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**The Deconstruction of the Mountain Men's  
Wilderness: Environmental Ethics in Abe Andrew's  
Novel *The Word for Woman is Wilderness* (2018)**

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## **Abstract**

Mountain Men have historically challenged civilisation's role in relation to our physical and intellectual freedom. They have promoted metaphorical journeys to the woods to regain our lost connection with Nature and our inner selves through a western rite of passage. *The Word for Woman is Wilderness*, by Abi Andrews, is an adventure novel just published (January 2018) whose main character, Erin, promotes an even more rebellious figure than the Mountain Men in her fight to deconstruct the established rules: Mountain Woman.

However, Erin's quest for freedom is a journey that clashes with her ideals because the metaphors used by Mountain Men are obsolete and dangerous for the Environment and themselves. Against all prejudiced odds, she proves that she is not only able to survive this journey but also that she is even more suited to it than any Mountain Men. Feminism and ecology embody an equal relation between all living organisms that becomes, in Andrew's view, a symbiotic association of the whole biotic community.

In this dissertation, I will follow Erin's journey to show how Abi Andrews deconstructs Mountain Men's heroic roles and nature's metaphors through ecology and feminism. She contrasts Erin's discoveries about Wilderness with the explanations given by the previous Mountain Men figures she mentions.

**Keywords:** *Word for Woman is Wilderness*, Abi Andrews, ecocriticism, Mountain Men, Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, feminism, Aldo Leopold



## 0. Introduction

In a world dominated by capitalism and consumerism, there is one person that challenges and subverts its rules: the Mountain Man. Since Thoreau and Jack London's times, plenty of idealists have struggled to survive in the wild in order to synchronize their inner selves and the landscape, which has been domesticated and alienated because of civilization's growth. All of these Mountain Men started a journey that could be more or less autobiographical and evolved into modern, western, and manly rites of passage. They were all claiming their autonomy through the union of wilderness and Literature. However, none of them noticed that they were all blinded by a form of social organisation that characterized our contemporary society due to their participation in it and its longevity: patriarchy.

*The Word for Woman is Wilderness*, by Abi Andrews, is the story of a girl who, inspired by Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* (1997), steps on a trip to follow her Jack London and Henry David Thoreau's dreams and live in the Alaskan woods. Krakauer is a mountaineer and American writer that follows the story of Chris McCandless, a hiker who travels to Alaska to live simply of the land. He was highly influenced by his favourite writers, who happened to be the Mountain Men's cannon. Erin embarks on a modern rite of passage to claim her autonomy through the endurance and hardship of the North Pole's Wilderness, mostly fuelled by men's Literature. It all starts when Erin realizes that if Chris McCandless had been a girl, his would have been a completely different story:

A girl wanting to shun modern society and go AWOL into the wilderness to live by killing and eating small animals and scavenged plants would just be considered unsettling", That is mainly because, "Wilderness in women does not mean autonomy and freedom; their wildness is instead an irrational fever. [...] We are the weaker sex and cannot prosper individually outside of the social sphere or without the protection of a manly man." (Andrews, 2018: 4)

All the male writers Erin used to admire are examples of a time in which Mountain Men believed that women were not fitted to be mountaineers alone. Of course, this is not true.

There have been great Mountain Women such as Mary Fields (1832-1914), Nelly Bly (1864-1922), Isabelle Eberhard (1877-1904), Freya Stark (1893-1993), Dervla Murphy (1931-) or Miriam Lancewood (1983-), which proved themselves fitted for the wilds' survival. Yet, we still think that surviving in the wild is not something we are all capable to do. Mountain writers have justified those women's successfulness with the argument that they were not regular women. They have abused nature and feminine metaphors to understand them as a propriety that can be owned and domesticated by men.

Abi Andrews writes a book to highlight that women need a rite of passage that is not limited to men and their patriarchal view of nature and women. Having read the most inspirational mountain texts, she realised that they were written and addressed to men. She proves not only that women are capable to experience this spiritual trip on the wilderness but also that woman is the word for wilderness because nature is feminine. First, I will dismantle mountain writers' patriarchal approach to wilderness contrasting Erin's journey with the authors she mentions. Secondly, Woman and Wilderness have been culturally understood by patriarchy as something that opposes Men and Culture, something that has to be transformed in order to adapt itself to the dominant's needs. Therefore, I will break down these binaries through Abi Andrews' words and ecocriticism. Finally, while human life is born from a woman's body, all living organisms are born from Nature. Consequently, I will explain the relation between Woman and Nature that Andrews points out in the title of the book.

## **1. Man versus Nature: The Deconstruction of the Epic Fight**

### **1.1. Mountain Man's Patriarchal Approach to Wilderness**

In their essays on ecofeminism, Mies and Shiva explain that since the Enlightenment, “modernity is a promise of total control, progress that civilizes and tames the wild forces of nature for our benefit and survival. Nature is wild, threatening, chaotic, risky, uncertain, uncontrollable” (Mies & Shiva, 1993: 140). Patriarchal men tame wild chaotic nature to impose on it their old hierarchical paradigm. For Mountain Men this quest for adventure “is often combined with the desire to experience themselves again as Real Men. In patriarchal civilization this means to experience themselves as the great hero who challenges” (141) the other. As Jewett observes, “This attitude towards domination is at the heart of the problem and serves to illustrate that our actions are a direct result of our erroneous belief that we are supreme” (Jewett, 2012: 37).

To situate the human species at the top of the biotic hierarchy is to establish one of the major literary conflicts: man versus nature. It implies that nature is an enemy that is worth to give our life for it. However, it just means “that nature (when personified) simply refuses to comply with man's desire to conquer it, which is rooted in the objective metaphor and denies nature's rights. [...] We fight against nature that does not submit to our will (Jewett, 2012: 44). This is the classic patriarchal role: men feel the need to dominate everything that they have previously categorized as the other. Erin, contrarily, knows that nature is not an antagonist. She is not fighting because she does not want to conquer. She wants her “documentary to be the opposite of colonial exploitation. I want it to explore, quietly, without imprinting. To be porous to all the things without contaminating. I want it to be conscious of its tracks in the snow” (Andrews, 2018: 43). She has a very critical perspective about all the presumably adventure-seekers that went



into the wild to gain control over it. Aldo Leopold, the ecologist that promoted the concept of land ethics, pointed the difference between an adventure seeker who is in communion with nature and one that is not. He assured that “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (Leopold, 1949: 224). As a result, even the most acclaimed Mountain Men are put under a doubt spell of integrity. As Leopold explains:

When Daniel Boone first entered into the forests and prairies of 'the dark and bloody ground,' he reduced to his possession the pure essence of 'outdoor America.' He didn't call it that, but what he found is the thing we now seek [...]. Recreation, however, is not the outdoors, but our reaction to it. Daniel Boone's reaction depended not only on the quality of what he saw, but on the quality of the mental eye with which he saw it. Ecological science has wrought a change in the mental eye. [...] Boone saw only the surface of things. (Leopold, 1949: 173-174)

This idea of the modern hero that goes into the wild to assert his manliness started to become popular in the transition from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, explorers and colonizers, such as Boone, Captain James Cook, Lewis and Clark, started to retell their stories to be seen as public epic heroes that survived the Wilderness and its perilous inhabitants. On the other hand, the Romantics sang their love for the past and its nostalgic wild rural Hinterlands in opposition to the growing industrialization. The Romantics did not realize that their Hinterland was a direct product of colonializations' imaginary.

The desire for Nature comes from our alienation from it. Our identity is rooted in our physical setting. Therefore, we started to be conscious about our environment in the moment that we were detached from it. Now that we are born in artificial landscapes full of neighbours we will never meet, this feeling of alienation overwhelms us. We are living in a civilisation where city life obeys rules, monotony, artificiality and responsibility. Therefore, many writers such as David Thoreau, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jack London,

or even Ted Kaczynski set forth on a quest for Wilderness due to its metaphorical opposition to their oppressive civilization. That is why Erin finally discovers that all of them “were searching for an absolute reality. They went looking in Nature, as in outside of human (human man) but this is a false dichotomy. They did not see that nature was what they threw at it” (Andrews, 2018: 157). They idealized natural places in order to create a refugee metaphor that cured their loneliness arisen from modernity’s apathy.

Plenty of modern Mountain Men, such as Christopher McCandless, are still inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henry David Thoreau. Erin catalogues them of Mountain Men due to their patriarchal and egotistical approach to nature. The former’s notable passage on nature from *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1778) defines nature as a refugee “where the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future” (Rousseau, 1979: 88). It encourages the vision of nature as a healing place. On the other hand, Thoreau’s most famous quotation from *Walden* (1854) implies that he went to the woods to “live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (Thoreau, 1985: 68). It takes for granted that wilderness is a place where human can heal themselves instead of a living entity that deserves to be treated equally. They both exemplify these early usages of nature as a refugee metaphor that heads mountaineers toward the view of “nature as the only means of spiritual renewal” (Jewett, 2012: 14). It misleads the naïve readers to think that all their existential problems will be solved in an epic wild trip to the virgin woods. Erin burns them all in the cabin to be safe from this dangerous interpretation.

“Industrial civilization,” Mies & Shiva write, “promised to create wealth and a life beyond mere subsistence for lots of people but it failed in satisfying the deeper, human, non-material needs”. (Mies & Shiva, 1993: 142) By going into the wild, we expect to recover our lost relatedness with the biotic community as a whole. Although it is partially truth, this idea usually tends to mislead us from what is real and what is literary. Fictional Erin and real-life Chris chose Alaska because in their mind, they thought they would be healed from civilization sickness in that remote and wild land. As Krakauer explains,

Alaska has long been a magnet for dreamers and misfits, people whom think the unsullied enormity of the Last Frontier will patch all the holes in their lives...People from Outside, ...they'll pick up a copy of Alaska magazine, thumb through it, get to thinkin', 'Hey, I'm goin' to get on up there, live off the land, go claim me a piece of the good life'" (Krakauer, 1997: 4).

We need, then, to rethink and move past these metaphors used in adventure literature to define nature because all those Mountain Men “guided by literary maps (not just magazine articles) as opposed to literal ones” (Jewett, 2012: 19) are destined to put themselves, their followers, and the places they love in real danger. The environment has been depicted through human's concerns and preoccupations and this nostalgic idealization of nature has become obsolete. Globalization has done away with those endless untrodden woods. To get this level of isolation in our contemporary age, we must seek further. The last wilderness is still untouched not because conservationist movement has kept it safe but because they are hazardous places; hence, every metaphor is out-of-date.

## **1.2. Nature is not a Trophy**

The most paradoxical direct consequence of the popularisation of Chris McCandless' story is that many people, such as Erin, felt the “call of the wild” and

ventured themselves into the same epic odyssey as Chris. His major failure was to identify himself with the patriarchal superiority and arrogance of Mountain Men. He wanted to be the explorer, the first conqueror of the land. Krakauer explains that having in mind that nowadays it is impossible to be the first one, “Chris came up with an elegant solution to this dilemma: He simply got rid of the map. In his own mind, if nowhere else, the *terra* would thereby remain *incognita*” (Krakauer, 1997: 174). He wanted to be the pioneer and the territory, which was already mapped, reminded him that in this postcolonial era every piece of land has been traversed, divided and reduced to somebody’s property. Erin has learnt from Chris that this idealisation of wild nature “breeds competition and risk-taking among the seekers” (Jewett, 2012: 18). In Erin’s words:

“I do not intend to be stupid with my life either but I have read my Thoreau too, well, some anyway, and I get what McCandless was trying to find by going out there. It was a claiming of autonomy and a rite of passage that I want to go through too and I bet he died happy doing it. (Andrews, 2018: 157)

Chris went to the wild to remove himself from “the stifling world of his parents and peers, a world of abstraction and security and material excess, a world in which he felt grievously cut off from the raw throb of existence” (Krakauer, 1997: 22). He was not a “suicidal lunatic, but rather a boy searching for an authentic experience on the outside of a superbly complex, modern society” (Krakauer, 1997: 23).

A reward asserts courage and manliness while it subdues Wildernesses and reduces it to “physical objects that the outdoorsman may seek, find, capture, and carry away. In this category are wild crops such as game and fish, and the symbols or tokens of achievement such as heads, hides, photographs, and specimens. All these things rest upon the idea of trophy” (Leopold, 1949: 168). Erin disregards Mountain Men’s quest for a certificate that proves that its owner has done something with physical value because this is the attitude that made people die or need to be rescued in the Alaskan territories.

“Nature is not as plentiful in an age of globalization, individuals [...] are forced to seek remote wildernesses instead of city parks and back yards, which speaks to the extent of our spiritual depravity” (Jewett, 2012: 14). They are fuelled by a spiritual and epic value they have put on nature, independently of their real survival knowledge. That is to say, to become wild, adventurous, natural and irresponsible in a free land. All those avoidable risks are made by man to prove how macho they are because “[Mountain Men] All your masculinity, it is a literary embellishment.” (Andrews, 2018: 251) Therefore, Erin does not feel part of this trophy seeking movement.

Ted Kaczynski is an American terrorist known as The Unabomber who opposes industrialization and promotes a nature-centred form of anarchism. Erin mentions him plenty of times through the book and, in the end, she even writes him a letter. She emphasizes with his manifesto and wants to convince him that the solution of the modern environmental crisis must be feminist and ecological instead of just anarchic and violent. Kaczynski strongly defends in multiple occasions that in the woods we can pursue “real goals instead of the artificial goals of surrogate activities” (Unabomber, 1995: 75). However, he is wrong, just like Chris McCandless, Daniel Boone and Thoreau are, because they all see nature as the other, as an object. These goals are metaphors that colonize nature through the achievement of several trophies that make nature cease to be so. Our comprehension of the Wilderness is an entirely human invention, which can be exposed through the analysis of its metaphors. “The mountain as trophy causes individuals to pursue their desire regardless of preparedness, conditions, or risk”. Therefore, “this metaphor creates the opportunity for death and loss in addition to cementing the existential wedge between humans and nature” (Jewett, 2012: 31).

As Silva warns, “By focusing on what we “get” out of nature, we create the idea that nature is a resource to be mined, such as a lumber yard or an oil platform, which is unethical” (Silva, 2013: 67). In other words, “instead of a productive relation with nature, they just consume it as a commodity (Mies & Shiva, 1993: 134)”. This profit-oriented understanding of Nature turns it into a mass-usable product, a modern mecca for Mountain Men. Andrews does not reject at all the idea of being called by the wild because Erin has read all these texts and has gone to the woods because of them. However, her point is to promote an accurate perception of the human impact on Earth, our limitations and the awareness of our role in its development. Ethical restraints and critic thinking must be the main message to learn from contemporary adventure writing instead of a call to irresponsibility and immature models that result catastrophic both for nature and for ourselves.

Thanks to the civilization, which Mountain Men despise so, we have access to lots of endurance techniques and tips that allow us to survive the most dangerous places. To equip oneself and plan one’s supplies will not decrease the adrenaline of risk. Abe Andrews builds a female hero that prepares herself consciously to face the wild. Danger is still there but she can choose to face it wisely. Nature is a very effective place for internal debates because it offers complete alienation from civilization sickness, so it is possible to reach a new perspective. With the appropriate synchronization, we can feel how our ego diminishes and we are nothing but another life being among the world. Ecology and feminism has taught Erin that she is not superior from any life being. The story of her journey expects to change “our role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for our fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such” (Leopold, 1949: 204).

## 2. Nature versus Culture

### 2.1. Trip to Wilderness: a Modern Rite of Passage?

In the civilized society we have created, the most important values and the main reasons why we live in it are health, education and security. When we become mountaineers, we risk them in exchange for independence, autonomy and self-management. Once into the wild, we have the freedom to choose how we really want to spend our time because time is organised by the weather and oneself. Mountain Men understand nature as a symbol, a cul-de-sac where they put everything that opposes to civilization, technology and control. Plenty of misfits that ended up in a quest to find themselves in the wilderness usually fail due to their lack of knowledge about nature itself. The literary construction of the woods has become so detached from nature that it has evolved into a place in itself, a Hinterland to go on pilgrimage. In Onfray's words,

El Gran Norte no genera ex nihilo sacudidas existenciales de importancia. Abordar semejante continente con el equipaje masoquista, sufridor, biempensante, expiatorio y deportivo, conduce de lleno hacia el malentendido [...]: uno no se dirige hacia la escasez ártica provisto tan solo de obsesiones redentoras. [...] La paz no se busca allí, no se encuentra allí - a no ser que el individuo ya sea portador potencial -. Es cierto que la comarca favorece una práctica de mayéutica, pero solo revela en cada uno lo que ya existe. (Onfray, 2015: 75)

“The idea of connecting with nature as a means of reconnecting with the self has remained with many cultures, since there has been industrial forces threatening nature and simpler ways of living” (Jewett, 2012: 5). Globalisation is leading us to a resurgence of the Romantic Movement that searched for a type of nature that was untouched by the hands of humans. Romantic poets valued a world that is for us

[...] long vanished – in which people live in rhythm with nature. Presumably, we value such a world because we are not entirely happy with our new modernity, with speed, with noise. We sense that there is something wrong about our comfortable insulation against the rhythms of the seasons, something alienating about the perpetual mediation of nature through the instruments of culture. (Bate, 2000: 3)

Before the Industrial Revolution, everybody lived in communion with nature. Therefore, there could not be such a thing as alienation. Capital cities existed but countryside rural areas and wild nature surrounded them. Yet, this idea of a pristine Hinterland before the damage of humans' relation with nature is a literary invention. Denevan, who studied the landscape of the Americas before Colon's arrival, points that "the notion that wilderness areas have somehow avoided the long sweep of human history, and can be shielded in perpetuity from human influence, is a fantasy. All landscapes now designated as parks or wildernesses were once sites of human habitation and productive labor" (Denevan in Simon & Alagona, 2009: 26). Nature is not a timeless isolated bunch of forests but every landscape that surrounds our cities and every park within.

Now we live far much better than in the past due to all technological and cultural advances, but the price we have paid for it is estrangement and exploitation of nature. As we all know, "The more commodities are heaped on the supermarkets' shelves, the deeper the despair and the inarticulate desire for some basic element essential for a sense of fulfilment" (Mies & Shiva, 1993: 133). We have been raised in a profit-oriented system instead of a purpose-oriented one. Technologies can make our lives easier but in this postmodern era, they must be reformed ethically because industries are based on the exploitation of nature. Real-life Chris and fictional Erin need a real intrinsically motivating purpose, one that they can give their lives for. School, University, sport, work, does not feel challenging for them. Instead, they have chosen a trip to the untrodden wilderness. The famous quote from the film adaptation of *Fight Club* explains this postmodern feeling of alienation, apathy and lack of purpose. As Tyler Durden says, "We have no purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our Great War's a spiritual war..."



our Great Depression is our lives. We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars. But we won't." (Fincher, 1999: 39) All the economic incentives blind our intrinsic motivation making us feel lazy and apathetic when there is any reward for us. Kaczynski explains that the woods offer an alternative to "excessive density of population, isolation of man from nature, excessive rapidity of social change and the breakdown of natural small-scale communities such as the extended family, the village or the tribe" (Unabomber, 1995: 47). Erin might agree with him when he reveals that "we attribute the social and psychological problems of modern society to the fact that society requires people to live under conditions radically different from those under which the human race evolved" (46). She also might understand that, in McCandless' words,

"So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity and conservatism, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun." (Krakauer, 1997: 58)

However, we must not forget that it is only a metaphor and we will not ever find in nature anything that we did not already know: as Larsen notes, "places, from an ecocritical perspective, are environments to which human value has been assigned, and are, therefore, strongly associated, and defined, by their connection to human culture" (Larsen, 2007: 349). Accepting the metaphor of nature as a healing place can be "an idealization sometimes useful from a practical point of view, like the construction of an identity" (Andrews, 2018: 257) but we should not understand "to have endlessly changing horizon" literally, because we can be learning interminably in a tiny city room. Nowadays, as Silva illustrates, "in a time when globalization has minimized the amount of wilderness places, we learn alternative ways to find our identities within the urban

spaces that surround us by looking inward, rather than outward, for healing. (Silva, 2013: 69).

Women need their own real rite of passage. Having a baby and getting married is not about individual strife and development of the self but rather a development of a family in a social context. As Erin says, “My leaving would have been a casting out, an initiation ritual, had I been a boy. Women who leave always abandon. Imagine the pinnacle form of this, the mother who leaves her children to the husband. Unnatural!” (22). She wants to claim that woman do exist out of social context because their belonging to an emotional and social nature of being is just a social construction. Travelling forces us to analyse critically our surroundings and our relation with the rest of living organisms. Erin needs to feel, to thrive, to struggle, to live: “What happened to me? Nothing. I think that is the point. I need to experience something visceral to placate the hunger. And I am sick of the men that want to keep it from me. Maybe you could say patriarchy happened to me” (Andrews, 2018: 157). Therefore, she understood this journey as a means to defeat her inner protected and naïve girl to become a fully-grown woman. Chris and Erin’s freedom is restricted by manly figures, so they go into the wild to learn to be autonomous.

Nevertheless, the Wilderness is not a means of escape from civilization and our own personal problems: it is a living organism and extremes are just a path to balance. Even though it is righteous to rediscover the power of our self-determination in the woods, this does not justify an egotistical, colonizing and destructive attitude towards Earth promoted by macho loners. At the end of his life, Chris understood that he needed society as much as nature. On one hand he wished “to escape from the meaningless dullness of human eloquence, from all those sublime phrases, to take refuge in nature, apparently so inarticulate, or in the wordlessness of long, grinding labour, of sound sleep, of true music,

or of a human understanding rendered speechless by emotion” (Krakauer, 1997: 188). On the other hand, Chris knew that, after all, humans are intrinsically social beings because, during his last days, he wrote on his diary that “only a life similar to the life of those around us, merging with it without a ripple, is genuine life, and that an unshared happiness is not happiness. Happiness is only real when shared”(188). Thanks to the survival of extreme situations, Erin also discovers the balanced position, her middle way:

Wilderness as a static boundary keeps humans out of nature, as though we are still two sides of a dichotomy when we are not. But it is also useful to stop from saturation, the unbalance of the system from too many mountain men. Thoreau wanted full libertarian ‘freedom’, like Buck the dog, but men are more destructive than dogs, which would leave wildness to fend for itself against many Mountain Men with guns and pickaxes, which it can’t. The ‘self-willed man stakes his claim to freedom while taking no care over anybody else. (Andrews, 2018: 281)

## **2.2. Deconstruction of the Dichotomy**

Sherry Ortner, a feminist cultural anthropologist, writes in her first published essay that even if “culture at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct from but superior to nature, that sense of distinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform – to “socialize” and “culturalize” – nature” (Ortner, 1974: 73). Culture and Nature are complementary and so are genders and the rest of things that have been always presented dualistically. This is not about choosing between society and nature: polarizations are dividing reality into two sides that fail to see each other and understand the wholeness of reality. Even if many Krakauer’s and Thoreau’s readers fail to see it, the final part of the trip is a return back to society: “Moving away from society to gain a perspective or understanding of our societal problems provides only temporary relief, but no real solution.[...] We need to learn to work within an urban framework to achieve lasting happiness.” (Krakauer, 1997: 166) After all, even if Mountain Men want to run

away from globalisation and society, they will still exist and their attitude will not improve anything. As Erin notes:

“The Machine is perpetuated by us and we are inextricable from it. We need to change the collective conscious to change the direction of the Machine [...]. Mountain Men shun society, yet their solitude relies on the continuation of the system to contain the rest of humanity and leave room for their wilderness” (Andrews, 2018: 292)

Mountain writers have usually established a literary tradition from a patriarchal perspective of Nature. All Mountain Men have survived nature, as if it was an enemy that must be fought and civilized. Thus, we can establish the Mountain Men’s paradox. Thanks to man-made gadgets, they are able to submit nature and impose it all society patterns they were theoretically running from. This is an egotistical and patriarchal behaviour. Even Chris McCandless, who was so sick of society, intended to civilize nature for the sake of commodity and domination. He expected to “map the area, improvise a bathtub, collect skins and feathers to sew into clothing, construct a bridge across a nearby creek, repair mess kit, blaze a network of hunting trails” (Krakauer, 1997:166). He was repeating the same old civilizing patriarchal patterns to conquer the other. He hated civilization, his parents and human footprint but his anger tied him to all these entities. Anger encourages misfits to seek their inner selves into the wild woods and turn into Mountain Men. Yet, they will never achieve any kind of freedom if they are not able to free themselves from anger or to deconstruct their mind-sets, as Erin says:

There’s not enough bounty for everyone to claim a piece, so for Big Mountain to keep on working it had to be understood that Man had no obligation to the happiness of anyone but himself. That to have the right to pursue the happiness was to be free, even if free was only to be forever in pursuit. This is what the Mountain Man was born from. A healthy white man’s ideal. (Andrews, 2018: 57)

We must establish a symbiotic relation with landscape and all its living organisms: “Western thinkers need to recognize a common experience in all living things, an idea offered simply by ecology, and let go of the desire to assert oneself against an opposing

force or binary. In short, we need to move from “me”-centered thinking to “we”-centered” (Jewett, 2012: 69). Environmental ethics are the tendency to develop a symbiotic relation in which the two parts, humans and Nature, evolve harmonically and grow co-operating. The only rules followed by non-aware mountaineers are in self-interest, but never in the interest of the land nor the future generations. “Social conscience must be extended from people to land” (Leopold, 1949: 203) because it is “still property. The land relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations” (204).

As ecofeminists claim, “we must merge again culture and economics and keep investigating on new technologies that are more environmental-friendly. [...] Nature is thought to be an “inert and fragmented matter” (Mies & Shiva, 1993: 23)”. Therefore, it justifies the consumerism point of view that is based on the production of commodity articles, which are efficient only because natural resources are “free”. For the system, a forest is not a living organism such as humans or animals but commercial wood that can be used as cellulose for the pulp and paper industry (24). We must give back to Earth what it takes her to regenerate the resources upon the system is based. Our current system dichotomises everything into profitable and non-profitable. As a result, spirituality, feminism and ecology are considered non-valuable. When everything is measured by its efficiency and by the extent to which the system can make a profit of it, ecologic and feminist propaganda cannot help but being ignored. Therefore, “everything that hasn’t got any value by its own becomes exploited in order to be considered valuable” (27). Nevertheless, how can we decide what is valuable and what is not with these profit-oriented eyes?

“In order for wild land to be protected by legislation, it must be understood as a physical entity, and not simply a symbol or metaphor” (Jewett, 2012: 28). Nature has

value intrinsically. We are not more valuable to the biotic community than any other living organism. It is a very macho thinking to feel that humans have the godly power to decide what deserves to be exterminated and what is valuable depending on the benefits it is going to provide us. Besides, economics should not be the weapon to defend all land-use because it does not determine whose members have value. When ecologists want to defend them, they feel obliged to use economic reasoning to justify that they do have economic value but that is not the point. Wildflowers and songbirds are destined to perish even though they are valuable lifeforms and members of the biotic community only because they are not valuable in economically terms.

Nature must be approached with ecologist values rather than the economic ones. Land ethics are means to expand the “boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.[...] It cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources,' but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state” (Leopold, 1949: 204). Otherwise, we will be perpetuating the same superficial and anthropocentric relation that our Romantic predecessors started. When there is no such a thing as an eco-friendly mind-set, nature is not a place per se but the reverse of the civilisation. The Mountain Man must not be the dominant figure that situates himself at the top of the hierarchy because this is a patriarchal way to approach nature.

### **3. Woman and Nature: the Other**

#### **3.1. Liberation from the Patriarchal Approach**

In the history of Literature, woman have been usually seen through men's eyes. As a result, woman in Literature existed only in relation to male characters. Here, Erin wants to claim her function as a female hero to depart from the traditional feminine role and follow her dream to unfold despite her personal relationships. Her whole point is to assert her role as the woman who lives the adventures instead of the one that suffers its consequences. While men had portrayed feminine characters within the limits of their relation with males, Nature had been written as a feminine metaphor that either helps or attacks Mountain Men. Ortner, an ecofeminist anthropologist, explains that the idea of "Woman is being identified with [...] something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself. Now it seems that there is only one thing that would fit that description, and that is "nature" in the most generalized sense" (Ortner, 1974: 71), In Literature, there are two literary views of women, which result to be analogous to nature's metaphors. Nature and women, in Mountain writers' texts, are seen in relation to men, instead of as entities by themselves.

Nature's ability to restore man's spirit comes from the binary between the urban and the natural. All kinds of Literature, such as "Romantic, pastoral, science fiction or biblical, reinforce this binary by offering visions of nature as holy, pure, virginal, clean, and simple. [...] Nature has been also 'applied to the other-than-us, the wild, rough, crude, its meaning steeped in apathy, suspicion, even hatred'" (Jewett, 2012: 12). Not only they reinforce the symbol of women as "holy, pure, virginal, clean and simple" beings that must be kept safe of the worldly dangers; but also women as a devilish and hysterical hindrances that must be domesticated and civilised for the sake of men. However, if we

are all equal and gender is a performance, where does this idea of pure femininity come from?

Everything beyond heterosexuality, men, white, western... is defined in relation to the norm, which is written by individuals included on these previous characteristics. The other is defined in relation to its opposite and from their perspective, which limits what is included or not in the norm, and Mountain Women are not included yet. Erin realizes that “gender is another act of division, deciding who gets what admirable qualities. There are no Mountain Women because the Mountain Men will not call her Mountain Woman” (Andrews, 2018: 219). Literature, tradition and history have created these prefabricated personalities, which influence us to act out our gender performatively. Gender boundaries are limited by stereotypes that still configure and renew everyday by the hand of a culture that, in Ngozi Adichie’s words,

praise[s] girls for virginity but don’t praise[s] boys for virginity [...]. We teach girls shame. Close your legs. Cover Yourself. We make them feel as though by being born female, they are already guilty of something. And so girls grow up to be women who cannot say they have desire. Who silenced themselves. Who cannot say what they truly think. Who have turned pretence into an art form. (Adichie 2014: 33)

Hence, Erin connects her own relation with the wives of the astronauts because in the history of Literature, when women leave, men feel abandoned but when men do, women must understand that men have to fulfil their destiny: “If I had been an Apollo wife I would probably have thought fuck you. Fuck you, husband, for wanting to risk giving up on our marriage bed [...] for some idea of eternal glory” (Andrews, 2018: 155). She also points out that this hatred comes from jealousy: “Maybe I would have liked to have gone up there with you too but I was just not allowed and on some level I am jealous that you get the chance to abandon it all and be seen as a selfless hero” (155) while women are seen as uncaring mothers or lovers.



Still, it is nothing new. This is a long tradition among epic heroes since Odysseus, Theseus and Aeneas abandoned Penelope, Ariadne and Dido to follow their destiny. In epic stories, heroes are always men. Consequently, women are seen as complements, which can be either benefactors or hindrances but never equals. This gender values still affect our society. To prove it, Lars von Trier wrote and directed a film, that was released in two volumes named *Nymphomaniac: Vol. I* (2013) and *Nymphomaniac: Vol. II* (2013). In those films the main character is a woman, an unfaithful parental figure that abandons her family, works in organised crime and has a 15 years-old lover, among many others. The shocking result demonstrates that we are not equal because, in moral terms, we still judge differently women from men.

Therefore, Erin embarks on her female quest for authenticity. She wanted to demonstrate to herself and “everyone else that solitude is as much as hers as any Mountain Man’s and that she does not have to be relegated to loneliness and displacement just for being female” (Andrews, 2018:17). She attacks directly all what she has read about women by the self-called Mountain Men writers, such as Ted Kaczynski. He is paraphrased all over the book for his famous naturalist and misogynist sentences from his manifesto, such as “feminists are desperately anxious to prove that women are as strong and as capable as men. Clearly, they are nagged by a fear that women may NOT be as strong and as capable as men” (Unabomber, 1995: 14). Actually, the origin of Erin trip’s purpose is precisely to prove herself she can be as manly as any man. She reminds the reader that plenty of women have positioned themselves as men in some cases due to the lack of female realistic heroes, and they do not even realise what did it implied. She called it “the masculine counterpart who lives in my brain” (Andrews, 2018: 42). When she reads an adventure book or watches anything related to the wilderness’ survival, all the

protagonists are usually male. Krakauer talks about it in Jewett's paper and admits that "the culture of ascent [is] characterized by intense competition and undiluted machismo" (Into thin Air, 23). This machismo, on Everest, ultimately proves fatal and comes from the idea that nature is something to be attained by man, and it's a race to see who can "bag the top" first." (Jewett, 2012: 39) Women are excluded as supposedly we could not be able to experience this relation by being born women:

We can learn from the past but also need to adapt to the future. Women are, in our society, simultaneously social and maternal, crazy and wild. The relationship we need with the natural is one that is feminine. Admitting this and ending the unfair and ungrounded exclusion of women from your philosophy of wilderness is an important step in deconstruction. (Andrews, 2018: 291)

### **3.2. On Nature's Femininity: Women and Wilderness**

In Iceland, Erin is told the story of Gudrid and becomes aware of the connection between woman and wilderness. Gudrid is the first European-born female explorer who travels to America. Erin feels "how Gudrid personifies the bulking hills, and the geysers and the winds and the looming, enduring volcanoes, the shifting ground" and how the landscape is altogether "hostile and fertile" (Andrews, 2018: 21). In the Norse mythology, the first man and the first woman were created equally from two different tree trunks and given a soul, ecstasy and health equally. Ask, the man, represents the sky and his name means 'ash tree' while the woman, Embla, represents the earth and her name means 'water pot'. This story states clearly that, in contrast to Christian or Greek myths about the origin of humankind, Norse mythology offers Icelandic people a cultural background that supports gender equality and links the feminine to the natural.

We are all members of a community made of interdependent parts and each one is as unique as equal. Nature has been personified as a feminine being because it

constitutes the alterity of the patriarchal man and his civilisation. Women and nature are seen as a property to possess and objectify so they become men's objects of desire. It has been spread that "women are dominated by biology [. Therefore], the dominance of the menstrual cycle, the primitivism of birth, and the animalism of breast-feeding" (Jewett, 2012: 8) made Mountain Men assume that nature is female. This is so because while both are only reproductive culture makes, men are productive ones. In *The Second Sex* we can read that

On the biological level a species is maintained only by creating itself anew; but this creation results only in repeating the same Life in more individuals. But man assures the repetition of Life while transcending Life through Existence [i.e. goal-oriented, meaningful action]; by this transcendence he creates values that deprive pure repetition of all value. (Beauvoir, 1949: 99)

In other words, woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life. "The male, in contrast, lacking natural creative functions, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, "artificially," through the medium of technology and symbols. In so doing, he creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables – human beings" (Ortner, 1974: 75). In the end she acknowledges that her "project of staking a claim to solitude and autonomy [was] trying to emulate the Mountain Men while at the same time there are other woman being violently reminded of their lack of even more"(Andrews, 2012: 177). When a man goes out to the wild he talks about freedom but when a woman does it, she talks not only about freedom but also about her lack of it. Erin wants to claim Wilderness for woman. Like Sylvia Plath she wants to be able "To sleep in an open field! To travel west! To walk freely at night!" (158)

Historically, woman have been deprived of the individual rights that would have allowed them to participate in society's cultural heritage. That is why here there is a claim of recognition of equality. Many women have lived alone in the woods before but they

were burned for witches or silenced for safety. Therefore, while nature untouched by humans' hands is called Wilderness, women who lived in the woods were not Mountain Women but sinful witches. Erin is aware that "the categorizing of indigenous people is a colonial pursuit that controls their identity with words. Like in the Indian (Indian) act. It is a way to distinguish in white law who gets status or non-status" (Andrews, 2018: 219). Women and nature must stand together to claim it.

There is a growing tendency of women writers "whose subject is human relationships with the land" that employ "emancipatory strategies in their effort to reimagine nature and human relationships with the natural world" (Warren, 1997: 230). Rachel Carson was the first modern female environmentalist who managed to change the impact of pesticides and fertilizers on humans. That is why her figure appears repeatedly through the book as a source of inspiration. DDT was banned after her *Silent Spring* (1966) explained its damage and its publication stood for women involved in environmental activism. Feminist and ecologist theories are combined in *The Word for Woman is Wilderness*. There is a whole movement that merges these two theories: ecofeminism. It defends that both women and wilderness must be emancipated from the patriarchal discourse. Maria Ries and Vandana Shiva explain that it sees no division between basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, hygiene) and higher needs (freedom, knowledge access, integrity). While free market insists on free access to natural sources and lifeforms, it exploits non-western civilizations almost freely. When feminists become involved against ecological destruction, it becomes obvious that the gender and environmental damage comes from the same source: the western patriarchal consumerist society.

What I really dislike about Ecofeminism is that even though its authors deconstruct the idealisation of the Mountain Man role and their nature's romantic vision, they fail to understand that their longing to go back to the roots is equally absurd. They only add the feminist discourse to the Romantic and Mountain Men's old rhetoric against technology. Erin recalls that Kaczynski's (and ecofeminist's) problem is that he "does not acknowledge or maybe realize is that he is his own worst enemy: it is this rampant freedom to pursue which propagates the Machine."(Andrews, 2018: 251). Although environmental crisis is a "by-product of culture" (Jewett, 2012: 13), this same technology has reduced birthing and child mortality. The decision to position themselves in the other side is excessive because flu epidemics, birthing complications and choleric fevers implied the death of, at least, one third of children. How can a feminist defend that must be better a time where there were not proper medicines, technologies and infrastructures to survive to any epidemic, natural disaster and common illnesses? They have idealized the past because their modern needs have misled them to imagine the past as a lost paradise. Bate notes that "our longing for the imaginary health of the past must be a sign of the sickness of the present" (2000: 2). Still, Erin outstands them because she knows that "we can learn from the past but also need to adapt to the future" (Andrews, 2018: 291). She criticizes this Mountain Men's idealisation of the woods as a lost paradise because if we all tried to go back to the old times, "the amount of land that would be needed to support a hunter-gatherer lifestyle far outweighed the amount of land available per head currently" (Andrews. 2018: 285).

Her final discovery is that she has "been emulating and [her] whole journey has been compliance. I can Buck as well as any man, but now I understand it better, why would I want to be like them, the Mountain Men?" (77). Buck, the main character in Jack

London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903), is frequently used by Erin as a metaphor for the Mountain Men's primitive attitude. She rejects their beliefs because they are only a white men's ideal that is born from nostalgia, Literature, power and glory. Those Mountain Men have no awareness about the damage they have done to Earth and young reader's mind-sets due to their egotistical and careless behaviour. "Ecology tends to view the environment or biosphere holistically, each part relating to and inseparable from the next" (Jewett, 2012: 68). Aldo Leopold proposes "a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence" (Leopold, 1949: 201). Social conscience must be extended from people to land because it is still property, and so are women. "The land relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations" (203). That is to say that ethics are the tendency to develop a symbiotic relation in which the two parts, humans and nature, evolve harmonically and grow cooperating. The only rules that are followed by non-aware mountaineers are in self-interest, but never in the interest of the land and the future generations.

### **3. Conclusions and Further Research**

Nature and women have been a common representation of the other in human civilization. Bauman established that our contemporary era could be described as a liquid modernity in which all the established pillars of truth are "melting" (Bauman, 2000: 6); hence, we must deconstruct what we have learned about the organisation of the world in order to understand all the human beings and the environment unitedly. This dichotomist vision of the self and the other has often placed the self in a superior position that leads to patriarchy, the maximum expression of egotistical behaviour, destruction and

subordination of the other. Feminism and ecocriticism remind us “the function of a literary education was to develop critical awareness, to resist the blandishments of the mass media shouting their breathless praise of 'progress' and of everything shiny and new. The business of literature is to work upon consciousness” (Bate, 2000: 23). We have deconstructed everything that has been previously established as universal truths. Therefore, the young ones must rethink the world and reinvent a quest for their own identity, a new genderless rite of passage to emerge from the ashes of our dualistic and obsolete tradition. After plenty of attempts to approach the reality from a new perspective with ecocriticism, feminism, Marxism and so on, in the end, we only know that the direction must be ethical. We must investigate “what ways and to what degrees a work challenges previous constructions of nature and human relationships with nature” (Warren, 1997: 230).

I have chosen Abi Andrews' novel because she challenges these constructions just presented. She questions the authority of the patriarchal mountain writers over nature and women. Both have been depicted as feminine passive entities defined as evil or saviours while their autonomy is missing. Women have the right to go wild, to be strong and to immerse themselves in an epic genderless adventure into the wilderness. She demonstrates how a female character can succeed by rethinking the topics that have been usually explained by male-travel writers. Women cannot be afraid of going alone into the woods because they are as self-sufficient as any man is. Erin loves the wilderness and, unlike most of male mountaineers, she is concerned about our damage to it. Andrews mixes adventure literature with essays on feminist and conservationist issues, such as the moon cup in snowy lands, the view of men as explorers while women are mere social beings, the usage of pesticides and chemical fertilizers on British and American soil, or

the idealization of the past by anti-industrialization activists. Consequently, she highlights female writers involved in non-traditionally feminine fields as well as she spreads the word about environmental protection. Even if our environmental awareness keeps developing every year, the current Leave No Trace principle is not enough. It consists on outdoor ethics that minimalize mountaineers direct consequences of camping. However, despite its advantages upon immediate and local consequences of backpackers, it does not mention any measure against our indirect ecological footprint. “Climate change, air pollution, exotic species, plant pathogens, and misguided management schemes have transformed most American wilderness landscapes” (Simon & Alagona, 2009: 26) and there not any real and effective law to protect it from us.

This dissertation can be used as a template to keep searching and deconstructing the metaphors of nature and women used by Mountain Men and to promote this new approach to mountain texts through environment’s awareness instead of survival and dominance. Thanks to Rachel Carson, we know that it is possible to have influence over society and its environmental consciousness through research and Literature; hence, we must keep the line and spread the word about all the misunderstandings that are taken for valid due to the misuse of nature and women’s metaphors all over the literary tradition of wilderness’ texts.



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