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Wounded Planet, Wounded People: The Possibility of Ecological Trauma

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WOUNDED PLANET, WOUNDED PEOPLE:
THE POSSIBILITY OF ECOLOGICAL TRAUMA

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ABSTRACT

In recognizing that the human relationship to the nonhuman natural world has been characterized primarily by trauma, we might notice that humans abuse landscapes and deplete resources, harming the very ecosystems that support us, moving on when they no longer can or using technology in order to remain. This might be seen as a double trauma in which the human traumatizes ecosystems, which are then traumatic to the human. Our unwillingness as a culture to consider the nonhuman natural world as a valuable subject capable of experiencing trauma prevents us from understanding the repercussions of our actions. Spivak's theory offers a possible solution: we should enter into a relationship of ethical singularity with the earth in which we accept that we are indelibly part of the ecosystem ourselves and that we must attempt to understand as much of what the natural world expresses as possible, even though we can never fully comprehend what we see.

Representation through literature provides access to ecological trauma, especially its hidden elements, through the analogy of ecological to human trauma. The two novels I address, *the bone people* and *Mr. Pip*, both geographically set in the South Pacific, approach understanding of the nonhuman natural world in very different ways, but both use human trauma to mediate ecological trauma, making it accessible to readers.

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INTRODUCTION

THE POSSIBILITY OF ECOLOGICAL TRAUMA

An island has eroded in silent pain since my boyhood, and reefs have become islands. Yet the old people used to say People pass away, but not the land. It remains forever... I am tied irrevocably to this land. (Hulme 336)

When we imagine what is meant by the term “trauma,” we rarely think of a nonhuman victim. With the advent of the animal rights movement, however, it is increasingly acceptable to consider a nonhuman creature (usually domesticated) to have “feelings” – or at least to be able to suffer pain – and therefore to be deserving of rights. Environmentalists essentially argue – with varying degrees of success – the same for wild animals and ecosystems. Though they would probably not claim that ecosystems have “feelings,” they do recognize the fragility and biological importance of certain areas and that human activities can disturb the species there. Since ecosystems don’t have “feelings,” are they disqualified from gaining the benefits of human sympathy and protection?

One major problem environmental activists encounter in attempting to protect ecosystems is that the endeavor often means disrupting human interest in one form or another, and if money is in question, these interests will undoubtedly trump ecological rights. What usually does not come up in the controversy, however, is the fact that the disturbance of functioning ecosystems always impacts human interests in some way. Humans are locked into ecosystems just like any other animal, so when we degrade a landscape by dumping toxic waste, clear cutting, or filling in wetlands, for example, those modifications affect the quality of our drinking water, available shade and oxygen,

and the land's ability to minimize flooding by natural drainage. In this way we might think traumatized ecosystems traumatize humans in return.

But can such a disturbance of the ecology of an area actually be termed "trauma" if there are no feelings involved? Some representations of the natural world in literature suggest that it can. In her novel *the bone people*, Keri Hulme writes of three characters whose lives are laced with the effects of personal suffering, a fact that eventually drives them apart from each other. Their pain mirrors that of the land of New Zealand itself, and the healing of their individual wounds and their relationships with each other depends on both their recognition of New Zealand's pain (in its environmental degradation) and their role in revitalizing the land and its nonhuman inhabitants, which ends up bringing the characters into a new and more equitable relationship with nonhuman nature as well as each other.

It is no secret that humans have been disrupting and modifying ecosystems for our entire history. Pertinent to the example above, Erin Williams writes that the Maoris – a Native culture in New Zealand and traditionally an intensely fire-centric people – used fire to clear an enormous percentage of New Zealand's land within the first hundred years of their arrival on the islands about a thousand years ago (Williams 174). Burning as part of a system of agricultural management was common in Polynesian cultures (177), but the technique had vast repercussions in New Zealand because of its arid climate, particularly on the South Island. Williams hypothesizes that natural fires were a common occurrence already, and fires made by humans could easily get out of control. Based on the evidence she presents, they frequently did, resulting in the rampant deforestation of

New Zealand. Confronted with the position of some scholars that the Maoris were indifferent to the loss of the forests, Williams replies that there is no way to prove such a statement, and actually, there is evidence to the contrary, that they were deeply bothered by the deforestation and loss of resources they needed (Williams 186). Regardless of whether or not the burning was completely intentional, it is clear that the extent of the damage the fires caused resulted in human suffering alongside that of the forest-dependent ecosystems on the islands. The portrayal of this double trauma of human and nonhuman nature – begun with Maori fire use, continuing through the colonial exploitation of the resources of people and land, and persisting into modern environmental degradation – is crucial to a full understanding of the novel.

With examples of environmental degradation so early in human history constantly surfacing as researchers delve deeper into the study of ancient cultures, it is ever easier to imagine the wounding of the nonhuman natural world that has occurred, affecting both the people and the lands of various Native cultures. Hulme's novel portrays a physically and spiritually wasted world, one that even its spirit protectors have fled, and, as spokespeople for the land, they have taken their voices with them, effectively silencing nonhuman nature.

the bone people details the intersection of the lives of three New Zealanders: Kerewin, an artist and musician who lives alone in a tower on the beach now that she has lost the ability to create art; Joe, a widower whose wife and child died of the flu and who is Simon's guardian; and Simon, a mute and temperamental child who washed up on shore alone after a shipwreck and found a home with Joe. Kerewin and Joe are both of

Maori descent while Simon is white. When the three meet, they have already been through plenty of emotional distress, and in spite of their affinity for each other, their frustrations erupt in violent acts, which tear them apart.

Hulme's three protagonists cannot admit their personal traumas, let alone express them to each other, though each is affected significantly by psychological wounding. When they reach their individual tipping points, they can no longer contain the pain, and it comes spilling out in a rush of violence. Similarly, the novel presents the land – silenced, burnt, and modified with human built environments – trying desperately to express its inexpressible suffering through violence and intrusion into the human realm (the earthquake, dream visions, and face-to-face confrontation between the human characters and spirits).

The earth can finally be heard when the characters remove themselves from human society and become open to listening to what the land has to say via its supernatural ambassadors. The troubled human figures of *the bone people* find themselves unable to lead normal lives while their trauma and the trauma of their natural doubles goes unexpressed. They must find a way to confront it, in spite of their difficulties, and begin healing, notably through interrelationship and through involvement with nonhuman nature. While their personal traumas must be faced alone, it is through communication and understanding between the human and nonhuman that the novel's traumatized achieve a measure of reconciliation with their experiences and begin the healing process.

Wounded Environments

To begin to decide whether the environment can be said to experience trauma, we must turn to trauma theory. Trauma theorists have moved away from the original definition of trauma as the actual wound or the event that caused the wound; according to Cathy Caruth, the consequences of the event and not the event itself constitutes modern trauma (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). Applying this reasoning to the ecosphere, then, we might observe the effects of environmental damage rather than the damaging event itself. For example, the trauma of a polluted waterway consists in the dead fish and eutrophic water (rich in nutrients, the decomposition of which deprives the water of oxygen) rather than in the source of the pollution, perhaps runoff from a farm.

This said, in the case of nonhuman nature's experience of trauma, we must still locate the cause, if only to better illustrate the fact that the injury often inflicted on the environment is caused by humans, making nature and its inhabitants perpetual victims. While locating the cause of human trauma often means accessing the memory of the traumatic event, which may have been repressed, the environment by comparison has no repressed memory to access; the physical expression of trauma to nonhuman natural environments is always available for interpretation. Anyone may perceive both the evidence of the triggering event and the affects that ripple out from it if they know what to look for.

In the introduction to *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth illustrates the principles of trauma theory through Tasso's tale of Tancred, who unknowingly murders his love

Clorinda in a duel (she is dressed as the enemy knight). Later, while marching through an enchanted forest, he hacks into a tree with his sword, and the tree bleeds and cries out in the voice of the dead beloved that he has hurt her once again (*Unclaimed Experience* 2).

Caruth points out that this story demonstrates how trauma always resurfaces in unexpected ways and that trauma often involves a witness, in this case, Tancred. She writes:

But we can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound. (*Unclaimed Experience* 8)

In similar fashion, human trauma is bound up with what I will call ecological trauma. Not only are the two wrapped in a cyclical relationship of trauma and the counter-trauma of witnessing, but given the fact illuminated by theorists like Caruth that trauma can never be fully understood, even by the person who suffers it, humans cannot expect to understand trauma experienced by the nonhuman natural world. Inexpressible trauma resorts to metaphor, as Tasso demonstrates in the bleeding, speaking tree. A traditional reading of this passage would understand the crying tree as an anthropomorphic manifestation of Tancred's trauma, trauma that he did not even know he had. However, a more literal interpretation – of the tree itself communicating its pain at human aggression – allows access to ecological trauma (which we cannot understand) through the mediation of human trauma (which we can begin to understand), not only because of Tancred's surprise in witnessing the trauma(s) he himself has caused, but also because the trauma is expressed in story form. The representation of ecological trauma cannot be absorbed

literally, but requires conversion into the symbolic in order to even communicate it, thus the necessity of human mediation for the achievement of any kind of interpretation.

Caruth expands on the issue of bearing witness to another's trauma, saying, "The figure of Tancred addressed by the speaking wound constitutes... a parable of psychoanalytic theory itself as it listens to a voice that it cannot fully know but to which is nonetheless bears witness" (9). We likewise cannot fully know nature's voice, and yet the human (Tancred) bears witness to Clorinda's trauma through exposure to the ecological trauma of the tree. He can grasp the cry of physical pain and blood resulting from a stabbing, but to see this wound expressed through a tree is greatly disturbing, precisely because he is able to understand it on a human but not an ecological level. But as Tasso elides the two, he can potentially make the connection that ecological trauma exists and is similar to human trauma. One important component of trauma that Caruth notes through Freud is the shocking literality with which trauma recurs in human memory (*Trauma and Experience* 5). Even if memory of the event is vague or nonexistent, flashbacks and nightmares about it are finely textured and detailed, almost as if they are imprinted indelibly on the person's subconscious. Nature, however, is incapable of its own metaphorical representation just as it is incapable of repression, having no memory beyond its own natural history and no representation beyond its own physical reality, and so is characterized by complete literality, much like what traumatized humans experience in the involuntary resurfacing of repressed events. As with incomprehensible dreams and flashbacks, the full expression of ecological trauma does not mean we can fully interpret it.

In highlighting the similarities between human and ecological trauma, I might reveal another, deeper reading of *Tancred and Clorinda*. Tancred does not comprehend his accidental act of murder except through the allegory of the tree standing in for the woman, thus the ecological wounding sheds light on the human trauma. Tasso's conversion of the murder into a fairytale demonstrates just how little we can understand, even of what we "know" and see. We might think that we can fully understand ecological trauma precisely because it is always fully expressed in the physical world and always literal. We approach it through science, gathering data and examining the circumstances that create the traumatic situation in order to understand what the nonhuman natural world might experience, but this tactic provides only partial comprehension. As with our own human traumas, full understanding eludes us. In recognizing that ecological trauma is like human trauma in these particular ways, we must also acknowledge that we cannot fully know what it means for an ecosystem to suffer, and no matter how much data we gather, we can never comprehend nonhuman wounding.

The delay of the expression of any symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder – the clinical term for human trauma – until well after the traumatic event's occurrence is known in trauma theory as "latency." Latency, which Caruth discusses in the introduction to *Explorations in Memory*, displays some equivalency to the temporal (and often geographical) gap between ecological trauma and its repercussions (7). She explains,

And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience: since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place and another time. (*Explorations in Memory* 8)

For the environment, we might understand as latency what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence.” He explains that when environmental degradation occurs, it can be many years, even many decades, before the full force of the effects of the damage becomes apparent. Nixon addresses slow violence in his essay of the same name, citing it as one of the major obstacles to the environmental movement. Environmental degradation is a gradual process, the results of which may be catastrophic over time, but not at present or all at once, so people are able to ignore them, often denying that there is a problem at all. In this way humans repress not only their own experiences of trauma, but also the land’s experience of ecological trauma, denying the possible effects of environmental damage because of their difficulty in grasping what to them is the abstract reality of ecological trauma (which will ultimately result in continuing human trauma) – abstract because humans find it troublesome to imagine the world from any perspective other than a human one. As humans slowly realize the severity of ecological damage over time, repression becomes more and more difficult and awareness of the repercussions of human habits grows, but in the meantime, the earth suffers still more damage, and the cycle rolls on.

Though it may seem abstract to imagine entire ecosystems as capable of experiencing trauma, a similar idea surfaces in trauma theory. In his discussion of communal trauma in his essay *Notes on Trauma and Community*, Kai Erikson posits that whole communities, or even entire nations or regions can also experience trauma. Though the affects manifest in different ways than in individual experience, mostly due to the nature of community, many of the same theories and terms are still applicable. Erikson

has found in his research and personal experience that traumatized communities such as Buffalo Creek, West Virginia and the Native settlement of Grassy Narrows in Canada whose citizens have all been through the same experience often fracture and dissolve rather than banding together in solidarity or out of mutual understanding. Minus the obvious individual and collective psychological impacts such trauma can have on human communities, one can imagine an ecosystem “suffering” similar communal trauma through each organism’s interconnection with its neighbor and similar fracturing in the breakdown of ecological systems in the face of environmental damage.

Ecoholism vs. Constructionism

The relationship between humanity and nonhuman nature is one that has been heavily debated and finds new relevance for the modern age as we reevaluate what the nonhuman natural world means to us as a species. Native cultures’ sentiment that humans and nature are interconnected has given way to modern preservationist and conservationist thought, neither of which leaves any room for the Native ideology, leaving the cultural majority wondering how we as a Western society are going to handle the future of our environments. Do we care about environmental ethics? If so, what does that mean exactly? Is the nature/culture divide a false or useful distinction? What is the appropriate discourse for addressing issues concerning ecology? Ecocritics cannot avoid dealing in real-world terms, but often grapple with these issues in the realm of the literary as well. Although many scholars’ theories are so grounded in the historical or

philosophical as to only rarely refer to literature, this project relies on literature to formulate a theory of ecological trauma. For my purposes, literature makes human access to ecological trauma possible precisely because of the abstract nature of imagining ecological trauma and the necessity of reimagining human relationship to the nonhuman natural world.

Sabine Wilke divides the diverse field of ecocritical studies into two major “camps” into which many critics fall, perhaps rendering the field more contentious than it actually would be if more “camps” were considered. Still, her delineations are useful in describing general trends in the discipline of ecocriticism. On one hand, the nature camp acknowledges both nature and culture and the connections between them. According to Wilke, this camp notoriously avoids theory. On the other hand, Wilke presents the constructionist camp, which sees nature as a construction of human history and culture, and some who fall into this category even argue that nature does not truly exist at all outside the human mind.

Some scholars in the nature camp see non-human nature holistically, as a complete, functional system of itself, referring to it as “harmonious” (Truitt), “balanced,” or “unified” (Lopez). The term for this in ecocriticism is ecoholism. They see human activity as disruptive or intrusive into these harmonious systems, a view which reinforces the idea of a nature/culture divide, which may not be something they mean to accomplish. Christa Grewe-Volpp comments that, “the majority [of ecocritics] negates this sentimental approach to a modern science which has detected instability and uncertainty within ecosystems” (123), meaning many scholars in both camps have accepted what

ecologists have found, which is that fluidity and constant change are major characteristics of ecosystems. This real world instability opens the natural world as depicted in literature to more complex interpretations and discourages the impulse to rely on an ecologic reading of apparently harmonious nature, as it is in reality anything but. This is not to deny that healthy ecosystems function on mutually beneficial interrelationships amongst many organisms and their inorganic environs, but rather acknowledges that all ecosystems are constantly in flux and are always subject to both sudden and gradual – and completely natural – change.

Constructionists tend to focus on the way humans imagine the nonhuman natural world, foregrounding nature in the human mind over nature “out there.” In arguing his position, William Cronon, a historian, makes the point that human conception of nature is hopelessly bound up in values and assumptions that are strictly human and that because of this, we cannot separate ourselves from the world we describe. He cites the invention of the term “wilderness” in the 19th century for the purpose of upper class tourism as an example of the unnaturalness of our ideas about what nature is (Wilke 96-97). I agree that the term is inaccurate in describing, for example, the English lake country or the lands that have become American national parks (both these areas are subject to human management and are therefore anything but “wild”), but what Cronon fails to emphasize is that the term “wilderness” describes how humans imagine and think about the land, and the term’s use, particularly in the West, is indicative of the human propensity to imagine ourselves as separated from the natural world in certain crucial ways. The term “wilderness” draws a solid line separating human culture from the natural world, and we

use “wild” to indicate the inhuman (unthinking or violent) behavior of humans. The larger myth at work here is the misunderstanding that humans can somehow separate themselves from the natural world simply by imagining ourselves as separate. Cronon recognizes the distinction between nature and culture as a false one in this example, but only so far as the human imagination is concerned. My interpretation is that if we cannot separate ourselves – and thus our culture – from the world we describe as Cronon says, it is because, regardless of what we imagine, we are indelibly a part of that world and thus have as much impact on it as it does on us.

The conviction of nature-as-construct may be meant to be primarily abstract, but in the context of the real world it is completely impractical – and precarious. Nature-as-construct neglects the fact that humans have a comparably miniscule history in comparison with nature, and it focuses only on human history as relevant to any discussion of nature, including the representation of nature in literature. It may be that throughout our history humans have been altering and managing landscapes, but so do many other nonhuman members of ecosystems (habitat engineers like oysters and corals come to mind, not to mention geologic and weather forces of all stripes). As part of the ecosystem we necessarily alter it by the very fact of our existence, not to mention by our every action. Imagining the nonhuman natural world as mere construction also objectifies it in dangerous ways; the extreme constructionist philosophy seems to inexorably lead to a justification of human domination of inanimate landscapes and their inhabitants, and our society is ever more willing to admit that this might not be the healthiest mindset to foster.

Several scholars have called for a mediating position to define the contemporary human conception of its relation to the nonhuman natural world between the opposing ideas of a biocentric ideal of oneness with nature and the anthropocentric insistence in encouraging human objectification of nature that humans are somehow superior to nonhuman nature, both of which emphasize the mythical nature/culture distinction, though in very different ways. Sabine Wilke maintains that ecocriticism can only advance by walking a middle ground and looking forward rather than nostalgically back, as many ecocritics tend to do, to ancient cultures whose apparently balanced and harmonious living with nature probably never existed as more than an ideal (Wilke 98). The example of Maori fire use definitely supports a claim that such balance was not always achievable, and human distrust and fear of nature is evident in many early societies in which survival often meant daily struggle against the nonhuman natural forces in the world. Grewe-Volpp agrees that a mediating position is much more productive than other options. She writes,

Human beings define nature culturally, but they themselves are also biological beings and as such dependent on the ecosystem. A mediating position accepts *human embeddedness in the physical, material world* on the one hand and human difference from other beings in the ecosystem on the other. Viewed this way, nature and culture cannot be neatly separated; instead, they influence each other in multiple ways.
(Grewe-Volpp 124, emphasis mine)

Her approach reasonably handles both the scientific truth that we are bound up in ecosystems regardless of whether we inhabit inner city or rural landscapes and also the fact that humans are somehow set apart from the rest of nonhuman nature in ways that may seem easy to pinpoint, but are actually more complex. Language is one example Grewe-Volpp discusses. While we often consider language a cultural development that

sets the various peoples of earth apart from one another and defines them, both spoken and body language are biological developments that evolved along with us to serve our species's tendency toward social interaction well, and many animals rely on similar systems of sound and nonverbal communication. One could argue that even written language is a result of our evolving brains and the demands of our lives in ever-expanding and complex group relationships. Culture itself can be seen as a natural development since it is part of our maturation as a species and the main evidence of our natural reliance on social interaction to flourish.

Grewe-Volpp's description of the human relationship with the nonhuman natural world is one on which I will base my assumptions about how nature and culture interact as I continue to expand on the idea of ecological trauma and begin to discuss its mediation in literature. This thesis will examine the aesthetic representation of environmental destruction in literary works to argue that literature provides a means to view the environment as both unknowable (supernatural, superhuman) and knowable (in parallel with human experience). Literature allows us see environmental damage as not only physical – expressed in landscapes – but psychological as well – repressed and re-expressed in the human imagination – and the literary works I will discuss exemplify that ecological trauma is linked to and expressible through human trauma.

Establishing Ethical Singularity with the Earth

I will pose two main questions to frame my discussion of ecological trauma and its relationship to human trauma in literature: whether we can consider the environment a communicative subject and what we might understand in attempting to interpret the non-verbal aspects of our world. Communication poses the biggest obstacle to comprehension since the environment cannot express itself in ways humans have traditionally understood. There is not a question of whether or not this subaltern can speak; it *is* “speaking” to us every day. The question is, rather, can we understand what it is saying?

From an ethical standpoint, it seems necessary for humans to allow the environment to communicate on its own terms, regardless of whether or not we understand fully; to attempt some measure of understanding is more important. To borrow a term from postcolonial theory, humans emphasize the otherness of the environment by expecting it to communicate in our language and discounting its relevance when it does not. In considering cross-cultural human interactions, Gayatri Spivak claims that, rather than allowing oppression to dominate, we must strive instead for ethical singularity in our approach to the other. To do so means that we think of an ethical relation as an act of love, an embrace of the other rather than its subjugation. The point of establishing an ethical singularity is to strive beyond the binary of self/other and to attempt to think of the relationship from the other’s perspective. Ethical singularity does not allow the privileging of one term over the other; it recognizes difference and the inevitability of failure in understanding, but attempts nonetheless, allowing both sides to learn and exchange ideas without either dominating or submitting.

For the environment, this relationship cannot be reciprocal, so the ethic lies solely in the approach of the human to nonhuman nature. Rather than approaching as empiricist imposing a reading on nature and attempting to speak for it – a mistake Spivak cautions us against in human interactions – we should instead approach on equal terms, recognizing ourselves as members of the biotic community, too. In acknowledging the importance of the imagination and the literary in understanding and improving human relationships, Spivak writes in the first chapter of *Death of a Discipline*, “Here we stand outside, but not as anthropologist; we stand rather as reader with imagination ready for the effort of othering, however imperfectly, as an end in itself” (13). We might apply this idea of “othering... as an end in itself” equally to the human interrelation with nonhuman nature. Humans should not enter a relationship (which might be better termed “kinship”) with their environments with ulterior motives of exploitation or to gain personal or self-knowledge. The relationship certainly requires imagination, as it is unlike any other we are used to. Humans must approach nature for the sake of kinship, significantly as a reader, prepared for the fact that we will be required to think abstractly to interpret nonhuman nature, just as when we read literature. The difference is that the self must be willing to change as opposed to trying to change the other.

Spivak has famously claimed that the subaltern – the oppressed and silenced individual or culture – cannot speak. In the introduction to *The Spivak Reader*, Landry and Maclean explain Spivak’s articulation of how the subaltern might be heard:

As she explains in the interview “Subaltern Talk” (see p. 287), when she claims that the subaltern “cannot speak,” she means that the subaltern as such cannot be heard by the privileged of either the First or Third Worlds. If the subaltern were able to make herself heard – as has happened when particular subalterns have emerged, in Antonio Gramsci’s

terms, as organic intellectuals and spokespeople for their communities – her status as a subaltern would be changed utterly; she would cease to be subaltern. And that is the goal of the ethical relation Spivak is seeking and calling for – that the subaltern, the most oppressed and invisible constituencies, as such might cease to exist.

Spivak takes great pains in her work to define the relationship between the entities of the colonial figure and the subaltern. The subaltern is always diminished and disregarded by the colonizer as savage, uneducated, and/or heathen, and one might say that the persistence of colonial effects during and well after the colonizing force has been removed constitutes a traumatic situation for the subaltern often by physical violence, suppression, or cultural denigration. There are significant parallels between what Spivak sees going on between colonizer and colonized peoples all over the world and the human domination of the nonhuman natural. In fact, the same areas that have seen the most exploitation and plundering of resources are often the areas where humans are also disenfranchised and treated as mere raw material or entirely disregarded. The colonizer abuses both land and people. The sufferings of the colonized people and their lands go hand-in-hand and often even feed into one another. Spivak's goal for the creation of an ethic that allows the subaltern to speak could be equally applied to the ecological subaltern, the nonhuman natural world that literally cannot express itself in human language, but relies on human interpretation and imagination in order to be understood.

Hybridity, often glorified by postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, might in other circumstances be understood as traumatic as well. Cultural confrontation creates a crisis of identity, and colonized cultures find themselves unable to return to their original culture or fully extricate the now-interconnected colonizing culture from their own. The same hybridity is evident in the human to nonhuman nature relationship in the mixture of

natural and human built environments. For example, urban areas shelter many species of vegetation and animals whether by human intention or not, and cities experience weather patterns that affect all life in the area just as rural and less developed areas do. In the case of both human and ecological hybridity, there are benefits and drawbacks that are too various and complicated to pick apart here. But if, as Spivak requires as a potential solution to the inequality of the colonizer-subaltern relationship, we are to attempt understanding each through an extension of imagination toward the other and her culture, allowing her a voice and control of her own destiny, we might ask how this relation could translate into a new relationship between the human and nonhuman natural world.

Those favoring biocentrism and ecoholism might be inclined to call for ethical singularity between human and nonhuman nature, a system of communication and exchange that allows humans and nonhumans alike their differences, and yet opens the possibility for understanding; however, this is impossible. We cannot expect an ethical relationship with nature – including reciprocity – exactly as Spivak’s ethical singularity demands we enter relationship with other humans. The lack of interior being or consciousness in nature forecloses this direct option. This impossibility demands a metaphorical mediation between humans and nonhumans. Thus, my turn to literature is the development of a more attuned sense by humans of the environment.

Grewe-Volpp discusses strategies for successfully approaching the natural world on its own terms and effectively listening to it. In reading Barry Lopez’s *Arctic Dreams*, she finds his solutions to reconciling his human self with the incredible otherness of nature potentially capable of providing the necessary listening skills. Lopez both

describes the land and creatures around him in minute scientific detail and closely observes the Native inhabitants' cultural methods of reading the land that seems so desert-like and empty, focusing on their understanding of the mutual dependence of their people with the land and the animals there (135). She goes on to explain that Lopez's impulse to attempt to "think like an animal," to imagine how it perceives its world – an impulse also in evidence in the works of Mary Austin, Rachel Carson, and Barbara Gowdy among others – "decenters human consciousness and contributes to a relinquishment of the self as well as to an expansion of other forms of consciousness. It is also a revaluation of the world 'out there,' which is no longer a mere text, created by human culture, but an entity alive in many different ways, depending on the sensory equipment of the beholder" (136).

I want to focus on Grewe-Volpp's notion of embedding of human consciousness in nature. Such a mindset begins to allow and is necessary for the experience of ecological trauma as our own, as human.

If we are willing to put forth the effort to "think like an animal" or, more abstractly, like a plant or geographical feature (Aldo Leopold famously calls for us to "think like a mountain"), then we *can* other the environment as Spivak suggests we ought to other our human cohabitants. A mindset like this accepts the existence of multiple species-specific realities dependent largely on the manner in which each perceives and communicates, and, as no other animal, plant, or landscape imposes on us by discounting our reality, it is up to us to make the relationship reciprocal by not discounting theirs. Part of this relationship also involves our admittance that we cannot know everything about

the other subject, just as we cannot know everything about ourselves. At the same time we continue to expand our knowledge of the other, we accept its mysteries and “appreciate the sophisticated life of another creature, which can then no longer be regarded as a dumb object” (Grewe-Volpp 135).

* * * *

I see the two camps Wilke describes existing in the field of ecocriticism in slightly different terms than she uses. The writers of the nature camp such as Lawrence Buell – and others she does not mention like Rob Nixon and Eric Cheyfitz – tend to focus on the world of our daily experience rather than the represented world; even though these writers certainly achieve excellent close readings of literary works, their main points are rooted in the contemporary real world, operating within philosophically biocentric boundaries. The constructionist writers tend to operate primarily in the realm of history and sometimes mythology to make their arguments that nature is a social construct. Again, they read literature closely, but always with an eye to returning in the end to theory. They tend toward the anthropocentric in ways nature camp scholars maneuver to avoid, but interestingly enough, many writers in each camp resolutely insist that the nature/culture divide is false while at the same time reinforcing it in different ways. The nature camp calls for humans to be more appreciative of the nonhuman natural for its own sake, but doesn't always offer good answers for how to accomplish this without the human ego getting in the way, which leads to Spivak's fallacy of speaking for the

subaltern instead of allowing her to speak. On the constructionist side, Simon Schama even claims in *Landscape and Memory* that human development and management of lands – whether conservationist or preservationist – are not actions to be deplored, but celebrated (9). He argues that we should acknowledge that the impact of culture on nature has been a mix of positive and negative aspects that should not all be lumped together as “calamity”, but that we should focus instead on the way we imagine our landscapes, as these mental constructions largely determine how we treat them (10). His sentiment, like Cronon’s, is potentially dangerous in allowing for the justification of truly destructive human behaviors toward environments and, once again, he sees the human as separated from the natural.

By contrast, my theory stems directly from the literary. The two novels I address in the following chapters comprise dual narratives, human and natural, in which human experience stands in for and represents natural conditions. The analogy in which humans become the vehicles by which nature is understood – as opposed to the traditional situation in which animals allegorically represent human behaviors – suggests a new way of thinking, and if the nonhuman natural world is accepted as subject capable of experiencing trauma, the new perspective allows a combination of ecocritical with trauma theory. The goal of this combination is the understanding of humans as inseparable components of ecosystems and thus susceptible to the repercussions of the damage they inflict on those systems. Since the language environments “speak” is so different from our own and so rarely considered in readings of most literary works, reading nonhuman nature – whether managed or not – as a “speaking” subject, just as capable of wounding,

being wounded, and expressing trauma as any person, opens works up to readings of the previously inaccessible natural “consciousness.”

Nonhuman Trauma

While the idea of biocentrism and approaching understanding of the nonhuman through Lopez and Grewe-Volpp’s techniques for creating ethical singularity are potentially doable and enlightening for modern culture in the way that Wilke calls for, they are still ideals, and not everyone is willing to put forth the effort to accomplish such time-consuming and intensive methods of gaining deep understanding of the science of natural systems and also approaching nature in an ethically balanced manner. In general, the human relationship with the nonhuman natural world has been characterized, not by a quest for understanding or mutual respect, but by trauma. Trauma theory has traditionally focused on the psychological effects on individuals of either natural (or manmade) disasters or violence, and although the environment can be a source of trauma, trauma theory does not often address trauma to the environment itself. If it is in evidence, nature is generally foregrounded as an incomprehensible force of devastation or relegated to the background where it quietly hums along, unnoticed.

In choosing the term ecological trauma I have made several distinctions. I avoided the word “environmental” because I want to specifically cite the nonhuman natural world, excluding the human-built environment. Lawrence Buell makes an excellent case in his study *Writing for an Endangered World* that our world does not fall neatly into

categories of nature and culture, but is intermixed with plants and animals living alongside metropolitan humans, and arguably all of the “wild” places left in the world subject to some sort of human management. He writes, “Monist, dualist, and technocultural constructionist theories or myths are likely to prove less convincing than a myth of mutual constructionism: of physical environment (both natural and human-built) shaping in some measure the cultures that in some measure continually refashion it” (Buell 6). This interrelation is far from harmonious, and I view both the urban “wilderness” and many managed areas as traumatized landscapes. Another problem with the term “environment” is that it can also refer to mental and emotional landscapes as well as to a vague sense of physical surroundings, which would serve only to muddy the claims I wish to make.

The term “ecological” evokes the natural world in terms of the system or systems as a whole rather than to only one space or area. Trauma inflicted on the natural world from pollution of a river to the clear cutting of a forest necessarily deals in ecosystems, larger than just one species and expanding in effect to reach beyond the original source of trauma. Because I am dealing with systems rather than individuals, the term also serves to highlight the ever-shifting balance created in the interrelation of species and geographies, a balance that can be upset from within, causing the trauma on which I have chosen to focus. (Note that by “balance” I am referring not to ecobalancing, but the real and incessant fluctuations that occur within natural systems.) Still more vital is the fact that humans are necessarily included in the ecological whereas, if “environment” refers to our surroundings, they can be viewed as excluded from the environmental.

To say that humans inflict trauma on the nonhuman natural world seems to emphasize the nature/culture divide when in reality the fact that humans are *not* separated from the ecosystem makes ecological trauma possible in the first place. We are capable of such devastation precisely because our actions occur from inside the system. This also means that try as we might we cannot separate ourselves from the consequences of our actions any more than we can remove ourselves from the ecosystem. We perpetuate the destruction of our own support systems.

Why, if this is the case, do humans continue to fight for the right to deplete and damage the very systems that support our species' existence? Rob Nixon discusses the damage we cause to landscapes – particularly deforestation and desertification – as “slow violence.” The reason these problems arise is their short-term benefit to humans. Most people hardly notice the changes to their environments over time, or what they notice may not be enough to cause general alarm. Unlike an event like a terrorist attack, for example, it is not flashy, no bombs go off, there are no casualties to count, no disparate beginning or end to the conflict, no bodies in the streets. It will not make the nightly news. People can rally around a single event like the BP oil spill and will come together to clean up for the sake of their human and wild neighbors, but when the issue is the slow destruction of a beach ecosystem by development and pollution, too few jump to do anything. In the case of the oil spill, both human and nonhuman nature are at risk in both lives and livelihoods while in the second case humans appear to benefit from the overuse and abuse of the ecosystem, which will slowly decline until it is utterly bereft of its former health and diversity. The trauma is protracted and, though the problems are in

evidence, most people think it ridiculous to apparently privilege the lives of a few birds or fish over the recreational and financial benefit of humans. In reality, a disrupted ecosystem benefits no one in the long run, but developers rarely have the foresight to imagine their projects more than ten years into the future – in addition to the fact that they are focused on making money – and this myopia and focus on short-term financial gain spells trouble for the nonhuman natural world on both a local and global scale.

While a few people reap the short-term profits by stripping the land of its resources, locals, often poor, are the ones who bear the burden of the degradation. Nixon cites the desertification of Kenya's rural land because of deforestation by the government. He speaks of local women having to walk many miles just to find clean water and a few sticks of firewood so they can support their families and how the ever-worsening conditions in these villages spurred Wangari Maathai to found the Green Belt Movement, a tooth-and-nail fight to restore the land to health against the formidable enemy of the rich and resourceful government, which was not above using military force to protect its claims.

In a lot of ways, ecological and human suffering are the same. I do not mean to imply that ecological and human *trauma* are the same; they differ in some particulars as I have discussed, but while human pain almost never causes a corresponding pain in the nonhuman natural world – indeed, many writers have emphasized nature's infuriating indifference to human suffering – the suffering felt by environments inevitably transfers to humans. What I mean to say is that ecological trauma is also – or will also become – human trauma.

Ecological trauma is noticeable as a phenomenon in the environmental justice movement, which attempts to fight environmental degradation and to illuminate the links between environmental, social, and economic justice as the Green Belt Movement has done. In the ever-expanding capitalist economies of the world, the rich may easily obtain the best real estate (read most impressive and/or desirable landscapes) while the poor are often relegated to city slums, which, on top of the social and political problems they face there, also have ecological problems as well. These communities tend to be densely populated with fewer (if any) public green spaces and may even be subject to direct environmental degradation by toxic materials, such as either human or chemical waste. The people are thus victim to the physical and psychological affects of others' greed, inflicted on them via ecological devastation. Recognition of the links amongst these issues makes it clear that people are becoming increasingly aware of just how interconnected nature is with culture, which paves the way to the theory of ecological trauma and its connection to human trauma. Imagining these various concerns as issues of justice further illustrates our willingness to begin thinking of ecosystems as deserving of rights, at least by virtue of their value in supporting human communities, which is a start.

The same cyclical trauma (human to ecosystem to human) exists in the colonizer-subaltern relationship discussed earlier. When a colonial culture takes possession of an area, it not only see itself as conquering – and perhaps even improving – the peoples living there, but also and perhaps more so as possessor of the land and its resources. These natural riches are often what draw foreign attention in the first place. The

colonized, then, are not only stripped of their cultural dignity and identity, but worse are dispossessed of their own land, either directly (as in the American Trail of Tears) or indirectly (as when modern oil companies, for example, barge into South American nations and begin drilling without regard for or the consent of the Native peoples). These cases stand out from other instances of environmental damage in that the people who harm the environment never face the consequences of their actions, though others suffer in their wake.

Lloyd Jones describes a similar situation in *Mr. Pip*. An Australian copper mining company establishes itself on the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, employing locals, but also attracting workers from neighboring Papua New Guinean islands who represent a different ethnic group. At first, the Natives believe the mine's presence is a blessing, as the culture that springs up around it brings Western luxuries into their lives, but when the terrible ecological price of mining – pollution of the reef on which local villagers depend for food and the rivers that provide them with fresh water – begins to affect the workers' homes and the fishermen who support their families, they raise a resistance, which is successful in shutting the mine down – at least temporarily. The conflict, however, leads to a long and grueling guerilla war that brings violence into the very villages the Native workers sought to protect.

The ecological trauma the island has suffered eventually comes to a literal head in the floodwaters that rush from onshore to the sea after heavy rains. Jones schedules the flood to coincide with the aftermath of protagonist Matilda's loss of her mother and teacher to the opposing guerilla army and the fact that she is now quite alone in the

world. She stands in the flood overwhelmed with numbness and allows herself to be washed away. Most readers have no trouble seeing the flood as a symbolic representation of Matilda's grief, but on a deeper level than that the flood exists as an expression of ecological trauma. Whether consciously or not, Jones uses Matilda's human trauma to mediate the otherwise inexpressible ecological trauma that the island has suffered. It is important to remember that the ecological trauma is what caused the conflict in the first place, so the cycle of humans traumatizing ecosystems, trauma that in turn causes trauma to humans, is complete. As both symbol and representative of the cause of Matilda's grief, the flood communicates the ecological trauma in the novel to the reader metaphorically, the easiest – and perhaps only – way for us to grasp it.

Metaphor Comes Naturally

The capacity for metaphor is one of the things that sets humans apart from the rest of nonhuman nature according to Grewe-Volpp. In suggesting that humans enter into dialogue with the nonhuman natural she significantly adds, "What is furthermore needed to make a place come alive is a careful use of metaphor, myth, and even fantasy" (130). Metaphor has characterized human understanding of the natural world and our relationship with it from the creation of Native mythologies, and they continue to color our conception of the landscapes we inhabit even as we alter them. We bulldoze an area to build a neighborhood, which we then name after the forest, creek, or meadow that was

lost to make way for it. We are attracted to names that incorporate natural imagery, and the landscape that is no longer there lives on in some ways in our minds.

The constructionist view of nature as figment of the human imagination is true, though not only to the extent that constructionists push it; we are, after all, imaginative creatures, but imagination is not the only place that nature exists. What a loss our society would suffer if we no longer had any concept of local color, which usually results from landscape and our mental and physical associations with it, not to mention how landscapes shape the people who inhabit them. A southwestern desert-dweller is worlds apart in our imaginations from an Appalachian mountain man. In conjunction with his idea of the necessity of celebrating human intervention in nature, Schama claims that once landscape has been imbued with metaphor in the form of mythology or idealization, the metaphor takes on a life of its own, becoming in some ways more real than the landscape itself (61). Constructionists tend to pose their point as nature exists *only* or *primarily* in the human imagination, but the idea of nature as at least partially constructed by human thought should serve to increase rather than diminish the value of the natural to human society. If we are so tied to our own perceptions of it, would we not prefer to attempt preservation rather than destruction of whatever corresponding physical embodiment it still has left?

Native approaches to the physical world and human imagination of the nonhuman natural come closer together than mainstream modern culture's do. Natural democracy is Cajete's concept that explains the Native relationship with the nonhuman natural world. He writes,

In the inclusive view of natural democracy, humans are related and interdependent with plants, animals, stones, water, clouds, and everything else. Thus, it becomes in every sense abnormal to view the world as dead matter, private property, commodities, or commercial resources. The manifestation and roots of the Native sense of democracy run much deeper than the modern American political version of democracy today in that all of nature, not only humans, has rights. This is the essential “cosmological clash” between the foundations of Native culture and those of modern society. (qtd. in Cheyfitz 52–53)

The Native relationship between nature and culture is one of kinship and the rights thusly implied, and this kinship is so pronounced that there is no word for the collective concept of “animals” in most Native languages. The people refer to each type by its individual name, much as one would refer to a “man” or “woman” by those designations rather than by an all-encompassing term (Cheyfitz 145). Cheyfitz cites William Bevis, who comments that in many languages the Native word for nature is in fact closer to our word for “urban” or “downtown” than it is to the Western idea of “nature” precisely because what happens in nature is central to Native human life (qtd. in Cheyfitz 145). An equivalent for “wilderness,” of course, does not exist at all. There is no separation between human and ecological communities because humans are a part of the ecosystems they inhabit. It makes sense, then, that natural democracy leaves no room for Western semiotics of possession. Eric Cheyfitz writes of a lack of vocabulary for owning land among indigenous tribes:

At the center of this indigenous democracy is a community relationship to land as kind in contradistinction to its conceptualization as property. While the institution of property treats land as alienable, a commodity and hence fungible, the kinship relation to land understands it as absolutely inalienable, as literal family, as part of an ongoing and inviolable ceremonial relationship. (Cheyfitz 157)

In addition to such a radical notion (in the Western mind), Cheyfitz pushes further by pointing out that, “. . . it may be the power of Native kinship terminologies that they break down the distinction between the literal and the figurative, a distinction so fundamental to

Western notions of identity and to the Western notion of literature” (146). Cheyfitz notes here the Native propensity for literal readings of the relationship of mankind to the land, an idea Lloyd Jones explores deeply in *Mr. Pip*.

In this way, Cheyfitz uses the concept of natural democracy to deny the distance between humans and nature implicit in metaphorical reference. Just as there is no nature/culture divide for the Native, there is also no literal/metaphorical divide. This is not to say that Native mythologies are meant to be or are taken literally, but they often rely on bringing the nonhuman natural world into deep kinship with the human through anthropomorphism and personification.

Western literature also has a long tradition of anthropomorphism, but its intentions are much different from the Native’s. Medieval scholars such as Gillian Rudd and Sarah Stanbury mark the perpetuation of the nature/culture divide in early Western literary tradition through their discussions of the authorial impulse to anthropomorphize, which is evident in such writers as Chaucer and the Pearl Poet. If Medieval writers illuminate a relationship between nature and culture at all, they do so by trying to make nature more accessible and understandable via filtration through the human whether by imposing human feelings onto nonhuman elements or by imagining some human embodiment of nature that remains alien in spite of its similarity to a human (the Green Knight is the most striking example of this, though any faerie or magical humanoid creature qualifies as well). In short, they emphasize human difference with the nonhuman natural world rather than sameness, as Native storytellers do. The critics I mentioned tend to see this impulse as negative, indicative of the root cultural mindset, which has led to

our current ecological crisis, reinforcing the divide between nature and culture and the alienness and subsequent fear of the nonhuman natural. Grewe-Volpp even notes that some have referred to anthropomorphism in literature as an “intellectual cancer” (139). But does this type of metaphorical writing deny the rights of these nonhuman elements in the way Cheyfitz might claim? It is true that encounters with such figures as the Green Knight may emphasize their otherness over their kinship, and they are still separate, generally subject to natural rather than human law, but they still have some sort of claim to rights in human community, which, though it does not encourage a reading of humans as part of the ecological community and is thus more destructive than constructive, should not be overlooked.

Lopez does not have a problem with anthropomorphism in literature. He sees it as a potentially significant tool of “comparative inquiry” (qtd. in Grewe-Volpp 139), citing the ease with which the human mind processes analogies and which might be applied to creating an ethical singularity with the nonhuman natural. Lopez, too, recognizes how language reflects, grows, and changes according to landscape (Grewe-Volpp 139). There are dozens of Eskimo words to describe “snow,” where English has only one. More are not necessary to survival in English-speaking parts of the world, but distinctions the Eskimos make in their communications with one another can be the difference between life and death in their landscape.

Nixon discusses the power of metaphor and symbol in “Slow Violence” when he outlines the history of the Green Belt Movement. Wangari Maathai significantly chose to act in a positive manner, actively doing something to counteract her nation’s

environmental degradation rather than simply protesting the government's priorities. She gathered together the women who were suffering most from the desertification and deforestation of Kenya's land and they began replanting the lost forests. Thus, the tree became the symbol and rallying point for the entire movement. The power of this image cannot be understated. The tree represents life, renewal, and hope for the future. No one plants a tree expecting to benefit from it themselves; they do it for the sake of their children, who will enjoy the benefits trees provide (a few of which include shade, oxygen, firewood, habitat, prevention of erosion, and temperature control). Trees are significant symbols in the two novels I will discuss as well. Hulme's character Kerewin laments the replacement of native trees with pine, which was meant as a lumber crop, but which fell ill to blight and failed, leaving the landscape littered with a dying forest that prevents the native species from returning. Jones's protagonist Matilda is saved from drowning in the flood when she is able to latch onto a log, and her teacher Mr. Watts explains the idea of multiple meanings by saying that the word "tree" can connote either an oak or a palm, and both are equally correct ideas. The tree is one image of the nonhuman natural world that can evoke an emotional response in the human imagination instantly.

Improving our scientific understanding of nature, some scholars claim, has mostly brought about its exploitation and ruin rather than its protection. If this is in some ways the case, imagination is one of the few ways modern humans may "enter in" to nature. Metaphor has the power to mediate our experience of nature, translating it into our own experience, thus making it accessible to us. Literature provides this avenue to

understanding by representing the ecological through the human. *the bone people* accomplishes this much in the way that Native mythologies and the Medieval works mentioned earlier do – by using supernatural figures to communicate to the human. When Kerewin is dying of stomach cancer, she encounters a strange human-like creature that heals her and brings her into an awareness of her homeland in a way she could never accomplish on her own. Jones's character Matilda in *Mr. Pip* begins to process the trauma of her mother's murder by resorting to the anthropomorphism of the log that saves her from drowning; she names it Mr. Jagers after Dickens's character because that is the only name she knows of for a savior. In both cases, human trauma makes ecological trauma accessible to the reader by paralleling it and through the author's or character's use of metaphorical thinking, which helps the reader – if not always the character – better understand what the nonhuman natural world suffers.

Not only do the characters in the novels rely on metaphor and its use regarding and relation to the natural world to help them through their various traumas, but the novels themselves mediate the ecological trauma that cannot be directly articulated to the reader through human characters. We cannot immediately comprehend the broken land of New Zealand or Bougainville's poisoned reef, but we can relate quite easily to the pain and loss suffered by the characters in the novels. Through the authors' shockingly literal narration of the characters' traumas, the reader can gain admittance into the ecological traumas that have preceded them. The human capacity for metaphor accesses nature's silent trauma.

Representing Ecological Trauma

Making the claim that the nonhuman natural world should be considered an acting subject rather than an object to be acted upon is a bold move that some scholars have referred to as a necessary part of the concept of ecophilism. Kant defines a subject as a being whose “action is subject to causality as an event in the world of appearing nature, but free as something in itself” (Bowie 18), and thus liable for moral responsibility for those actions and their consequences. This definition works well for humans, but it falls apart quickly when one tries to apply it to the nonhuman natural world. First, Western culture considers people primarily on the level of individuals (rather than in terms of family, community, or nation), so it is easy to delineate one subject from the next, but the same cannot be said of our ecosystems. The nonhuman natural world lends itself to a model of individuals only perhaps with regards to large fauna, distinctive trees, and macro elements like mountains; it seems ridiculous to imagine each ant or fern or bacterium an active agent, yet if we want to match Kant’s definition of acting subject, this might arguably be necessary. It is much more useful to think of most organisms in terms of community, but the impulse to do so, if not controlled, soon spreads to an entire biotic community encompassing numerous organisms, and even this model excludes the inorganic elements of the environment, leading to application to ecosystems at large as a single subject. Nonhuman nature could be regarded as a single entity, but this cumbersome amalgamation would tend to generalize and oversimplify. This issue aside, holding any of these iterations of nonhuman nature to a human code of moral

responsibility is impossible and, if we are to seriously review our attitudes toward the natural world, completely unethical because none of them fully allow for a relationship of ethical singularity.

Kant, too, became entangled in the problems of subjectivity as it relates to nature. Andrew Bowie points out that nature was threatened by two of Kant's core ideas from his early critiques: first, the cognitive approach to nature led to a conclusion of nature's unbounded multiplicity because it did not allow for nature's status as an end as well as a means; and second, Kantian understanding led to nature's reduction to subjection to human-based principles of abstraction (Bowie 28). The way out of these problems lies in Kant's theory of aesthetics; interestingly, as Bowie points out, while nature for Kant clearly operated mechanically on some level, he was inclined to see it as systems, working technically, *techne* referring to art. He writes, "*An organized product of nature is that in which everything is an end and on the other hand also a means. Nothing in it is in vain, pointless, or to be attributed to a blind mechanism of nature (B p.296, A p.292)*" (Bowie 27, emphasis Kant's). His view expresses clearly that perplexing and transfixing quality of nature that makes it so aesthetically poignant to the human imagination (seeing it as harmonious interconnection might be a way to articulate it) and evokes the very reason that nature ought to be considered a free agent – its status as an end as well as a means. Nature as art then can be, according to one possible interpretation of Kant, in ethical relation with humanity in its role as valuable subject, its aesthetic worth providing an end in itself. This idea allows the nonhuman natural world to exist for more than just its use value to humans.

Nature differs strikingly from all other aesthetic objects, primarily in that the observer is inextricable from that which is observed. The impression of human presence in nature does not even wholly subside when nature is framed as in a painting or photograph. The artist's presence is always implied. The natural has often been synonymous with the beautiful in art and literature – British ecotourists in the Romantic Period indulged the impulse to “frame” the environment, preferring to view certain vistas over their shoulders through their reflection in a sepia-toned lens rather than taking the view in as it actually was – but with the advent of global climate change in addition to centuries of pollution, overuse, and overdevelopment, many of today's ecotourists view the world as aesthetically but a shadow of its former self. It has suffered extreme modification, and humans, as aesthetically minded creatures, have developed new standards of aesthetics with which to represent the world, which now often includes the built environment. The ugly, the grotesque, and the wounded are the comparably new aesthetic expressions of human experience. Biophilia is still innate – who wouldn't prefer pure running rivers to agricultural and industrial waste-filled ones? – but intact nature often comes out juxtaposed with the built environment: for example, a flower growing up between the cracks on the sidewalk, an abandoned lot overrun with weeds, pigeons on the steps of a museum. In these examples, we see the natural world “making do” with the human built environment, and this comparably pathetic attempt at flourishing can be read to embody a kind of painful beauty, one which we can appreciate aesthetically.

Novels are one way we attempt to communicate the effects of trauma, as environmental degradation is directly inexpressible for us; aesthetic representation allows

us to communicate the unspeakable and upsetting material human life often entails by using metaphorical techniques to better illustrate what trauma is like and sometimes to provide a kind of narrative distance, especially if the trauma communicated is voiced through someone other than the traumatized person. The works that I will focus on are, I argue, an expression of ecological trauma in that it is part of and partially responsible for the human trauma articulated by the writers. In spite of its centrality to the situations the characters find themselves in, the novels cannot express the natural world's trauma as an ecological trauma at all. Instead, they rely on the wounding of humans to mediate the ecological trauma and make it comprehensible to the reader in some way. In keeping with trauma theory, the reader experiences the human trauma in the shockingly literal state that occurs when trauma is recalled in flashbacks or dreams. In this way, the novels themselves act as a form of trauma, that of the spectator bearing witness to the attempted expression of the traumatized. The ecological trauma is available to the reader through the metaphorical expression of trauma by the human characters and the author.

Caruth mentions the possibility of the person suffering from PTSD attempting to express their pain to someone in words, and the listener is then traumatized in the listening (*Explorations in Memory* 8). This passing-on of trauma is a possibility in the reading of novels. There is trauma, too, in the fact that what is passed on in history and in art is not precisely the trauma that was originally experienced, as human communication is by nature imperfect. By extension, literature provides us an imperfect portrait of trauma, but we can read symptoms of ecological trauma in the writers' descriptions and portrayal of the natural world as well as in how their characters perceive and interact with

it. The impossibility of perfect expression cannot deter us from attempting to communicate and interpret one another nonetheless. This is part of our responsibility to each other and the nonhuman natural world if we are to pursue ethical singularity.

The full measure of environmental degradation and what it means for the world at large and the future of the human race is equally as alienating and difficult to grapple as many instances of human trauma. Just as we cannot exit the aesthetic frame we might try to put around the real nonhuman natural world, the fact that we cannot avoid the consequences of environmental damage, but live with this degradation – participate in it – every day and must cope with the consequences is very disturbing when we stop repressing the idea and begin engaging with it.

For the most part, people avoid focusing their minds on this subject precisely because of its daunting enormity, in spite of the fact that many public interest groups and politicians have invested incalculable time and resources in increasing awareness. We avoid the topic in our daily lives just as one might repress an individual traumatic experience. This does not mean we are unable to face trauma, but are unwilling because of the potential pain it could cause and the demands such knowledge would make of us to change many of our daily habits. As clinical psychologists can attest, confronting fears and traumas can help humans process them and begin healing, and it is through representations in literature and other arts that ecological trauma can be slowly assimilated into our psyches, faced, and understood in whatever way is possible.

Being unable to remove ourselves from any frame we try to put around nature poses aesthetic problems for us as well and speaks to the fundamental interconnectedness

of human and nonhuman nature. We may be able to imagine a world without us, but it quickly becomes meaningless, however “perfect” some might consider it to be. Human trauma’s mediation of ecological trauma offers a solution to these problems. If we cannot understand how the environment experiences trauma, we can at least grasp how the trauma suffered by ecosystems affects humans and imagine what the species involved might be “feeling.” This is possible on both a large and small scale, from the negative effects of global climate change beginning to be felt across the globe to the loss of the shade of one cut tree. The aesthetic representation of ecological trauma in art and the parallel relationship between ecological and human trauma provide access to the nonhuman natural world’s “feelings” and “memory,” thus allowing us to imagine its pain and bringing us into greater understanding of nonhuman nature and our kinship with it.

The Representation Camp

It is possible to read my approach to the issues I have discussed as constituting a mediating route for which both Wilke and Grewe-Volpp call. I might at least situate myself outside of the two camps as Wilke has described them. While both the nature and constructionist camps go to literature for examples to support their claims, their theories ultimately rely on the physical world and the human imagination. I wish to focus instead on the *representations* of the physical world and human imagination in literature, which prove useful in explaining how it is that we approach the nonhuman natural world as individuals and cultures and what repercussions our approaches have.

The following two chapters consist of my close readings of the two novels whose topics inspired the theories outlined in this introduction. Although *the bone people* and *Mr. Pip* differ widely in the cultural and social situations they describe, both works treat themes of postcoloniality and human trauma, and both involve a corresponding ecological trauma through the role of nonhuman nature depicted. Each novel relies on metaphor to mediate nonhuman trauma to the reader through the very visceral and literal representation of human trauma. Though each approaches the means of this mediation differently, both accomplish the same end, and interpretation of these mediations are crucial to a full understanding of the texts.

Ecological trauma, as I will frame it in these works, is characterized by a fully physical expression of the trauma the nonhuman natural world experiences, which the characters may acknowledge, but not as trauma and not in conjunction with their own human trauma. Even though their decisions may involve the nonhuman natural world, their actions are dictated by their own woundings, not by the pain of ecosystems. The message of ecological trauma is ultimately one for the reader, not the characters. It is up to the reader to make the connection between human and ecological suffering, to note the cyclical features of the relationship between them in the novels, and to begin to consider how we might reimagine our role in the world around us.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BONE PEOPLE

“Aue, the roots of the tree are long and descend into darkness. The shore is wavebeaten, and there is nothing beyond but the unceasing immeasurable sea.”
(Hulme 344)

Critics have mostly considered Keri Hulme’s novel *the bone people* a work that deals heavily with personal and cultural trauma. Scholars such as Christina Stachurski, Clare Barker, and Antje Rauwerda focus on the complicated gender roles, the psychological affects of human trauma, and the postcolonial issues of race and culture in the novel. Hulme herself explained in speaking to a group about *the bone people* that the major problem with the three characters is their perpetuation of a culture of violence and that she wanted to write the novel to speak out against child abuse (Benediktsson 126), which is a common occurrence in New Zealand among both the native Maoris and the European New Zealanders (often referred to by the Maori term “Pakeha”). While these are all significant and weighty topics (and almost all deal at least tangentially with some form of trauma), most scholars who have written about this novel – even those who address its environmental themes – miss the vital link between human and nonhuman nature, a link I see as characterized by the cycle of human and ecological trauma.

It is likely that Hulme illustrates the connection between ecological and human trauma in her novel unconsciously, but this only deepens my conviction that they are in keeping with the tenets of trauma theory, that they are somehow

essential, and that, for humans to understand it, ecological trauma requires human trauma to mediate as metaphor and knowable parallel. In claiming that the link between ecological and human trauma is somehow “essential,” I mean to refer to human embeddedness in the natural world, that we are inescapably bound to the fate of our environments.

The unconscious resurfacing of trauma is widely known since Freud. He exemplifies the phenomenon in the case study of a woman who had been in a concentration camp as a child; she experienced nightmares of trains and had no idea why until someone mentioned to her that the tracks were visible from the children’s barracks and that trains were constantly going by the camp. The woman had no conscious memory of this and was relieved to know that she was not mad (*Trauma and Memory* 6). As the environment lacks a “consciousness” and thus always expresses its trauma physically, we look to human consciousness for recognition of ecological trauma. Intuitively, Hulme seems to sense the link between human and nonhuman trauma. Her character Kerewin is the most attuned to the environmental issues New Zealand faces, but she does not go so far as to connect ecological suffering with her own, even though the nonhuman plays an essential role in her recovery. Readers must make the association on their own.

Hulme is not able to express what the environment is trying to say in the novel on its own terms. Instead, she relies on supernatural, spiritual elements to bridge the gap in communication between human and nonhuman environment in the form of the creature that heals Kerewin’s cancer and of the mauri spirit in the stone that Joe receives. These

elemental beings are the symbolic representatives of the land, ones whom the characters can much more readily understand because of the creature's humanoid form and ability to speak in Kerewin's case and, in Joe's, his Maori belief system that supports the idea of the mauriora. The supernatural serves as the mediator between the natural and the human in this novel, expressing in human terms what in the land's constant expression of wounding was misunderstood or ignored. The nonhuman makes the first move in reaching out to the characters, an indication that the truth of ecological trauma has been evident in the world all along; the nonhuman has to approach the human on human terms in order to finally be understood. Once the environment establishes communication with the characters through these supernatural beings, the characters need no further encouragement in constructing a new relationship between the cultures and the lands of New Zealand.

Walking Wounded

Hulme's three protagonists begin the novel steeped in individual pain. Though they are all standoffish to some degree, they grow closer together with time and begin to imagine themselves a kind of family. An unfortunate chain of misunderstandings leads to the violent rupturing of their relationships, and the three spin away from one another in different directions.

The Maoris were traditionally a society of warriors who valued aggression; one needs only see their war dance, the *haka*, to see evidence of the importance of fighting in

their culture. The trauma that tears the three characters apart results from their lashing out at each other, not from any external source. This internal, private animosity can read as them expressing the repressed, unspeakable experiences they suffered before the novel's commencement. Even Kerewin's planned intervention cannot halt Joe's brutal beating of Simon, and Kerewin is actually no better than Joe; she beats Joe down utterly using her Aikido, an Eastern martial arts technique she has mastered, though the peaceful philosophy behind it seems to have eluded her. Simon, too, reacts to people's lack of understanding of his muteness with violence. He breaks all the shop windows on the street in frustrated anger against Kerewin when she ignores his pain in having found a man dead. He lashes out at Joe during a devastating beating and cuts him deeply with a piece of glass from the shop windows. The violence spirals from one person to the next and back again until all three find themselves alone and in life-threatening situations. Kerewin burns her home, a spiral tower, to the ground and flees the area on a goal-less pilgrimage, self-medicating her stomach cancer and stubbornly refusing any formal treatment. Joe, too, wanders the land, ending up in the middle of nowhere with a broken leg after a botched suicide attempt. Simon is taken into protective custody and whisked off to a hospital with life-threatening injuries from the beating.

Hulme's three characters struggle not only with the pain of their life situations and the pain they cause each other, but also with the same predicament Elizabeth Dodd describes in James Wright's poetry as an "...ongoing quest... for the human, articulate animal to feel at home in a degraded environment" (23). Both Kerewin and Joe have Maori blood, Joe almost completely so, and this is clearer than

ever in their regret for the way the Europeans have treated the natural world. Theirs, like Wright's, is a rather despairing quest for home and wholeness that realistically implies that there is no going back to a "pristine" ecological state. Still, proponents of sustainability hope that the human race can re-evaluate its relationship with nonhuman nature and start healing the land it has wounded. All three characters go on more or less voluntary quests for such healing, and Hulme suggests in the Epilogue that they all succeed not only in finding peace and reuniting with one another, but in revitalizing the land as well. The characters' return to culture is vital because, as Hulme writes, "Together, all together, they were instruments of change" (Hulme 4), implying that singly their revelations mean far less and are not enough to alter the natural or cultural schisms in the novel, but as a diverse community aware of its interconnection with the nonhuman natural world, they are powerful.

As the kaumatua – a Maori elder and guardian of the mauri spirit stone – describes his life to Joe, he explains that he was raised to be more Pakeha than Maori, and in his time, the Maoris were trying hard to assimilate to European culture, but this left them "Maori on the outside with none of the heart left" (Hulme 359). Hulme implies in the passage that the only people meant to flourish on New Zealand are the Maori, and Europeans should not have tried to stay. They are invasive and, like most invasive species, they choke out the native and separate them from the land, yet are unable to fully flourish themselves. In spite of their separation from the land, both Joe and Kerewin feel, perhaps as a result of their

Maori blood, that the land has chosen them and provides for them. They each uncover greenstone pendants in the sands of Moerangi, and Kerewin actually hears voices telling her the name of the piece she found. Later she dreams of entering the island itself and feeling it breathe, a clear moment of oneness with the land and foreshadowing of the importance of the nonhuman natural in her future.

The way the environment experiences trauma seems similar to a human experience in schema. At first, the earth is a passive victim, suffering at human hands, and later, it actively expresses the trauma in ways that may seem unrelated to the original trauma, but are actually direct affects of it. In humans, memory of the traumatic event is suppressed in the psyche, but the trauma is still expressed through various behaviors and reenacted in ways that mimic the original trauma. For the environment, however, there is no psyche and therefore no suppression; the environment always embodies and expresses its wounds. Traumatic events such as mining, deforestation, and the Industrial Revolution are recorded in ice caps, tree rings, and geological formations; scientists can literally read the landscape to know how the earth has suffered in the past. Williams's study of Maori fire use is possible because the evidence of burns is inscribed into the geography of New Zealand. The example she describes of early Maori settlers using fire as an agricultural management tool that got out of hand and ended up destroying the majority of New Zealand's forests shows that the Europeans were not the first group to traumatize New Zealand's land. The absence of forest over much of the country is testament to the environmental suffering from which the land is unable to recover and which Hulme's protagonists attempt to reverse.

The Pain of Pines

The environmental trauma New Zealand has suffered from both the Pakeha and Maori settlers crucially parallels the trauma felt by the three protagonists. Kerewin is deeply bothered by the mismanagement of the land by humans. On the drive to Moerangi, they stop for a rest and she points out a stand of pines that are suffering from blight, though they were planted there deliberately in place of the native trees for the express purpose of use as lumber. This scene stands at a structurally significant place for commentary on the abuse of the environment, opening the second section of the novel. It occurs as the characters are just beginning to get comfortable with each other. Having suffered the trauma of the loss of loved ones, the characters are understandably reluctant to lower their shields and let each other in, but here on the trip to Kerewin's beach house they are beginning to do so. That Hulme chooses to have them bond over environmental damage brings ecological trauma to the foreground. Kerewin points out the blighted pine stand to Joe and laments:

“This place used to have one of the finest stands of kahikatea in the country [...] Pines grow faster. When they grow. The poor old kahikatea takes two or three hundred years to get to its best, and that's not fast enough for the moneyminded [...] O there's room in the land for them, I grant you, but why do they have to cut down good bush just to plant sickening pinus? Look at that lot, dripping with needle blight dammit [...] this land isn't suitable for immigrants from Monterey or bloody wherever.” (Hulme 157)

The pines serve as a powerful metaphor for both the environmental and cultural devastation of New Zealand. They are a European species transported to New Zealand to create a fast-growing lumber crop, taking the place of the much slower-

growing native kahikatea, which can no longer survive because of the invasion of its habitat. But the pines do not grow well; they are not suited for the New Zealand environment, and so they fall ill with pine rot, which makes them useless as lumber.

Kerewin's description of the pines is often read as a postcolonial metaphor for the Pakeha invasion of New Zealand and usurpation of the Maoris. The Pakeha, like the pines, suffer the blight of uselessness because of their displacement from their native land to another, but the Maoris cannot recover either because they, too, have been removed from their native soil. Significantly, Simon is Pakeha and, we learn late in the novel, of Scottish origin, which may help to explain the blight of muteness he suffers. The novel also invites a reading that the heroin addict whom the kaumatua nurses many years before Joe arrives is actually Simon's father, once again emphasizing the corruption and ill health of the European in New Zealand. This is a physical, spiritual, and emotional remove from Native to Western culture, which accounts for the trauma experienced by Hulme's characters. It does not, however, fully account for the trauma the land has experienced. The Europeans damage the landscape by removing native and planting a non-native species. The land then reacts by killing the European species, but cannot heal itself by reinstating the native species. Thus, the absence of the native and the sickness of the non-native express the wounding New Zealand has suffered at the hands of its Pakeha plant and human invaders.

Hulme suggests that the Pakeha removal of the native plants and the "deculturation" of the Maori people are not irrevocable; healing is possible. It is also not necessary for the humans to leave New Zealand for the healing process to begin. On the

contrary, humans are an essential part of that process. Hulme envisions an ecoholistic solution, harmony between nature and culture, a process that must happen first in humans through a change of attitude towards the natural world and then in the land by way of an alternate interpretation of it. Humans must reimagine their relationship to the nonhuman natural world. Hulme implies that communication and mutually beneficial living arrangements are entirely possible, but humans have to be the active party in initiating the change. Human action in establishing a better connection to the nonhuman natural is a perfect reversal of the cycle of trauma. Humans began the cycle, and they must initiate the healing as well. The antagonist must reconcile with the victim in order for true healing to take place.

Expressions of Trauma and Oneness with Nonhuman Nature

For Kerewin, pain manifests in art as well as in body and mind. She has lost her ability to create art as she used to, through painting, though she is still a talented guitarist, singer, and songwriter, and Joe notes several times that she makes the most beautiful fires he has ever seen (echoing the Maori traditional use of fire and its destructiveness, perhaps also Kerewin's own penchant for violence and fascination with the aesthetic of such power). After Joe goes to jail for nearly beating Simon to death, Kerewin tears down most of her Tower and creates the largest of these beautifully constructed conflagrations, using it to fire the clay sculpture trinity she creates bearing the faces of Joe, Simon, and herself on a single pottery head. This

art piece gives the impression that they are each so broken as to be unable to be individually whole; only through togetherness, community with one another, can they flourish, attesting to a subconscious relation to ecology and ecosystems. Her use of clay is significant as well. She uses the earth itself to render the three human faces. Thus Kerewin's immediate reaction to the most intense trauma of loss is to express herself through art in a way that channels both the natural world and her own Maori culture.

Kerewin's self worth is directly tied to the aesthetic value of her artistic abilities. When she loses the ability to paint, she sinks into dejection and cynicism, retreating from human society to the solitude of her Tower:

Through poverty, godhunger, the family debacle, I kept a sense of worth. I could limn and paint like no-one else in this human-wounded land; I was worth the while of living. Now my skill is dead. I should be. But I can't... So I exist, a husk that wishes decay into sweet earth. (Hulme 261)

The loss of her artistic ability wounds her most deeply because it cuts into the very essence of her identity by denying her self-representation – representation of anything, for that matter. Because she cannot bring herself to commit suicide – though she entertains the thought several times, most notably each time she writes in her journal except the last – she is trapped in her pain, and her only desire is to be at one with the earth. To join with the land would be ultimate healing, but the best she can do in the meantime is to use nature as subject to continue attempting artistic expression through painting and song.

The novel portrays the characters' connection with the land as never far beneath the surface of their consciousness; indeed, the novel insists it is a prominent part of who

they are. They already have the capacity for interpreting ecological trauma, so it makes sense for their trauma and recovery to be tied to the land's, though for most of the novel they do not identify it as such. They come to the realization as they become more receptive to hearing what ecosystems have to say. Both Joe and Kerewin care deeply about the nonhuman natural world and see it as an inseparable part of themselves. Kerewin remarks offhand at one point, "We are of the sea, we have tides like the sea... Tears of saltwater, tidal bodies, and seastreamed hair" (Hulme 288), to which her listeners have no ready response except to say that the words are beautiful. Just as in the novel form, the beauty of the words stands in for the beauty of the earth. Kerewin and Joe see themselves as natural creatures first and foremost, which tends to separate them from others. Their individual emotional traumas also shoulder some blame for sundering them from the main body of the community, as they cannot readily relate to others who have not suffered as they have. Joe expresses his loneliness by radically claiming that he is himself a landscape:

I am a waste, a wilderness of alien gorse and stone that scores all who enter... [Simon] storms through any wilderness though it tears him bloody. I am afraid of his ardour. I am afraid of him. So they track my waste, and the waste yields nothing blessed yet. And no-one else attempts this desert... I cannot warm or heal the woman. I cannot warm or heal the child. (Hulme 343-344)

Joe feels the despair of his helplessness to heal those he has hurt, and he expresses his feelings by comparing himself to a desert environment. By portraying himself metaphorically, he can better understand himself and cope with what has happened. His quest brings him closer to the spirit of the land than he has ever been, until the kaumatua passes on to him the responsibility of guarding the mauriora, which is the

experience that alters him and prompts him to renounce violence once and for all, thus making him a worthy vessel for the spirit of the land.

An even more literal example of a human mediation of ecological experience occurs in Simon's spelling of his true name in the rocks he collected at Moerangi. Like the rocks themselves, Simon is considered silent by those around him while he is not actually "silent" at all; he can still express himself physically, which he does constantly, and he can write, though that takes more patience. He does not impose what is meaningful to him on anyone, but spells out behind the house where few have reason to venture the only connection to his previous life, and he expects nothing to change because of this divulgence; he is simply communicating without any regard or concern for audience. Simon's choice to express himself using natural objects in the environment around him reflects his kinship with the nonhuman natural world, which he enjoys exploring because it never asks anything of him. In spite of all Joe and Kerewin's trying to understand him, the natural world is what facilitates his ultimate expression of identity precisely because it does not judge or make assumptions, but accepts only the literal inscription of his name. The situation parallels how the environment communicates its pain, inscribing the earth silently and without expectation of remediation.

When Kerewin discovers the name "Clare" spelled out in tall letters with Simon's smooth white stones, she kicks herself for never asking him what he calls himself and for accepting only what other people call him. In so doing, she has let others' perceptions of Simon trump his own sense of self and has unwittingly denied him the possibility of making his true identity known. Similarly, if we approach the nonhuman natural world

with preconceptions and ask the wrong questions, we too will miss the communication that is available to us if we can only read properly.

Koru: Spiral as Structure and Symbol

The Maori symbol *koru* – a spiral – appears frequently in the culture from architecture and totems (*pou*) to facial tattooing (*moko*) and traditional Maori jewelry made from greenstone or bone. The symbol originates from the spiral of the curled fern leaf and represents the continuousness of life and life cycles. It is unique to Maori culture (a more universal symbol of a similar idea, perhaps, would be the closed circle, which is truly infinite). The spiral can open up into a short line and so can also be said to represent an individual life with a discrete beginning and end. It can also be imagined as a piece of an infinite spiral extending in both directions beyond a single life, thus invoking the idea of continuity of life in general with each individual life simply a piece of the infinite strand.

Hulme's novel itself is structured in the "shape" of the *koru*, opening with the Prologue entitled "The End at the Beginning" and ending with the words "Te Mutunga – Ranei Te Take," which is translated in the Glossary as "The end – or the beginning," bringing the novel full spiral rather than full circle, as we end in a wholly different place than where we began, having only seen a piece of the implied infinite spiral. Thus, Hulme suggests that while the novel is over, the story is far from complete – and perhaps it will never be. As a symbol of life and life cycles, the *koru*

symbolically reflects the notion of an ecosystem as well in that it can be read as a discrete element in a larger, less easily discernible or even invisible, pattern.

The materials the Maori use to make *koru* pendants and other significant decorations are also symbolic. Kerewin wears many rings on her hands because each stone represents a different trait that she wishes to embody. Greenstone, the material of choice for the *koru*, “ennobles,” she says (Hulme 291), implying the natural ability of the stone to increase a person’s dignity and self-worth, something she sorely needs. She imparts meaning to these pieces of the nonhuman natural world, imagining that they hold some kind of power that can help her heal or reignite her artistic talent. Whether true or not is moot; the human imagination constructs meaning from the nonhuman natural world, and whether based in scientific fact or myth, these beliefs carry psychological weight and charge the human relationship to the nonhuman with significance.

The spiral is an aesthetic object that both appears in and embodies the text. Its simplicity and elegance resonate with the viewer or reader partly because its meaning is easily discernible from its form. It emphasizes the natural cycles that appear in the novel from the tides to the seasons to night and day. Cycles recur throughout the story; in fact, tides and the diurnal cycle appear in such structuring elements as chapter titles. The first proper chapter of the novel even begins in the middle of a sentence that means nothing to the reader and is never explained because it is not significant except as an indication that we have truly begun *in medias res*. If we are to understand all life as moving in spirals, as the Maori do, then

when we are born, we enter into a cycle already in motion and which will continue after we are gone. We are responsible for orienting ourselves to the situation we find ourselves in, and Hulme's opening accentuates that feeling of disorientation on first entering a world constantly in motion and the necessity of getting our bearings. Hulme's use of the present tense also places the reader in the immediate rather than narrating as if the story had already taken place. It emphasizes that whatever has happened in the past and no matter what future we foresee, we only have control over our present and the actions we take or neglect in it.

The structural layout of the novel allows the characters to "voice" their trauma, communicating to the reader through the physical arrangement of the words on the page rather than to each other within the narrative. Hulme's use of indentations to denote levels of penetration into each character's psyche allows the reader to separate what the character says via the omniscient narrator from the characters' surface thoughts from their deeper contemplations or "conversations" with themselves. The deepest level generally involves self-deprecation and painful realizations or admissions. The indentions may also be read to puncture each character's defenses, giving the reader access to thoughts and feelings that are concealed far below the person's exterior and which they would never admit to anyone aloud. This structural choice on the part of the author can be read as either invasive and a kind of trauma in itself or simply as a tool of insight that grants the reader license to better understand the characters. Kerewin is especially wont to "talk" to herself since she lives alone, and she often addresses her own soul when

she does this. Her inner dialogue is accessible to the reader by way of this unique literary structure of indentation as well as through her journal entries, which tend toward the suicidal. The reader is pulled in and out of the different levels of the characters' consciousness like waves washing in and out on the shore, and such visualization mimics the appearance of the indentions in the text.

Kerewin's Tower is essentially an art piece, and one of her greatest, built in the shape of a *koru* with stairs spiraling up from the ground floor. Interestingly, if we are to follow Hulme's reference to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in Kerewin's decision between building either a hobbit hole or a Tower and choosing the Tower (Hulme 7), then her home, although it is in the shape of a Maori spiral, can be read as a sort of evil, a chunk of human built environment out of harmony with its surroundings and holding Kerewin herself above the land as opposed to placing her on or in it as a hobbit hole would have. In its Maori symbolism of life and natural continuation, the Tower at the same time isolates Kerewin from the society humans naturally crave, and this emotionally fractures her even further, rather than helping her to psychic renewal as intended. The Tower's duality of attempted balance and harmful reality mirrors Kerewin's own; she thrives on her love of natural harmony, but she is unwilling to live or even associate much with other people and achieve cultural harmony, so she, like the Tower, must ultimately be destroyed. For Kerewin, personal destruction is redemptive rather than devastating.

When Kerewin builds the new Tower, she does it "right," that is, with community rather than artistic seclusion in mind and a fresh awareness of the

beneficial role of nonhuman nature in human everyday life. Kerewin's intentions for the Tower are what set it apart from its predecessor. The spiral structure of the Tower now serves to bring the people in her life closer together (she has a house full of guests when Joe arrives) rather than separating them from each other in the boxy rooms of a normal house or lifting them above the land as in the previous Tower. The Tower's location in and mirroring of the nonhuman natural world reinforces the new community Kerewin has found with the nonhuman. The spiral itself reinforces the ecologist relationship the people now find themselves in with the environment, reflecting both nature and Maori culture simultaneously.

Supernatural Mediation

...there, poking through the ashes, is a thin wiry person... Watery eyes. Snaggle teeth. It says, coming over and bending by the bunk, "You can understand now?" (Hulme 424)

The novel's structure accomplishes a great deal in communicating Hulme's intentions to the reader, but ultimately, ecological trauma is only accessible in its mediation by human trauma. In literature, this happens most easily through use of metaphorical devices like personification and symbolism. Hulme allows the nonhuman natural to communicate through supernatural figures associated with Maori culture and myth.

Riddled with cancer, Kerewin sits alone in a shack by the beach waiting to die. But just when it seems that all is over for her, a voice speaks to her from inside (the soul

she so often addresses? Perhaps the spirit of the greenstone pendant, Tahoro Ruku? (Hulme 253)), and then a creature described as utterly gender-neutral appears and offers her a drink that tastes a bit like red currant juice, and thus, surprisingly, heals her cancer. The creature is “of indeterminate age. Of indeterminate sex. Of indeterminate race” and has “A massive burn scar for half a face” (Hulme 424). If Hulme is suggesting that this creature is potentially a corporeal embodiment of all of New Zealand, then the burns could be a reference to the extensive burning of the land when the Maoris first arrived (Williams). They might also represent Pakeha over-development and the devastation modernity has wreaked on the land.

In a similar situation, far from Kerewin, Joe reaches out to touch the murky water where the mauriora lies, but it feels electrified and pulses with a strange energy. Hulme uses these supernatural elements of traditional Maori mythology to rescue Kerewin and Joe from what seems to be their fate, from endless loneliness and pain, and puts them to work as conduits for a new version of what it means to be Maori. Physical “healing” thus approaches them in these two forms, which are linked inextricably to the natural world, effectively asserting that the natural is essential to the healing of the human just as human recognition of the nonhuman natural world is essential to the healing of ecological trauma.

The idea of the Maori spirits, especially the mauri Joe encounters is very similar to the Shinto concept of *kami*. The idea of *kami* appeals to poet Gary Snyder, who describes the *kami* as spirits who inhabit everything in nature, but especially “certain outstanding objects such as large curiously twisted boulders, very old trees, or thundering

misty waterfalls” (qtd. in Johnston 17). The location of the mauriora seems a likely place to find a spirit like this. New Zealand has many areas of volcanic activity – boiling mud pools, hot springs, etc. – and this could very well be one of them. Christina Stachurski remarks on the mauri’s surroundings in *Reading Pakeha*:

... the mauri’s original location is pivotal. Unlike the land’s surface, the mauri has been able to resist colonization; indeed, its retreat underground is partly motivated by Maori being ‘overcome by those white people in their hordes’ (364). Hence, the local environment’s spoiled surface can be transformed, its infusion with the (apparently) original and untainted mauri deepening *the bone people’s* postcolonial appeal. (Stachurski 59)

Stachurski describes the mauri as the sole remainder of pre-colonial life and refers to a passage where the kaumatua remarks to Joe that whether the mauri will reawaken is by no means certain. “ ‘Maybe we have gone too far down other paths for the old alliance to be reformed,’ ” he says, “ ‘ and this will remain a land where the spirit has withdrawn... No longer loving the land.’ He laughs harshly. ‘I can’t imagine it loving the mess the Pakeha have made, can you?’ ” (Hulme 371). Whereas Williams’s research proves that pre-colonial life was not the simple, harmonious existence it is idealized to be, Stachurski does not acknowledge the mess the Maori have made. She focuses on the colonial devastation of Maori culture and Pakeha destruction of the land, and the kaumatua seems oblivious to the idea of Maori involvement in environmental degradation as well. For my part, I imagine the mauri, as ambassador for the nonhuman natural world, would be equally disappointed in the Maori for their part in both waves of damage (ancient fire use and complicity in modernity) as in colonial devastation by the Pakeha.

Strangely, there are no birds or insects in the mauri’s hidden canyon and very little plant life; the area seems particularly devoid of life, indicating perhaps the mauri’s

sleeping state and/or its disapproval of the state of things, but when the canyon collapses in an earthquake, suddenly the area abounds with life. The earthquake, which occurs shortly after the removal of the mauriora, evinces the mauri spirit finally awakening. By its inclusion, the novel signals a readiness to begin the national (or potentially global?) healing process now that Joe and Kerewin have accepted their place in the natural world, given their new Maori ways of nonviolence and stewardship. Johnston writes, “For Snyder and Jeffers, then, the ‘healing’ achieved through regaining the ‘spiritual benefits of place which poets voice’ [...] is a function of the unification of self with nature” (Johnston 24-25). Similarly, Joe and Kerewin have to enter into a new relationship with the nonhuman natural world, renounce their former cultures and the cycle of violence, and become whole and at one with the natural world. They are then capable of finally being healed and in turn, capable of beginning to heal the wounded environment and culture around them. The establishment of a new home and the sinking of the mauri stone into the ground at Kerewin’s new Tower demonstrate the human and spiritual acceptance of the reforged relationship between the two and encourage hope for reawakening the dead and diminished landscape of New Zealand.

Reconciliation

Postcolonial cultures face many daunting tasks, including the need to clear away the problems of warring cultures, alienated hybridity, and the environmental degradation that comes with modern Westernized life. Benediktsson identifies a

trend in *the bone people* and other postcolonial works (he deals in particular with Silko's *Ceremony*) for dealing with such problems. He suggests that one solution is through the establishment of a new way of life that takes into account both colonizer and colonized culture and the hybridity inherent in their interaction. Benediktsson highlights the point in *the bone people* where Joe "plants" the mauriora rock and Kerewin establishes a new marae (community meeting house), thus signaling the founding of the new order:

The spiral house Kerewin builds there, and the family relationship that is established between the white child and the two Maoris, represent not only their triumph against their own personal demons, but also the germ of a new society, neither Pakeha nor Maori, whose spirituality is based on the mauriora life-energy, now grounded in the land and its people. The power has awakened. (Benediktsson 130)

Stachurski notices the same combination of cultures happening in the novel, but highlights its affect on the Pakeha reader, who she sees being more accepted and included by the Maori characters' new attitude toward Simon. She writes,

In a way, *the bone people's* Epilogue is conceptually contradictory, representing original pre-contact Maoriness – and the local environment – in terms of traditional Western conceptions of spirituality and nature, but this particular combination certainly invited the Pakeha reader to feel localized, as comfortable belonging in New Zealand. (Stachurski 61)

She sees that the other characters' acceptance of Simon for who and what he is reflects something different than the reader has come to expect from the conflict between Maori and Pakeha culture. While she reads the new relationship as a look back to a Maori culture free of Pakeha influence and emphasizes the ecoholistic nature of the new human connection to the nonhuman natural, I see the epilogue suggesting more. Hulme allows Simon – the novel's Pakeha representative – to end the novel in a healthy community

relationship with the Maori characters, neither of whom are privileged over the other, leading me to believe that both cultures have been culpable in New Zealand's fall to its broken modern state and both (antagonist and victim, and each party appears to take on both roles in this case) are equally necessary in healing the breaches between cultures, but also importantly between human actors and nonhuman elements. Hulme also makes the nonhuman natural world a crucial part of that community, one that is an embodiment of fully operational nature, that is, one that includes culture.

The creation of the new society requires the people to reunite with nature, here represented by the spirits of the land. Pollution, over-development, and misuse of the natural must cease and reverse in exchange for the cohabitation of human and non-human in a sustainable system of practices and values. That this shift requires the intervention of a supernatural entity is telling; can humans not accomplish this on their own? The novel suggests that we need spiritual guidance from an external source, one more in touch with the natural world, to accomplish the kind of harmony that can heal the breach between nature and culture. For this novel, the external impetus comes in the form of several supernatural figures including the mauri spirit and the creature that heals Kerewin's cancer. These entities can be read as ambassadors of the natural world, and their spiritual forms reflect the necessity of appearing in forms that are accessible to the human characters.

The supernatural elements in the novel serve to mediate and illuminate New Zealand's ecological trauma to the reader. They can be interpreted as Hulme's way of communicating the land's feelings metaphorically, since humans can grasp figures like

these far more easily than they can understand the trauma that the land expresses without human language. The novel offers the opportunity for metaphor to do the work of communication that is far more difficult to accomplish in the real world. The novel requires only that the reader interpret nature's depiction and does not demand the time and effort to consider the perspective of the nonhuman natural in the real world, as Lopez calls for.

Whether or not ecological trauma can actually be halted outside of the new close-knit community is left unspecified. The only strategy for attaining such a goal that we are given is the first step, which is entering into an ecological relationship of human and nonhuman nature. The implication, then, is that human attitudes and willingness to interpret the nonhuman natural world is somehow enough to change everything. It sets up between nature and culture the ethical singularity Spivak envisions between peoples, and ideally, if the mindset has changed, then so too will the actions.

"Together, all together they were instruments of change." (Hulme 4)

CHAPTER TWO

MR. PIP

The roosters strutted around. Seeing them made you feel human, because they didn't know anything. They didn't know about guns and the redskins from Moresby. They didn't know about the mine or about the politics of our fears. The roosters only knew how to be roosters. (Jones 36)

Lloyd Jones's novel *Mr. Pip* came out in 2006 to much critical acclaim, yet, as Zoë Norridge points out, few literary scholars have formally discussed the work as of yet, perhaps due to its complex context and difficulties in orienting the text within familiar literary frameworks. Jones, a white New Zealander, narrates through Matilda, a thirteen-year-old girl in Papua New Guinea, her traumatic experiences during the conflict over a mining operation on her home island of Bougainville in the 1980s. At the same time, she and the other island children are exposed for the first time to Western literature as their white teacher reads *Great Expectations* to them aloud. Matilda becomes obsessed with Pip's Victorian world and uses it as an escape from the horrific reality she faces, eventually leaving the island and traveling to London to study Dickens as a college student.

My interest in the novel stems from Jones's treatment of the nonhuman natural world, which is portrayed alongside the trauma suffered by the protagonist. Though he never discusses it overtly, ecological trauma is at the root of the suffering Jones illustrates in the human characters. The human trauma – expressed through visceral language, utterly literal and concrete – and the coincidental expression in metaphor of the wounding

of the nonhuman natural world make the ecological trauma that grounds all the suffering in the novel more accessible to the reader.

All the trouble depicted in the novel begins with the copper mine that an Australian company builds in Panguna, Papua New Guinea on the island of Bougainville. The mine devastates the ecology of the area and tensions build between the company and the locals until war breaks out and the mine closes. Norridge presents a brief history of the mining venture Jones uses in *Mr. Pip*, giving far more context than the novel itself does. She writes,

Long-standing local indignation about foreign control of prime agricultural terrain for export was aggravated in 1969 when Australian-owned Bougainville Copper Ltd. Opened the world's largest copper mine at Panguna, a highland area halfway down the northeast coast. This escalated tensions for a number of reasons: Bougainvilleans themselves saw very little of the immense profits from the mine; the influx of migrant workers from the mainland caused local resentment; many disliked the moving of the administrative centre from Buka to Arawa (near to Panguna); and the mine had a devastating environmental impact, displacing people who previously lived in the surrounding area, and poisoning the rivers used by thousands on a daily basis. (Norridge 59)

The cycling of ecological to human trauma is strongly in evidence here. Humans wounded the landscape in building the mine and poisoned many local ecosystems; the degraded land, in physically expressing its wounding through the effects of these human-inflictions in turn has negatively affected the locals, who can no longer rely on clean fresh water and stable fish populations. The fighting that breaks out because of these environmental issues (and the social ones that are also in evidence) causes additional trouble for the local peoples in cutting them off from the outside world and bringing violence and death into their lives. Human actions thus cause environmental damage, which then causes problems for other humans; this cyclical transfer of pain might be discussed in terms of human and ecological trauma. Unlike in *the bone people*, however,

those who suffer from the abuse of the island's natural resources are not the same people who perpetrated the abuse, meaning the novel represents the failure of ecological justice, which leads to social injustice.

Telling the story through a child's eyes means the actual reality of the copper mine and its representation in the novel are indistinguishable, mostly because the facts of why the fighting has broken out elude our narrator, Matilda, to a great extent since she is only a child and has never left her village. In addition, readers are unlikely to interpret the destruction of Bougainville's land by the mine in terms of suffering and trauma. However, this is the very tactic I propose; through the expectations of thinking metaphorically in reading Jones's novel, readers are much more likely to gain access to the concept of ecological trauma and come closer to understanding it as such. Jones's literal language in representing Matilda's trauma parallels examples of ecological trauma several key times in the novel, most notably in the emotional climax of the flood. Her feelings, which the reader can understand, echo what we might imagine the environment to "feel," and this mediation through metaphor makes an interpretation of ecological trauma possible.

The Absent Cause

Fishermen spoke of a reddish stain that pushed out far beyond the reef into open sea. You only had to hate that to hate the mine. (Jones 50)

While the ecological and social disaster of the copper mine is the cause of all the suffering in Jones's novel, it is barely present in the text at all. Few of the characters we meet have ever seen it, and most of what the protagonist and the people around Matilda

know about it is hearsay. This might appear at first to suggest, as in trauma theory, that the source of the trauma is ultimately unimportant compared to the resultant human repressions, expressions, and processing of the trauma, but I suggest through the concept of ecological trauma that we read this narrative silence as a silencing of the ecological “voices” that manage to “speak out” later in the text. The novel focuses the reader’s attention on the human trauma in the novel and how hybridity and imagination provide a route for Matilda to process her trauma and potentially become whole again. Whatever Jones’s motivation for this silencing, he foregrounds the social rather than the ecological even in the minor section that details the situation that began the conflict between the rambos (local Bougainvilleans who have dark skin) and the redskins (Papua New Guineans who have lighter skin). Besides the visible pollution of the reef, which she has never actually seen, Matilda explains,

And there were other issues that took me years to grasp: the pitiful amount paid to the lessees by the mining company; and the wontok system of the redskins, who had arrived on our island in large numbers to work for the company, and who used their position to advance their own kind, elbowing the locals out of jobs. (Jones 51)

Matilda is only thirteen years old when the events of the novel take place, so for her, it is easier to grasp the pollution of the river and the reef than the mining company’s working conditions and the negative interactions between locals and the redskins, who turn mercenary for the company when the conflict erupts in violence. The stained river would serve as an immediate, physical reminder of the tensions and why they are pertinent to the village, but while we assume that the river is close by, it is not mentioned at all until the end of Matilda’s time on Bougainville over two hundred pages into the novel, and it is never described as polluted. The villagers’ experience of the social issues at work in

the conflict is also limited and indirect at first. They see the redskins' helicopters and hear gunfire and the blockade prevents them from having the Western conveniences they enjoyed when the mine was open, but gradually, violence comes into their lives and alters them forever.

In spite of the prominence of environmental devastation in Bougainville's situation, Jones foregrounds social issues over the ecological ones by narrowing his initial perspective to encompass only the local through Matilda. Though this may seem to ignore even the politics of the situation, ultimately, Jones means to bring the reader's attention to the postcolonial issues the island of Bougainville faces. Matilda eventually travels to the source of Bougainville's colonization, making it first to Australia and then all the way to London, effectively tracing the damage done to her and her people back to its origin. In doing so, she gains perspective on Mr. Watts, her father, and Dickens. While she does not specifically discuss the postcolonial, she mentions several times being aware of her difference from others in her skin and perspective, and by simply being out in the wider world and seeing how others live she could gain an understanding of the people who have interest in her island. I mean to foreground the ecological instead of the postcolonial, presenting it as a trauma that leads to the trauma suffered by Matilda and her village. The two topics parallel one another, and I cannot effectively discuss one without bringing up the other. That Jones makes the decision to privilege the postcolonial over the ecological in spite of its prominence in the conflict the novel centers around speaks to the difficulty of interpreting the natural world and representing it in literature.

The importance to an ecocritical reading of recognizing and analyzing the true source of these traumas cannot be understated. However limited its presence in the novel, the role of the nonhuman natural world is vital to a full understanding of this text. Without a psyche to analyze or repressions to uncover, the traumatized environment always points back at its antagonist, humans, through the physical embodiment of trauma, here as pollution, species loss, and geographical scarring. In Bougainville's case, foreign hands have come in to take the land's resources regardless of the repercussions of its destruction for the local villages and certainly with no thought of the possible environmental impact. The trauma is perpetrated by outsiders who will never feel the immediate consequences of their actions. The direct victims are the river and reef ecosystems and the many lives that are a part of them, but the indirect victims include the jungle ecosystem as well, which supports thousands of Native human inhabitants.

Trauma finally reaches the village after Matilda's innocent inscription of Pip's name on the beach. The novel subtly indicates the interconnection of the human and the nonhuman natural when Matilda then fills the letters with heart seeds, the seeds she has just learned about in class (Jones 45); heart seeds float on the ocean to new shores where they dry out and take root over the course of many months. They will not grow large enough to flower until a year has passed since they beached (Jones 31). Matilda roots them in the name of her new best friend who has captured her imagination and superseded any interest she might have had in her own heritage (she comments that she feels closer to Pip than to her ancestors, a fact that infuriates her mother). Matilda's seemingly innocuous act leads to unforeseen consequences; when the redskins see the

name, they assume that Pip must be a rambo spy and that the villagers are harboring him, which is what brings them to the village in the first place. When no one can produce Pip, the violence escalates. They burn the villagers' belongings, then their houses, and then in frustration begin killing anyone who brings themselves to the redskins' attention.

The villagers handle their suffering calmly, doing what they can in the aftermath and keeping their thoughts to themselves. Rather than allowing their grief to consume them or expressing it in any visible way, they clean up, bury the dead, rebuild their homes, and pick fruit to eat. While I do not mean to imply that they suffer less than others in their position might, I do think that the ever-supportive presence of the natural world and the knowledge that they have everything they need to survive already in their possession (no one can take the air, the sun, or the fish from them) makes them better equipped to handle some aspects of trauma. While other humans wound them, the nonhuman natural world provides them with the means to survive both physically and, to some degree, psychologically through the comfort of knowing that they *can* still rebuild and feed themselves. Because of their close relationship with the nonhuman natural world, they are able to remain active participants in their fate rather than passive, helpless recipients of damage.

The copper mine isn't the only participant in the novel who is absent; Norridge discusses how Jones is himself removed from the text because of his choice to allow Matilda to not only narrate the story in full, but also to claim the written work as her own alternative thesis. This choice separates Jones from most other white writers who focus on Papua New Guinea and position themselves or the narrators in their texts as the white

outsiders they are. “Lloyd Jones on the other hand writes as an insider, using a wounded, borrowed ‘I’”, writes Norridge (63). Her choice of adjectives in describing this is striking. Jones allows his protagonist the agency to express her own trauma to the audience rather than posing as her spokesperson, and he thus allows her to avoid subaltern status. Yet because of Matilda’s prominence in the telling of the story, the reader does indeed feel that Jones is somehow “borrowing” her voice – or even her entire persona – to make his broader claims about postcolonial issues, which are somewhat obscured and subtle because he speaks through Matilda, who apparently has little interest in postcoloniality and only wants to tell her story. In addition, the fact that Matilda’s voice is a wounded one makes her the perfect mediator for ecological trauma. The loss of her mother and her experience of her mother’s and Mr. Watt’s brutalization are juxtaposed to the alien trauma of ecosystems, making them more comprehensible to the reader.

A Tree is a Tree: Natural Democracy in the Novel

Native perspective on nature in this novel is a combination of recognition of its ability to support humans and rebuke that it is less than human. On the one hand, people live by the land and are able to survive without any trouble solely on what the natural world offers them, yet they also tend to expect human interaction and human response from natural plants, animals, and even geographical features. For example, when the

redskins first come into the village and kill the chickens and a dog, Matilda comments on the indifference of the sun and tides to suffering, saying,

To stare at that black dog was to see our sister or brother or mum or dad in the same state. You saw how disrespectful the sun could be, how dumb the palms were to flutter back at the sea and up at the sky. The great shame of trees is that they have no conscience. They just go on staring. (Jones 40)

Matilda clearly feels kinship with the murdered dog, seeing in its spilled innards the reality of what lies inside every creature and empathizing with the pain of its death. In this passage, she moves toward an ethical singularity with the dog, but her kinship with the natural also leads her to anthropomorphize nature – in this case the palms – to an extent that involves unreasonable expectations of reciprocity. Humans have a long tradition of expressing indignance when their environment does not echo their own emotions, thus the impulse in literature to write of animals, weather, and landscapes as if they did, in fact, reflect the mood of the human characters and/or writer. Perhaps she expects the natural world to be like humanity because she is young, barely a teenager, but it might also be because of the way her culture interacts with and imagines nature.

Matilda's Native culture might be read to live at least partly by the idea of natural democracy, Cajete's concept that Natives often cannot imagine a separation between the human and nonhuman natural worlds, that they see them as inextricable parts of one world. Because of this, Native cultures sometimes have difficulty understanding metaphorical language. In this novel, there are two layers of natural democracy: the first is the villagers and redskins who do not understand that Pip and Dickens are not living people on the island; the other is the representation of their Native culture in the literary form of the novel. Thus, we have two layers of representation. For example, at the level

of the novel, the heart seed is a symbol readily apparent to most readers who might regard it as a representative of the miracle of life or that some things take time and a very specific set of conditions to thrive, much like the villagers themselves. Matilda's rooting of the heart seeds into Pip's name represents the growth of her new understanding of the world through *Great Expectations* and her feeling of companionship with Pip. The heart seed also echoes Jones's epigraph to the novel, which is Umberto Eco's statement that "Characters migrate," emphasizing that, like heart seeds taking root in foreign soil, some of the characters in this novel will migrate passively, pushed and pulled by ocean currents both literally and metaphorically. This is how Western readers are trained to understand not just literature, but the real world as well, and this is often how we interpret the nonhuman natural world. But when one student's mother explains why she brought up the heart seed to the class, she makes the Native perspective on the natural world clear. She says, " 'Why am I telling you this, children? Because its stamen makes a fierce flame and keeps away mosquitoes'" (Jones 31). The value of the heart seed for her is purely functional and shows that it is unnecessary for her to see the heart seed in any other way.

The plot turns on the innocence of natural democracy, the misunderstanding that Pip is fictional, first by the children and their parents and then, devastatingly, by the redskins. Sue Kossew describes what might be read as natural democracy in her essay "Pip in the Pacific" when she explains how the Bougainvilleans have difficulty understanding that Pip is not a "real" person at all and that he and Mr. Dickens are not present on the island. She mentions the part of the novel where, upon hearing that her daughter will be meeting Mr. Dickens today, Matilda's mother Dolores tells her to ask

Mr. Dickens to fix their generator. Kossew continues, “This elision between the literary and the real world is a continuing focus for the novel as it explores the potential misunderstandings and misreadings that can emerge from this position of innocence” (Kossew 283).

Cultural difference colors the characters’ perceptions of the world, both human and nonhuman natural, a point Mr. Watts makes in class that can be read to dissolve the students’ propensity for natural democracy. He pauses in his reading of *Great Expectations* to explain the word “gist” to the children by saying that when he imagines a tree, he sees an oak while they might see a palm. Both are valid answers to the question of what a tree is, yet they are very different interpretations of the word “tree.” In allowing for multiple interpretations, Mr. Watts opens their minds to the possibility of metaphor whereas before, they had thought only in practical, tangible terms. As the children get deeper into Dickens, their perspective on the world shifts farther and farther from their parents’, a fact that Dolores finds alarming and shameful. Norridge points out that,

Watts teaches the children about imaginative frameworks, the mobility of metaphors and transmutability of meanings, with examples from *Great Expectations* and local village speakers. In pointing towards other narratives he absents himself in a similar way to Lloyd Jones – provides the bones of an argument to be fleshed out by another’s imagination. (Norridge 70)

In teaching *Great Expectations*, Mr. Watts opens the children’s minds beyond the practical to the metaphorical, thus countering whatever propensity they might have had toward natural democracy. Because he also includes many Native voices to share stories and information in class, they are also now open to the flexibility of truth and the reality of multiple interpretations. Norridge’s point about Mr. Watts absenting himself is

compelling; he, Jones, and the copper mine might all be read as absent causes, the true forces at work in the novel behind the prominent presentation of the many narratives, the novel itself, and the human trauma Matilda and her village suffer. In noticing the many absent causes, readers increase the chance that they will come to understand that recognition of the copper mine as vital cause of trauma and silenced presence, which may lead to an awareness of ecological trauma.

Though Mr. Watts seems to be encouraging metaphorical thinking in the children for the first time, the natural world certainly provides ample analogies for the locals to use to make sense of their lives. Fish, other animals, and the sea are often used to explain and simplify people or situations. For example, Dolores tells Matilda that,

‘Pop Eye,’ she said, ‘is the offspring of the shining cuckoo.’
I knew about the shining cuckoo. At a certain time of the year we saw them leave our skies. They were headed for the nests of strangers to the south. There they find a nest and boot out the eggs of the host bird and lay their own eggs before flying off. The chick of the shining cuckoo never meets its mother. (Jones 48)

Matilda knows that she means that Mr. Watts does not belong on Bougainville and is taking advantage of the home the village offers while he simultaneously corrupts it. It may be sad that he is displaced from the people he truly belongs to, but he is dangerous to the prosperity of the nest he has invaded. Examples like this one, which occur frequently in the novel, indicate that natural democracy does not necessarily mean the Native people suffer an incapacity for abstract thinking, but that they understand themselves as part of the nonhuman natural world, meaning that the shining cuckoo has as much relevance to them as their neighbor.

Jones resists the common impulse to see the Bougainvilleans as an ecoholistic utopia, as many who write of Native culture tend to do. His characters may be capable of “reading the land” or, as often comes up in this novel, the sea, but it is important to note that not all members of the community can do this. Matilda speaks of the fishermen who know just where to find the fish at what time of year, and although these skills are a part of her own culture, they are a mystery to her, as they are to the other villagers who do not fish. The villagers have also been exposed to some measure of Western influence; they long for the Western conveniences the blockade has cut them off from. In spite of the environmental degradation the mine has caused,

...Everyone just wished the fighting would go away, and for the white men to come back and reopen the mine. These people missed buying things. They missed having money to buy those things. Biscuits, rice, tinned fish, tinned beef, sugar. We were back to eating what our grandparents had – sweet potatoes, fish, chicken, mango, guava, cassava, nuts, and mud crab.

The men wanted beer. Some men brewed jungle juice and got drunk. We’d hear their drunken carry-on through the night. Their wild behavior was so loud, we were afraid they would be heard by the redskins. In the dark I heard my mum condemn them to hell for their foul language. Jungle juice turned them crazy. They sounded like men who wouldn’t care if the world ended tomorrow, and they shocked the night with their ranting. (Jones 50-51)

The postcolonial perspective is clear in the latter part of this passage in that the native people have become accustomed to certain amenities of Western living, and, once they have had them, they do not want to give them up. Some of them have become hybridized in such a way that they see living as their grandparents lived as a step backwards and have to drink away their sorrows, which Dolores sees as potentially dangerous for all of them if it attracts the interest of the redskins. Dolores feels the lack of Western luxuries similarly, but reacts to it differently; she feels abandoned by Matilda’s father and imagines him living a “fat life” in the city without her and Matilda, and the feeling makes

her quick to anger. The villagers are clearly not a true natural democracy given these facts; they can survive completely on what nature provides, but would prefer to do otherwise, even to the detriment of the ecosystems they have traditionally relied on. Still, they have been isolated enough to have never been exposed to any written literature except the Bible until Mr. Watts begins reading. They are somewhere in between natural democracy and hybridized culture, and their relationship with the natural world reflects this.

The Mediating Flood

I was one of those heart seeds us kids had heard about in class. I was at some earlier stage of a journey that would deliver me to another place, to another life, into another way of being. I just didn't know where or when. (Jones 217)

The human trauma experienced by the characters in this novel is strikingly literal and visceral. Matilda simply narrates the atrocities she has witnessed with the flat tone that indicates her inability to feel anything, pain or otherwise. Each person reacts differently to such extreme circumstances, and Matilda's way of coping with it is clearly to put the pain aside and cover it with a lack of emotion. The villagers also handle this trauma differently; while the village women wailed for the babies they lost to malaria earlier in the novel, they make no such scene over the loss of the members of their community who were slaughtered by the redskins. They simply bury what they can and offer "small kindnesses" to Matilda.

The novel climaxes emotionally with Matilda's numb reaction to the trauma she has experienced, yet cannot feel. Her mother and Mr. Watts have been brutally murdered

by the redskins, and she feels entirely alone. She wanders alone through a torrential downpour hardly knowing where she means to go when she comes to the rain-swollen river, which has never been mentioned up to this point, but which the reader might recognize as the conduit of pollution from the mine to the sea. This representation of the river in flood is the closest Jones comes to acknowledging the environmental degradation of the island as anything other than moderately important background information. Here, it can be read as a symbol corresponding to Matilda's pain. Unable to go any farther, Matilda stops, ankle deep in the water, and muses on how easy it would be to just let it sweep her away like all the other debris. As she thinks this, a wave knocks her legs out from under her, and she is carried off just as she'd imagined. When the current begins to pull her under, she suddenly feels the will to live and fights to stay afloat. Just when her energy is wearing out, she bumps up against a log and clings to it, drifting into the open sea.

The reader has no trouble relating to Matilda's numb sorrow and struggle for life in this scene. A typical reading of such a passage might pose the flood as symbolic of Matilda's mixed up, messy, destructive, and unspoken feelings. It is the avenue that facilitates her escape from all the horror of Bougainville and out into the purity of the ocean where a classmate's escaping family spots her and brings her into their boat. But we might also read ecological trauma into the account: Matilda's traumatic experiences and her acceptance of being physically swept away by the flood actually facilitate the expression of the silenced ecological trauma, which is also physical. Because her situation is so accessible to the reader, her trauma effectively mediates the ecological

trauma that has been absent from the novel for the previous two hundred pages and allows the reader to finally see it. The two traumas can be viewed in parallel. The flood communicates in one act of natural destruction all the environmental devastation that has led to Matilda's experience of trauma, making the two traumas inseparable.

Matilda's description of the log that saves her life is particularly telling of her state of mind and how she imagines being human:

What would you call a savior? The only one I knew went by the name of Mr. Jagers. And so it was natural for me to name my savior, this log, after the man who had saved Pip's life. Better to cling to the worldliness of Mr. Jagers than the slimy skin of a water-soaked log. I couldn't talk to a log. But I could talk to Mr. Jagers. (Jones 216)

She cannot interpret the log that happens along just in time to save her life as simply a log; to do so would only emphasize her loneliness and loss. She immediately feels the need to personify it, and in naming it, she puts herself into community with it. Not only does she imagine the log anthropomorphized, but she pushes the metaphorical still further by choosing a fictional character to associate with it. Once aboard her classmate's father's boat, Matilda watches the log until it drifts away from them:

I leaned over the side to look for my savior. Mr. Jagers seemed to know with sad recognition that it was just a log and that the disloyal Matilda who had clung to its back throughout this watery trail was the privileged one, the lucky one. For a few minutes after I was hauled aboard, the log drifted alongside – bobbing and sticking close. Every now and then one end of it lifted on a wave, and it seemed almost to inquire if there was room enough for it, too. But no one else aboard looked at the log. (Jones 218)

Matilda's recently acquired capacity for such metaphorical thinking actually brings her into a positive relationship with an object from the nonhuman natural world. While many might write this off as just another instance of a human anthropomorphizing nature, considering the mutual trauma involved, this incident is much more meaningful. In her

traumatized state of mind, Matilda is briefly able through metaphor to consider the log a speaking subject worthy of her attention and even affection.

Imagining the environment the way Matilda does during her escape from Bougainville is the first step toward an ethical singularity with it in the manner Spivak calls for. Matilda's open-mindedness in her relationship to the log shows that – at least in this moment – there is something personable about the more-than-human. The flood is not merely a destructive force of nature expressing the pain of the polluted river and scarred landscape; through the log, the flood also offers the solace of companionship, demonstrating that relationship is possible between human and nonhuman nature beyond the cycle of trauma.

Matilda does not pursue this line of thinking to achieve actual ethical singularity, emphasizing again the difficulty in representing the nonhuman natural world in literature and Jones's lack of interest in ecological trauma, but she does briefly refer to the environmental problems of overdevelopment she sees in London: "I could tell them the landscape from *Great Expectations* is gone, that its fabled marshes lie beneath motorways and industrial estates" (Jones 249). This moment exemplifies Matilda's narrative voice, always stating facts and never passing judgment on them. Jones leaves that for the reader to interpret. In this case, I read Matilda's disappointed expectations in seeing the world as Dickens saw it. She has to imagine the marsh because it has been wiped out. In creating an ethical singularity with the nonhuman natural world, imagination is a necessity, so it is possible that Matilda has enough awareness of ecological trauma to sense that something irretrievable has been lost except to memory – just as the hard copy of *Great Expectations*

was lost when the redskins burned the village and had to be reconstructed via the children's memories of it – and this is cause for some regret. But will awareness be enough to change what has happened to the ecology – including both human and nonhuman natural – of Bougainville?

Returning Home

Pip is my story, and in the next day I would try where Pip had failed. I would try to return home. (Jones 256)

The novel depicts an amalgamation of stories, a fact that Kossew deals with in depth in her article. *Great Expectations* is not pure, but interpreted first by Mr. Watts and then by the children. When Mr. Watts tells his story to the rambos camped near the village, he combines *Great Expectations* with the stories the villagers shared in class and his own life story, allowing all the voices that are normally silenced to be heard. The white man does not speak for the novel's subalterns so much as he relates a narrative made up of various narratives, demonstrating that all stories are equally relevant and significant. Kossew points out that all the voices are oral (284), which means they are still malleable by the listener and not set down in ink like the actual work *Great Expectations*, which is lost halfway through the novel.

The allowance of all these voices may also include the voice of the nonhuman natural world, though none of the characters seem to be aware of it. Jones lets the river have its say through the flood; like a rush of anger and pain, it washes Matilda out of the situation that has caused her so much grief, simultaneously threatening her life and

offering her safe passage. The flood is certainly a literary device, but perhaps it is also more, offering the reader a chance to understand – even sympathize in reference to – the trauma inflicted on the ecology of Bougainville by colonial, capitalist power. If read this way, the reader also has a chance to act. What might an ethical singularity with the nonhuman natural world look like in the reader’s own context? What might witnessing to the trauma of ecosystems yield to benefit human life?

Significantly, Matilda plans to return to Bougainville at the end of the novel, implying that true healing necessarily involves a return, and she uses the word “home” to refer to the island, which shows that no matter how much she identifies with Pip or loves her father, neither England nor Australia are home. Her motivations for going back are unclear. Perhaps she means to face her traumatic memories head on and this requires more than just writing her account of what happened, communicating her trauma for other humans to read. It seems that, for Matilda, complete healing requires a certain geographical location, that of Bougainville above all others. Jones does not tell the reader what Matilda intends, whether to go back to her Native way of life or try one that reflects her hybridity, so we are left wondering. Will the ecological trauma the novel has communicated continue or will Matilda somehow, through the healing of her human trauma, reconcile with Bougainville’s broken land- and seascapes as the characters do in *the bone people*? Matilda calls into question whether her return will actually make any difference at all when she uses the word “try;” she says that she “will try to return home” (Jones 256), demonstrating that there is some doubt in her mind whether or not she will find whatever it is that she is looking for.

The mine in Panguna closed in 1989 and remains closed today, though the company still holds 8 mining licenses on Bougainville. The mine's future is uncertain; in spite of local protest on environmental grounds Bougainville's president, John Morris, claimed in 2010 that Bougainville's future prosperity depends on the international trade of its below-ground resources ("Bougainville Copper"), and the Bougainville Copper Ltd. Company is making moves toward reopening ("Bougainville Copper Ltd."). While it seems that the island has had a temporary reprieve in the destruction of its ecosystems, human perception of the land as object appears to still be strong from the Western, outsider perspective, which does not bode well for the recovery of river, reef, and jungle. The reality of the attitudes about the copper mine does not support a reading of Matilda's return to Bougainville as a successful attempt at healing both human and environment.

Jones's ambiguity leads me to believe that the thought that Matilda's dealing with her personal and cultural trauma might involve nonhuman nature has not occurred to her consciously. Matilda senses that place is a crucial element of moving on, but does not seem to have considered trying to heal the relationship of human to nonhuman nature as part of her own recovery. Her apparent lack of regard for the ecosystems of her home island (which she and her people are strikingly dependent upon, not to mention a part of) makes her doubt seem all the stronger. Can she succeed in healing herself if the land remains wounded? The answer must be 'no' for a reading sensitive to ecological trauma. Jones leaves it to the readers to pick up on the question of the relationship between human and ecological trauma and bring this consideration into their own lives. If no human acts to heal the land (literary or real life), then the cycle of trauma will only

continue, still reaching us only through the literary representation of nonhuman nature and the mediation of ecological trauma by the expression of human trauma alongside it.

I do not know what you are supposed to do with memories like these. It feels wrong to want to forget. Perhaps this is why we write these things down, so we can move on. (Jones 209-210)

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