrative restrictions and structures of the past by critiquing various systems and exerting her agency through choice, whereas all the generations of women depicted in Urquhart's novel are victims of their 'destiny' and the binary systems that result in lives of alienation, desperation and fragmentation. Even Esther, who has the advantage of Eileen's wisdom, lives a lonely solitary life passively waiting for two deaths: her own and the end of her farm. Despite all the circumstances that might strongly suggest it, Annie Phelan of *Afterimage* is not depicted as a victim; indeed, it is Isabelle and Eldon who seem to feel the oppression and limitations of class and gender most deeply, that is, until Annie makes them aware of the multiple discourses that constrain them, and encourages the couple to subvert the power of those discourses. Humphreys's characters enact the three strategies necessary for subverting "dominant and dominating discourses" as described by Davies:

The first strategy is to recognize and name oppressive and controlling forces, refusing the power of those who use silencing others as a major strategy for maintaining power. The second strategy is the development of an awareness, beyond words, of embodiment in landscape The third strategy . . . is the combination of the first two and involves a movement "into different linkages or new alignments." (245)

Humphreys creates characters that consistently destabilize gender and class boundaries as they bridge the gap between essentialist notions of identity and those that conform to theories of constructedness. Her narrative illustrates how circulating

images of femininity relate to and impact the *sujet-en-procès* through their tremendous prescriptive influence, but she simultaneously demonstrates how, through agency and discernment, the subject resists, rejects and /or transforms those same images. Although Mary O'Malley's character exposes the connections and foundations, at no time in *Away* do any of Urquhart's characters successfully undermine or overcome the binary logic of Western thought. Humphreys imagines a subject constituted by discourse but capable of resistance; Urquhart's characters are unable to resist their subjugation or to fashion new and/or feasible models of subjectivity to replace or augment existing ones.

Both authors deal with the subject of knowledge, and once again Urquhart portrays knowledge according to gender assumptions with the male characters, Brian O'Malley and Father Quinn, representing the Cartesian epistemology of a subject-centred knowledge acquired through the rational observation of an object; they logically debate Truth/truth according to the tenets of the Christian bible and assorted philosophical (masculine) values. Their reliance on an episteme of detachment and rationality contrasts sharply with the intuitive and embodied knowledge innate to Mary, a knowledge eventually heightened through contact with a corpse, then sustained through communications with a male spirit in/and the natural world, and ultimately stifled by patriarchal conventions. The prevailing sentiment in *Away* implies that a superior episteme—one related to the gift of empathy and connection—emanates from a feminine unconscious, a Kristevan-like semiotic that re-inscribes a male/female epistemological binary. As demonstrated earlier, Humphreys refrains from connecting characters to specific modes of

knowledge that would correlate with gender—both Eldon and Annie rely on alternatives to the abstract distancing of traditional Cartesian rationalism. Humphreys portrays knowledge as mediated, partial and embodied, a strategy that counters notions of an autonomous knower searching for and gaining knowledge of absolute truths. Bordo argues that a “knowledge that could acknowledge its genealogy in corporeality would also necessarily acknowledge its perspectivism, its incapacity to grasp all, or anything in its totality,” and it is precisely this model of knowledge that Humphreys develops in her novel (*Unbearable Weight* 128). While both narratives include renderings of knowledge-as-intimacy as an alternative to knowledge-as-power, in Urquhart’s vision only women and Natives are capable of recognizing or enacting this alternative through an intersubjective mode of relating with the other—outside of Mary’s connection with the ghost and Exodus Crow’s superior and intuitive interpersonal skills, boundaries between subject/object and male/female are rarely breached in *Away*. In contrast, *Afterimage* expands and redefines notions of knowledge by relaxing boundaries between subject and object, by conceiving the object of knowledge as active, by portraying knowledge as the consequence of webs of connection created by an ongoing mediation between subjects and objects, and by revaluing knowledge as necessary and desirable for its survival value rather than solely for its Truth value.

As previously discussed, language, and more specifically metaphor, offers ecocritical writers a crucial vehicle to deal with and often to destabilize the culture/nature dualism. Plumwood insists that essential to any discussion of dualisms in relation to the metaphors in a narrative is a recognition that

. . . a dualism is an intense, established and developed cultural expression of . . . a hierarchal relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable. (*Feminism* 47)

Metaphors in *Afterimage* usually disrupt dualism whereas in *Away* they almost always succeed in re-inscribing or maintaining rigid opposition and hierarchy. With the exception of Mary's metonymic imagery, shown to be a valuable corollary of female *jouissance*, Urquhart's imagery remains within the parameters of familiar and clichéd language at the level of plot and narrative in a manner that maintains a value-based structure governing relationships between entities. Her images and metaphors contribute little in the way of re-conceptualizing the terms and categories involved because she attempts to "clothe the unknowable in the familiar" (Alaimo 148). Conversely, the rhetorical figures in *Afterimage* contribute to Humphreys's obvious attempt to avoid extreme approaches; exploitive figuration and clichés are absent, reversal is avoided and the object is neither elided nor transformed into subject, nor is it deformed to fit or flatter anthropocentric vanities –hierarchies are more often than not destabilized. Humphreys shows that, while "the master's tools can never dismantle the master's house," they do have the capacity to remodel and renovate the structure to better accommodate the complexities that exist within the earth's extended and diverse family (Lorde 1981 99). Humphreys proves the promise of language to challenge, resist, revise and transform discourses. In *The Lay of the Land*, Annette Kolodny describes an approach to metaphor that articulates a goal for ecofeminist writers, one that Humphreys appears to be exploring in her novel:

In relation to that which is biologically or even physiologically fixed, metaphor (and image-making, in general) may be our way of exploring, again and again, the potent and potential content of our archetypal

structures, putting ourselves in touch with their changing contents or even changing those contents at will. Perhaps, to put in another way, we need to “wake up” to our ability to dream the as-yet-unknown and unconventional. (160).

Humphreys frees language from what Davies calls its “sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable” habits, to imagine relationships in configurations other than opposition, and to show the development of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ beyond an androcentric system (13). Annie empowers herself by learning to negotiate and manipulate discourses whereas freedom, for Mary, lies outside traditional discourse in silence and solitude.

The primary motif related to androcentric definitions of knowledge, vision, undergoes a transformation in both novels. Urquhart, through Mary and the ghost, explores embodied knowledge and foregrounds all the senses, but fails to integrate this alternative into the protagonist’s life—the two epistemic models represented in her novel never overlap. In *Afterimage*, Humphreys explores the idea of perception as “midway between mind and body” in a manner that suggests knowledge “requires the functioning of both,” and in a way that demonstrates how each is “mutually implicated with the other” (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 94). Humphreys’s praxis resembles Haraway’s theoretical approach: both of them aim for a middle ground. Rather than rejecting “the much maligned sensory system” of vision, as many feminists attempt to do, Humphreys reconceptualizes vision in a manner that recognizes “the particularities and embodiment” of the perceiving subject that Haraway insists is necessary for an overthrow of a “false vision” promising transcendence (*Knowledges* 188-190). Further, Haraway insists we need “writing that metaphorically emphasizes vision again,” but a vision that is “partial, locatable,

critical” (187). Humphreys’s novel accomplishes this task by way of its ubiquitous light imagery, as well as the inclusion of photography as a primary thematic element within the plot.

“The answer,” for Humphreys, seems to reside “not in a complete distrust and overthrow of representational modes but [in] a transformation of those modes to reflect a hopeful alternative to the nihilism of postmodern discourse” (Hekman, 135-187). The nihilistic vision on the final page of Urquhart’s novel underscores her entrapment in a nostalgic perspective. Murphy describes this attitude as a desire for the “unity of nostalgia” that only works if one presupposes an ontological separation between entities like subject and object or, in this case, between culture and nature (*Literature, Nature, Other* 37). Eric Todd Smith captures perfectly the conundrum that is represented in and hampers *Away*:

While the notion of “connection” between subject and object usefully resists dualistic thinking, the problem is that this union [think Mary and the ghost/Mary and Brian] is presented in terms of nostalgia: the subject can only choose between current alienation and restored unity. A basic ontological disparity between subject and object, in other words, is taken to be factual and inevitable. In this respect, nostalgia for a lost unity with nature reflects the attitude best described as modernity—the sense that our world is utterly different from the world of the past, the sense that we have been alienated from the “state of nature”. (“Dropping the Subject” 31)

To her credit, Urquhart’s writing does expose the “repression of the feminine” and the “repression of the body and passion in Western thought,” and, according to Moira Gatens, any attempt to represent the “repressed side of the dualisms is not, necessarily, to be working for reversal of the traditional values associated with each but rather to unbalance or disarrange the discourses in which these dualism operate” (“Powers and Bodies and Difference” 135). In the case of

Away, notwithstanding Urquhart's attempt at writing the repressed side, the novel falls short of "creating new conditions for the articulation of difference" (Gatens 135). While Urquhart fails to solve the paradox by breaking through the dualisms, she does clearly illustrate the deeply problematic and harmful effects on relationships, man to woman, human to non-human, when they are constructed upon a dualistic habit of mind. Although the novel recognizes patriarchal institutions and discourses that are destructive to females and nature, it fails to escape them and actually participates when it juxtaposes binaries in order to elevate the feminine and nature, thereby reifying the categories. Most current ecofeminist writing indicates an agreement among practitioners that we need to aim for a "nonreductive resolution" that re-conceives humans as "more animal and embodied" and "nature as more mindlike" but almost never do they suggest we confine the embodiment to females nor do they advocate figuring nature's subjectivity in human terms, both of which Urquhart does in *Away* (Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground* 13).

Concerns related to power are also highlighted in both novels: Urquhart evokes geographical boundaries to explore conceptual boundaries and questions of control in much the same way that Humphreys employs representational forms to explore questions of identity and the link between representation and domination. Davies reminds us that "we are subjected through discourse and within relations of power and there is no clear boundary between what we are or are in process of becoming and those discourses through which we are subjected" and that "discourses/texts/thought are not static, anymore than subjects are" (69). Boundaries in *Afterimage* are portrayed as discursively constructed and therefore impossible to

maintain in the material world, effectively contributing to the “non-phallogentric patterning of reality” that orders the narrative (Jaggar and Bordo, *Gender, Body, Knowledge* 6). Humphreys’s main protagonist struggles to be the author of her story and, in the process, she reveals the flexibility and adaptability of the boundaries—race, class and gender—that function in discourse to limit and control her choices. Urquhart’s female characters exist in a world structured on the principles of binary opposition, and where only Mary briefly transgresses the margins between conscious and unconscious, mind and body, culture and nature, knowing and being, self and other—rigid boundaries persevere in *Away* while entities simply shift sides to accommodate the author’s strategy of reversal.

Both authors have appropriated and reformed, to some extent, discourses from conventional masculine traditions. Marlene Goldman writes:

they highlight the way in which female identity has been fixed by traditional discourses; on the other hand, these same images emphasize the fact that the texts are engaged in attempts to remap established representations of female identity through a detailed analysis of the ‘blind spots’ on the map. (*Paths of Desire* 210)

Humphreys appropriates the romance genre à la Bronte sisters to ‘remap’ a number of representations as well as to draw attention to the role literature plays; she demonstrates some of the ways we might (re)interpret, subvert and reshape discourses to reflect, more authentically, ongoing collective modifications to various theories as well as our individual and particular realities. She imparts the idea that “meanings can shift and that discourses, like maps, can be used in ways that are radically different from the ones they were originally intended to serve” (Goldman 210). Similarly, Urquhart explores the borders between the representational and the

material world and, although the narrative perpetuates ideas of absolute difference, of gender divisions and associations between the land, nature, femininity and fertility, in doing so it manages to expose the roots of binary thought and the complex thread that connects all the 'isms' related to oppressive discourses. Urquhart produces a narrative that invites the reader to contemplate human relations with nature and she illustrates the benefits of empathy as a force to reconcile psychic opposition and to counter psychic models founded on phallogentric paradigms.

Humphreys successfully avoids long-established narrative traditions that position 'man' at the centre of all things even while she highlights the traditional narrative tropes that portray female characters as allies of nature, and in dualistic opposition to man and culture. *Afterimage* eschews the safety of closure; the novel demonstrates that when marriage is no longer the goal, the female protagonist can make other choices and engage directly with the experiences of life. Humphreys circumvents the traditional ending for romance narratives—marriage or death for the heroine—as well as the tempting but often compromising utopian finale of some feminist fiction (although her novel does gesture towards it in the final scene). She refuses to put in place an alternative to the metanarratives she displaces and, instead, she leaves the reader with several important unanswered questions. Humphreys invites us to emulate her character Annie Phelan, to reconsider and challenge the authority of age-old stories and myths and to develop a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity, and to feel comfortable with the indeterminacy that offers open-ended possibility.

Despite the obvious problems recounted in this thesis, *Away* remains an ideal exemplar for demonstrating how ecofeminist theory can add new dimensions to literary criticism. Readings of the novel to date, especially those that rely on magic realism as a methodology for interpreting the fantastic elements within the text, fail to provide an adequate paradigm or context to deal with many of the novel's central issues. Patricia Smart writes, "Urquhart's female characters are dreamers and rule-breakers who cannot or will not be contained within the traditional boundaries of identity," but, as this thesis has shown, that is exactly what confines all the women: their inability to break through the dualisms that circumscribe the few socially sanctioned feminine roles available to them ("Weighing the Claims of Memory" 65). In her essay "Romancing the Landscape," Compton attempts to demonstrate the benefits of replacing a magic realist approach, one that "account[s] for its [*Away's*] tone of hyperbole," with a framework formulated by Northrup Frye that outlines the characteristics of romance genre, and defines it as a mode existing "in that zone between myth and mimesis" (211). In her attempt to prove Urquhart's female characters are consistent with the "hero" of Frye's theory, one who is "superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment," (211) Compton either fails to grasp or ignores the obvious; she transforms Esther from the lonely, isolated old woman facing death into "Esther, the poet-narrator" who, "like her Biblical namesake, turns 'sorrow to gladness . . . mourning into a good day' (228). Somehow, in this reading, the nihilism of Urquhart's ending vanishes along with the ecologically pessimistic tone as Compton overlooks the reality and instrumentalizes the natural world: in her final paragraph she reproduces the Romantic view that exploits nature in order to

serve the artist. For Compton, landscape “sponsors the imaginative life” and enables the storytellers’ “fabling” (228). She argues that the “landscape, from which, through the gods, poetry and prophecy come, survives the nineteenth-century collector and the twentieth-century cement company” (227). An apparent deficiency in ecocritical awareness contributes to Compton’s blindness to the ecological reality—Urquhart’s landscape has not ‘survived’ the intrusions of ‘man’ or “the cement company.” In an interview, Urquhart describes her fears and concerns:

And I feel very nostalgic about the Canadian landscape, because I see it disappearing before my eyes. . . . Or at least my Canadian landscape, as I understood it and knew it growing up, and as my ancestors understood it and knew it. And I think that landscape has managed to hold on, that 19th-century landscape—rural landscape—has managed to exist in the country *up until two or three years ago, when it really started to disappear*. And when I saw it disappearing I suddenly knew that I wanted to capture it somehow, stop it fragmenting. (Zettell, “Jane Urquhart: On Becoming a Novelist” 21, emphasis mine)

Unfortunately, for Urquhart and her beloved but quickly ‘disappearing’ Ontario countryside, it requires more than expert storytelling to counter the accrued damage and destruction, to heal the “impossible earth wound” that results as a consequence of humanity’s ignorance of or indifference to the material reality of the ecological crisis (*Away* 9). Both Urquhart’s solution—“captur[ing]” it to “stop it fragmenting”—and Compton’s conclusion typify a particular postmodern perspective or direction, mentioned earlier in this study, that relegates woman and nature to discursive categories, to “ink upon paper” in a move that, in effect, erases the ground underfoot (Relke, *Greenwor(l)ds* 22).

In ecocritical writing and ecofeminist theory, the ground not only reappears, but also becomes the central feature of the methodological approach. Cheryll

Glotfelty describes literary theory as examining “the relations between writers, texts, and the world,” and then compares it to ecocriticism, a theory that she claims “expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosphere”(xix). She goes on to describe ecocriticism as an analytical position that “has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (*Ecocriticism Reader* xix). Perhaps, like many others, Urquhart, Compton and Smart fail to realize that

“Everything is connected to everything else,” [so we] must conclude that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, *and ideas*, interact. (Barry Commoner qt. in Glotfelty, xix)

The ontological oppositions governing *Away* render ineffective the few images of overlap and moments of connection, and suggest Urquhart’s inability to transcend the culture(novel)/nature(Ontario landscape) divide. The novel fails to gain energy-creative or transformational-from the ubiquitous binaries, and manages only infrequently to tease out the contradictions; in most cases Urquhart reveals but does not resolve. This fact makes *Away* a most fitting work to illustrate the difficulties faced by novelists for, despite Urquhart’s intense love and respect for the land, and her obvious recognition of dualistic ideologies and their consequences, represented most clearly in the novel by the final images of a landscape out of balance, her attempts to rescue it from ‘fragmentation’ and ‘loss’ wind up re-inscribing the very binaries she appears at times to be critiquing.

The notion of culture and nature as two diametrically opposed poles appears in Humphreys’s novel, but only on the periphery of the central narrative and clearly as the consequence of our-the human animal’s- projections, interpretations,

constructions and inscriptions; in the immediate narrative the larger framework of dualisms recedes in favour of multiplicity and ambiguity, serving to challenge the validity of gendering nature feminine, or valorizing it in any way related to gender. Humphreys, through her characters and her setting, shows us how creation emerges from the reconciliation of extremes.

This thesis has demonstrated how ecofeminisms, when incorporated into literary criticism, provide a fruitful framework for analysing, critiquing, and explaining the social import of all writers' inscriptions of nature. Urquhart's approach represents earlier versions of this evolving theory as she valorizes nature over culture, and "preaches respect for the land" and a "modern wilderness ethos of taking only memories from the wilderness Eden and leaving only footprints" (*Reading the Earth* 104). Humphreys's novel reflects many of the changes occurring as writers and critics within various branches of feminism attempt to come to terms with postmodern notions of subjectivity. And just as she constructs her narrative in a manner that would allow any one of the characters to tell the story, Humphreys neither foregrounds nor neglects nature. (Annie is assumed to be the main protagonist only because she appears first in the narrative—had the novel opened from the perspective of either Dashell, very little of the ensuing story would require modification.) For this very reason, the fact that nature appears no more or no less important than any other element within the larger narrative frame, *Afterimage* serves as a valuable example of the reach and relevance of ecofeminism—it need not be seen as a model of literary theory suitable only to works produced by nature writers, or for prose and poetry that spotlights the natural world, but can be a

practical and valuable tool to analyse any text regardless of its historical, cultural or generic specificities. Karl Kroeber, in “Refiguring Reason,” clarifies the benefits of ecocriticism most eloquently and accurately:

A major purpose of literary criticism, we tend to forget, is to overcome the deadening effects of repeated critical analyses by turning those experiences into a means of reacquiring a freshness of response matching the unfading vitality of fine poetry. If we can find means for innovatively reconsidering how we have already engaged with a poem, we may successfully challenge the false innocence of our young students. For they are really ignorant, which means they respond according to simplified patterns of internalized prejudice, of whose structuring of their thinking and feeling they are unaware. Ecological criticism is peculiarly valuable for facilitating such reconsiderations. It is open-minded, its definitive readings never pretending to be definitive. It is essentially inclusive, even historically, because it is developmental—that is, it employs the process of its own evolution out of earlier understandings. These qualities enable ecological criticism to be proactive as well as reactive, emphasizing what might be called a fine poem’s [piece of prose’s] epigenetic character, its capacity to “grow” and change through the process of being critically examined. (*Ecological Literary Criticisms: Romantic Imaginings and the Biology of Mind* 95-96)

Donovan agrees with Kroeber, extending the key participants to include “ecofeminist critics, writers, scholars and teachers” as she insists they “encourage the development of forms of attention that enhance awareness of the living environment, that foster respect for its reality as a separate, different, but knowable entity” (92).

Hopefully, in the course of this thesis, some of the ‘deadenings effects’ of typical analytical approaches will have been countered in a manner that demonstrates the benefits of ecofeminist and ecocritical methodologies for dealing with the woman/nature analogy, the culture/nature opposition, and for (re)interpreting and (re)conceptualizing humankind’s relationships to the natural world. These alternative methodologies and concepts seek ultimately to overthrow

dominative ideologies and to view and construct the human/nonhuman relationship in images and metaphors of connection and interdependence, the benefits of which include a response to and confounding of some of the dilemmas associated with postmodernism. In the words of Ynestra King:

Rather than succumb to nihilism, pessimism, and an end to reason and history, we seek to enter into history, to habilitate a genuinely ethical thinking—where one uses mind and history to reason from the ‘is’ to the ‘ought’ and to reconcile humanity with nature, within and without. This is the starting point for ecofeminism”(*Healing the Wounds*, 130).

Endnotes

¹ See pp. 25-29 below.

² For a cogent discussion of the “problem of nature for feminism” see Ynestra King’s “Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and Nature/Culture Dualism.” For an extremely comprehensive description of the various branches of ecofeminism— their values, beliefs and history— see Merchant’s article titled “Ecofeminism” in *Free Spirits* edited by Kate Mehuron and Gary Percesepe.

³ In “What Are Ecofeminists Saying?” in her *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, Karen Warren provides a detailed account of these approaches and the debates involved (21-41).

⁴ Most often offered as an example of this type of ecofeminist philosophy is Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology*, a text that supports the dichotomies by arguing for the assumed moral superiority of women and nature.

⁵ See Diana Relke’s “Introduction: A Literary History of Nature” in her *Greenwor(l)ds* for a fuller account.

⁶ Merchant discusses Bacon’s impact on discourses of science, religion, medicine, economic development, philosophy, emerging concepts related to “progress and a patriarchal structure of family and state,” witchcraft trials, and even judicial proceedings related to sartorial transgressions (164-190).

⁷ For an interesting account of how Enlightenment assumptions of a mind separate from the body was “essentially liberating for women” see Ruth Perry, “Radical Doubt and the Liberation of Women” in *Feminist Interpretations of René Descartes*, edited by Susan Bordo.

⁸ Despite the change, wilderness as a ‘manly’ landscape was still conceived of in terms of patriarchal images of sexual conquest and control, with an active and virile male explorer ‘penetrating’ the dangerous and provocative dark realms of ‘virgin’ lands. For an extensive discussion see Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor As Experience and History in American Life and Letters*.

⁹ See Ynestra King, “The Eco-feminist Imperative,” in *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*, edited by Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland 1983; Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Metaphysics of Radical Feminism*, 1978; Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* 1980; Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, 1978.

¹⁰ For an up-to-date comprehensive discussion of the history of ecofeminist literary criticism see Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective On What It Is and Why It Matters*, 2000.

¹¹ See Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, for a discussion of how each model of feminism is, or is not, compatible with an ecofeminist agenda (27-34). Also see Ynestra King, “Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and Nature/Culture Dualism,” for a detailed description of the various forms of feminism and the reasons they are inadequate on their own to respond to the nature/culture dualism (115-139). See Merchant “Ecofeminism,” in *Free Spirits*, edited by Mehuron and Percesepe, for extended discussion of how each form of feminism –liberal, Marxist, cultural, and socialist—contributes to ecofeminist theory in its own unique way (311-328).

¹² Plumwood adds, “completeness is impossible, since any distinction can in principle be treated as a dualism” (*Feminism* 43).

¹³ This is an interesting example of the evolution of ecofeminist thought. Griffin is most often associated with her book *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, an experimental text that validates and celebrates an ontological connection between women and the natural world.

¹⁴ See endnote 18 for a definition of this term.

¹⁵ Notably, during the sixties and in response to Northrup Frye’s comment that writers of Canadian poetry demonstrated “a tone of deep terror in regard to nature” (830).

¹⁶ Ynestra King, “Healing the Wounds” defines radical feminism as a feminist movement that believes “that the subordination of women in society is the root form of human domination” (121). However, she carefully notes that within radical feminism there are two positions related to the emancipatory potential of the woman/nature connection. The position of radical/cultural feminism implies a “separate feminist culture and philosophy from the vantage point of identification with nature and a celebration of the woman/nature connection”; the other school of radical feminism she

labels radical/rationalist feminism. The latter movement repudiates the woman/nature connection, viewing it as an “imprisoning female ghetto”; instead, they seek and celebrate “full participation in the male world” (122-123). Cultural feminism emphasizes the difference between men and women and takes woman’s side, which they see as nature’s side as well, against men and culture (123). King describes it as a “deeply woman-identified movement” (123).

¹⁷ According to Hekman, Derrida reveals that “binary oppositions of western thought are not, in fact, opposites at all” but are “two confused elements that inhabit each other” (171).

¹⁸ The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real refer to the discursive, the perceptive, and the real orders, “introduced into psychoanalytical terminology by Lacan in 1953” (92). See Translator’s notes, in Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Anthony Wilden. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1968).

¹⁹ Female libidinal economy, “a polymorphous ecstasy and celebration of the female body, an unleashing of an energy for transformation” (Murphy 160); “something that woman possesses as a consequence of her role as Other and, more importantly, it is something that exists outside the phallic signifier” (Hekman 85).

²⁰ Monks commonly wear brown as a symbol of their renunciation of the material world.

²¹ Jessica Benjamin’s theory, the concept of intersubjectivity, refers to an alternative mode of relating to the other, both within and without the self. Her psychoanalytical alternative to the Freudian intrapsychic mode will be elaborated further at a later stage of this thesis.

²² See Donovan, “Reading the Orange” for an account of the benefits of Buber’s aesthetics. In his work titled *Text as Thou*, Buber reveals the most effective ways for revealing the “I-thou” relationship and Donovan effectively appropriates the concept and demonstrates its usefulness to ecocritical methodology.

²³ Manes never suggests the ‘language’ referred to in his essay is human language, but is a “new language” that demands we “put at risk the privileged discourse of reason” (24).

²⁴ See page 26 above for brief definition of these features.

²⁵ The term ‘centric structure’ refers to any ideological discourse that privileges certain characteristics and defines the centre—the superior entity—over and against the inferiorized ‘other.’ Examples include Eurocentrism, androcentrism, anthropocentrism, racism, sexism, colonialism, and specieism and all rely on hierarchal binary oppositions.

²⁶ In her essay titled “Skin Dreaming,” Stacy Alaimo describes the Enlightenment presumption that the distance between subject and object provides “transparent knowledge,” that because of the emptiness surrounding the object there remains nothing to “impede the viewer’s penetrating gaze” (130).

²⁷ “Hyperseparation” is synonymous with and/or the effect of radical exclusion. Plumwood elaborates: “The colonized Other is set apart as having a totally different and inferior nature lacking in the defining feature of the colonizer . . . which justifies the Other’s devaluation and conquest” (“Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism” 337-341).

²⁸ While I was familiar with Benjamin’s theory, for the idea of employing it in the context of the human to non-human relationship I must credit a reading of Diana M.A. Relke’s work, particularly her essay entitled “Tracing the Terrestrial in the Early Work of P.K. Page: A Feminist Psychoanalytical Ecoreading.” (235-256).

²⁹ For extensive discussions of “the missing father” see Benjamin’s “A Desire of One’s Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective Space” in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*. Theresa de Lauretis, ed. Bloomington ID: Indiana University Press, 1986:78-101. Also, see Benjamin’s *The Bond’s of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988: 107-114.

³⁰ For a discussion of magic realism that asserts this position see Jeanne Delbaere, “Magic Realism: The Energy of the Margins.”

³¹ See Cynthia Sugars, “Haunted by (a Lack of) Postcolonial Ghosts” who points out that Freud, in “Mourning and Melancholy,” suggests that ghosts represent the return of repressed content and that the lost (or exiled, or repressed) object deposits a “shadow” or *trace* on the self. (p. 9 emphasis added).

³² The traditional sonnet remains a striking example of an art form adopting and adhering to humanist ideologies. The Petrarchan love lyric imagines the male subject’s pursuit of an unavailable female

object thus making it a perfect representation of the traditional intrapsychic mode. Metaphors of nature describe the *object* of the artist's affection that must, by the demands of the form, remain beyond his physical grasp; the beloved, in strict adherence to gender expectations, remains an idealized image of physical perfection and moral virtue. Dualisms abound and revolve around the subject/object categories bound up with the notions of transcendent man and immanent woman, while reason always transcends emotion in strict adherence to a structure that functions according to logic, rhetoric, and internalized patterns of thought.

³³ For discussions concerning the difficulty of expressing female desire in fiction see Nadya Aisenberg, *Ordinary Heroines: Transforming the Male Myth*. New York: Continuum, 1994; Susan Watkins, *20th Century Women Novelists: Feminist Theory into Practice*. New York: Palgrave, 2001; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire in Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

³⁴ A term first employed in film criticism (but applicable and relevant to any mode of representation) and coined by Laura Mulvey, it refers to the way cinema is structured around and for a male spectator. The gaze "carries with it the power of action and of possession that is lacking in the female gaze" and it constructs and represents 'woman' according to a "patriarchal unconscious" (120-121). E. Ann Kaplan writes, "the dominant cinematic apparatus is constructed by men for a male spectator" (122). See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, 16.3 (Autumn 1975), 16-18. Also, see E. Ann Kaplan, Ed. "Is the Gaze Male?" *Feminism and Film*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

³⁵ Specular metaphor depends on a "visual resemblance." For example, sonnet conventions that expressed male desire for the female object relied on visual comparison: "eyes and stars" or "cheeks and roses" (Homans 572).

³⁶ Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity owes much to the work of D.W. Winnicott and his principal text, *Playing and Reality*. London: Penguin, 1974.

³⁷ A term meant to relax the boundaries between human and non-human nature. On February 17th, 2005, Dr. Haraway's lecture at Montreal's McGill University was entitled "We Have Never Been Human: Encounters in Dogland." She focused on the relationship between humans and animals, explaining that her expression 'companion species' is part of an ongoing strategy to reconceptualize human and non-human interaction in a manner that recognizes the findings, both hers and those of a colleague working with baboons, that strongly suggest we need to rethink the relationships involved; she suggests we explore the multidimensional possibilities inherent in these conceptual terms that place all living things on a continuum of difference and grant non-human nature subjectivity.

³⁸ Intertextual allusions in *Away* include Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a narrative about love between gods and mortals where the taboo precipitates the "supernatural undoing of the sexual body into a plant or animal" and where access to sexual knowledge leads to the violent expulsion from the world of (the human) being. (Sarah Kay, "Sex and the Sacred").

³⁹ See Cheney's essay "Eco-feminism and Deep Ecology" for an example of a theory that, according to Cheney, fails to adequately address the ecological crisis because it doesn't balance "separation and connectedness." When followed to its logical conclusion, deep ecology "erases" the other, the natural world, in a form of "sustained merger".

⁴⁰ My use of the term "authentic feminine identity" in no way means to imply essentialism or biological determinism, but refers to those values, beliefs and behaviours that are unique to each individual and are repressed when they fail to comply with the rigidly proscribed gender roles and expectations.

⁴¹ The term *sujet-en-procès* was coined by Julia Kristeva to refer to the subjects ongoing negotiations with the other within, or the return of the repressed. Related to the maternal body, the subject-in-process has been employed by many feminists as an alternative to the autonomous unified (masculine) subject. See Kristeva, Julia, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁴² See earlier discussion of *Away*, pp. 76-77 for an elaboration of this concept.

⁴³ Quoted in Blunt and Rose, 1994, who add that this type of self-confidence and certitude belongs to "the master subject": white, middle-class, masculine, and heterosexual (4).

⁴⁴ Gatens writes, "There is probably no simple explanation for the recent proliferation of writings concerning the body" but suggests it may stem from Foucault's work as well as the "impact of feminist theory" (128-129). Feminists' responses have included attempts to undermine mind-centered epistemologies and to reconceptualize the role and centrality of the body in the "reproduction and transformation of culture" (Jaggar and Bordo 1989 4).

⁴⁵ For a comprehensive discussion of the relationship between gender and epistemology, see Goldberger et al. eds., (1996), *Knowledge, Difference, and Power: Essays Inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

⁴⁶ Undermining the authority of phallogcentrically defined ways of looking at the female body has important correlatives and implications in relation to the observations and representations of landscape for, as Gillian Rose informs us, "Woman becomes Nature, and Nature Woman, and both can thus be burdened with men's meaning and invite interpretation by masculinist discourse" (94).

⁴⁷ See Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (The) Body: Écriture féminine." The term is used to describe the "inscription of woman's difference in language . . . or writing (the) body" (52).

⁴⁸ See "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" a seminal work that explores social and cultural factors that contribute to the "universality of female subordination" (67). In *Woman, Culture, and Society*. Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist & Louise Lamphere, eds. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974, 67-87.

⁴⁹ A strategy frequently employed by writers to suggest nature's agency but by granting non-human nature subjectivity and a voice there evolves the need for a translator, for someone who understands what nature is trying to say. Smith (1998) writes that "in order to figure the "other" as a speaking subject, [we] must posit a "channeler" of sorts who will deliver the subjecthood of the other into language" (33) and the problem remains: "the question of 'what the land means' carries only as much weight as the person arguing for it" (34).

⁵⁰ Pequeto writes that the closer the domains the higher the correspondence of properties, whereas "the greater the cognitive distance, the fewer the numbers of properties that can be mapped, but the greater the novelty (through novel correspondences) and the potential for new insights" (129).

⁵¹ See footnote #49 and pp. 45, or, for extensive discussion of the problems that ensue when nature is brought into the category of the subject see Eric Todd Smith, "Dropping the Subject: Reflections on the Motives for an Ecological Criticism", *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*, (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1998)29-39.

⁵² For an example and discussion of this style of writing, see "Dorothy Wordsworth, Ecology, and the Picturesque." Robert Mellin compares Dorothy's non-anthropocentric writings against those of her brother William's (often an appropriation of her own recorded observations) that lacked "a material specificity" due to his "more abstract representations" (68).

⁵³ See Chapter 2, footnote #37 above.

⁵⁴ For an extremely cogent discussion of the dangers of deep ecology's stance, one that advocates an holistic view, ultimately rendering this theory incompatible with eco-feminism, see Jim Cheney, "Eco-Feminism and Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics* 9.2 (1987): 115-45.

⁵⁵ Haraway's term for the "ideological dimensions of 'facticity' and 'the organic' meant to "highlight the object of knowledge as an active, meaning-generating axis of the apparatus of bodily production, without ever implying immediate presence of such objects or, what is the same thing, their final or unique determination of what can count as objective knowledge at a particular historical juncture" (1991 200).

⁵⁶ According to Moira Gatens, (1992) any attempt to 'write' the "repressed side of these dualisms" – in this case the body– "is not, necessarily, to be working for the reversal of the traditional values associated with each but rather to unbalance or disarrange the discourses in which these dualisms operate" for doing so "creates new conditions for the articulation of difference" (135).

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