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CHAPTER TEN

Kathleen Jamie

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Kathleen Jamie published her first poem 'View from the Cliffs' in 1979 at the age of just seventeen. It depicts a scene from Orkney where fishermen load lobsters to be sent south to restaurants in London. In contrast to the conspicuous consumption of the metropolis the poem foregrounds the fishermen's contentment, their sense of balance and commitment to 'a walking-pace world'.¹ The poem's oscillation, from Orkney to London and back again, reveals its own preference for peripheral and more rooted forms of existence. Throughout her career this walking-pace world has offered an antidote to the increasing uncertainties of modernity and become fundamental to Jamie's poetic DNA. Equally constitutive is the notion of the chance encounter and, moreover, a willingness to submit these experiences to the rigours of poetic form. While the title alludes to a single view there are, in fact, two views in the poem: the image the poet initially stumbles upon and a second view, the aesthetic perspective offered by the poem itself. The poem becomes a form of second sight, a way of mediating and negotiating our experience of the external world. Such realisation recalls Wordsworth's manifesto in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798): 'to choose incidents and situations from common life' but to treat them so that 'ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect'.² The common is in fact uncommon, the prosaic deeply poetic. Jamie's poetry presents alternative ways of travelling. It is a gateway through which to access this walking-pace world. We are reminded of Frederic Jameson's definition of how good poetry functions: 'by drawing the real into its own texture, in order to submit it to the transformations of form'.³ In the following discussion this notion of a Romantic inheritance will be used as a way of contextualising Jamie's more recent output, particularly her collections *Jizzen* (1999) and *The Tree House* (2004). The legacy of Romanticism will be used to bring into focus a number of wider issues, including Jamie's engagement with the natural world, her place in various poetic traditions, and her acute interest in the politics of the environment. This framework is echoed in a review by Andrew Marr who compares Jamie's prose writing to the work of eighteenth-century English naturalist Gilbert White. If

'View from the Cliffs' looks backwards and in doing so evokes the aesthetics of the early eighteenth century, it is also possessed of a remarkable foresight. Our own ecologically attuned senses will doubtless recognise in Jamie's poem the contemporary debate surrounding food miles and the environmental cost of global trade. From the late 1970s the poem anticipates our own age and the fraught ideological terrain of environmental politics. This chapter explores the ways in which Jamie's poetry engages with the *mélange* of issues that gather under this green umbrella. It suggests that her poetry reconnects us with the natural world in a way that both science and the mainstream coverage of the environmental crisis have so far failed to do.

Just as drought, hurricanes and severe weather have little respect for national boundaries, Jamie's writing disrupts the demarcation lines within recent Scottish criticism. The sensitivity of her poetry stands in contrast to the 'Caledonian brutalism' that characterises so much recent Scottish writing.⁴ Her interest in green spaces situates her work in a radically different terrain, both aesthetically and ideologically, from the likes of Irvine Welsh, James Kelman and Alistair Gray. Jamie's background is markedly different from these and many of her other Scottish contemporaries. Born in Paisley, her family moved to Teeside before returning to Currie, a small town outside Edinburgh, where the poet spent the rest of her youth. A philosophy graduate from the University of Edinburgh she subsequently described herself as 'West Coast urban, Edinburgh middle class, English liberal – an outsider everywhere'.⁵ This sense of the outsider pervades Jamie's earlier work. The title poem from *The Queen of Sheba* (1994) depicts a camel train from Arabia riding into the Central Belt to lay bare the cultural poverty of modern Scotland. From the same collection 'Jocky in the Wilderness' offers a full frontal assault on the kinds of warped masculinity so prevalent within contemporary Scottish literature. The poem declares:

come hame
when ye've learned
to unclench your fists and heart.⁶

And when Jamie employs vernacular speech it is not to champion an under-class *a la* Kelman; instead she seeks to expose small town mentalities and peculiarly Scottish brands of philistinism. In 'Arraheids' the artistic impulse is kept in check by a voice handed down over generations: '*ye arnae here tae wonder, / whae dae ye think ye ur?*'⁷

The desire to escape the restricting force of labels has underpinned much of Jamie's travelling, both physically and aesthetically. In her twenties she travelled through Asia visiting China, Tibet and Pakistan, commenting: 'Sometimes I feel so constrained with this palaver of labelling. I just bugger

off abroad where nobody knows and nobody cares.⁸ A familiar claim within recent Scottish criticism is that in the wake of the devolution debacle in 1979 a more confident Scottish literature helped fan the flames of demands for national self-government. In his Introduction to the anthology *Dream State* (1994) Donny O'Rourke argues that in the 1980s it was the poets, more so than the politicians, who set about dreaming a new state for Scotland.⁹ One of only two full-length essays devoted to Jamie's work, Helen Boden's 'Semiotics of Scotland' situates the poet's work within this model of national introspection. Boden is interested in the 'interconnected matrices of national and sexual difference' within Jamie's poetry.¹⁰ She highlights her attempts to recycle rather than reject the cultural stereotypes of Scotland, with the poet rewriting the narrative of the nation.¹¹ My chapter departs from this tendency within Jamie criticism. Having said this, her ability to dissect surgically contemporary Scottish politics remains highly arresting. On the much debated new Scottish Parliament she offers us 'On the Design Chosen for the New Scottish Parliament Building by Architect Enric Miralles'. The poem itself is a two line aphorism: 'an upturned boat / a watershed'.¹² The title satirises political self-importance and long-windedness. In contrast the economy of the poem is a masterclass in understated wit. The upturned boat refers to the shape of the domed roof in Miralles's design. Jamie's description of this as a watershed evinces a measured ambiguity, both celebration and warning. At long last the boat has been righted, a new voyage has begun. But as a watershed, the new parliament might be of little lasting value, a room full of hot air, or cold water, perhaps. As this and the above examples from *The Queen of Sheba* illustrate, it is not always easy to align Jamie's cold eye with an unrestrained cultural nationalism. We see again that her poetry operates in the gaps, in the places where other discourses fail to reach. As critics we must be wary of valuing a writer in terms of the ease with which they may be appropriated to any particular ideology, not least that of nationalism. Such paradigms muzzle the range of Jamie's writing. They neglect the changes in direction that her work has taken in recent years; its turn toward greener and less nation-bound issues. The extended remit of Jamie's work is also evinced in the number of UK awards her poetry has received. She has won the Forward Poetry Prize, the Somerset Maugham Award and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize (twice!). Her poems have appeared on the walls of underground stations in both New York and Shanghai.

In marshalling, or at least tempering, the significance of the nation within our critical practice the Irish poet Eavan Boland is instructive. Boland reads a colonising tendency at work within certain nationalist interpretations of the literary text. The quotation below is her reaction to comments by Seamus Heaney following his inclusion in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982). Heaney had declared: 'My passport is green / no glass of ours

was ever raised to toast the Queen.¹³ Boland responds: 'Poetry is defined by its energies and its eloquence, not by the passport of the poet or the editor; or the name of the nationality. That way lie all the categories, the separations, the censorships that poetry seeks to dispel.'¹⁴ Her statement resonates with the central premise of Christopher Whyte's study *Modern Scottish Poetry* (2004). Whyte asks: 'How realistic is it to expect that, if we were to bring together the most significant works of Scottish poetry from the last sixty years, they would dutifully reflect a growing desire for and progress towards national autonomy?'¹⁵ Moreover, in terms of Scottish women's poetry there is little sense of an informing literary tradition. For Liz Lochhead in the 1970s the absence of a recognisable tradition was a liberation, a freedom to make things up as one went along. In terms of Scottish poetry more generally, Jamie's poetry works at a tangent to that of many of her male forebears. Whilst questions of language *are* important to her work, she wears her Scots lightly. Her poetry sidesteps the ardent linguistic politics that, in different ways, has characterised the work of writers like Hugh MacDiarmid or Tom Leonard. Jamie often employs dialect in an ironic and highly stylised manner:

Jock's a-brawling on the Aberdeen train.
I'll punch your heid! he says to his weans
I'll punch *your* heid! repeat the weans.¹⁶

Language it would seem is not the only thing passed from one generation to the next. Arguably much of Jamie's career has been spent defying a specifically Scottish scepticism regarding the legitimacy of the female poetic voice. Again Eavan Boland provides an insight into this kind of political aesthetic:

[M]erely by the fact of going upstairs in a winter dusk, merely by starting to write a poem at a window that looked out on the Dublin hills, I was entering a place of force. Just by trying to record the life I lived in the poem I wrote, I had become a political poet.¹⁷

Jamie's loyalty to her own experience demands that we attend to her poetry on its own terms before reaching for the flag and all that that entails.

Jamie's 'Meadowsweet' resonates with the kind of sentiments Boland locates within the very act of female writing. The poem begins with a preface – 'Tradition suggests that certain of the Gaelic women poets were buried face down.' The face-down burial, of course, was not solely the reserve of the female poet. It was more commonly employed as a way of interring witches; the idea being to silence them and prevent them speaking further maledictions from the grave. Jamie's poem deliberately plays on this association, interweaving images of the supernatural and otherworldly with the idea of the unreconstituted female poet. The poem begins at the funeral:

So they buried her, and turned home,
 a drab psalm
 hanging about them like haar¹⁸

Much of the mood of the first verse comes from the sonorous qualities of its language. Jamie's use of free verse suggests that it is not the line-endings but the internal rhymes of the poem we ought to attend. The lifeless, bland quality of the 'drab psalm' is emphasised through the assonance of the 'a' sounds, a tone which overflows to the 'hanging . . . haar' in the next line. The third line is itself enclosed at either end by the 'h' sounds which act like bookends. There is a feeling of entrapment, of a world imprisoned by the ubiquitous melancholy of such religiosity and its incantatory blandness. Jamie's use of the word 'haar' lends the scene specifically Scottish undertones. We are reminded of the vigour of Free Presbyterianism and its dour denial of the material world. The image of the face-down burial also suggests a communal desire to punish the female poet, to set her on her way, to hell rather than to heaven. What the community does not realise, what the haar of the drab psalm blinds it to, is the natural cycle of rebirth in which it has unknowingly placed the poet. We are told of seeds caught in her hair that will sprout and grow, nourished by her decomposing body. They will break the surface as summer flowers, meadowsweet and bastard balm. Their role: 'showing her, / when the time came, how to dig herself out'.¹⁹ Nature possesses a force and a power that will not conform to human reckoning. Also known as Queen of the Meadow, the flowering meadowsweet carries secondary connotations to do with female empowerment. Similarly, 'bastard balm' blossoms in colourful defiance of Christian prohibitions regarding sex, marriage and childbirth. As with Arabia and small-town Scotland, Jamie looks to play differences off against one another. 'Meadowsweet' cultivates its own pairs of opposites: grey haar / colourful flowers; dour Presbyterianism / vibrant Celticism; the world above / the world below. The flowers breaking the surface defy such rigid boundaries and the community's attempts to police them. From a Christian perspective the material world is, of course, of secondary importance. It is a place of preparation, an apprenticeship for the next life. This sense of detachment, of looking elsewhere, is contrasted with the female poet who merges and becomes one with the landscape. When the time comes she will return:

to surface and greet them,
 mouth young, and full again
 of dirt, and spit, and poetry.²⁰

Poetry refuses to remain buried. It will resurface and resume its place amid the grime and physicality of everyday life. The 'drab psalm' which opens

the poem is contrasted with the soundscape of the final line, its repeated 't' sounds drumming out the guttural liveliness of the material world. Poetry is not a lifeless, foreboding mist that clouds our vision. It is textured, grainy and raw. It exists within us rather than 'hanging' over us. 'Meadowsweet' rewrites the Christian lament 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust', turning its elegiac sadness into a celebratory shout. The traditional teleology of the Christian life, earthly denial followed by heavenly fulfilment, is undone by the cyclical, regenerative processes of nature. The poet's rebirth in the form of flowers offers both literal and metaphorical riposte to the finality of death.

The fusion of the female poet and the natural environment in 'Meadowsweet' anticipates the tenor of much of Jamie's recent poetry. This heightened sense of identification can in part be traced to the poet's own recent experiences of childbirth. The word 'jizzen' which lends Jamie's 1999 collection its title is old Scots for childbed. In a sequence called 'Ultrasound' the poet describes a new found intimacy that accompanied the pregnancy and birth of her son Duncan:

arms laden with you in a blanket,
I had to walk to the top of the garden,
to touch, in a complicit
homage of equals, the spiral
trunks of our plum trees, the moss,
the robin's roost in the holly.²¹

This process of identification, of new found complicity, is a useful way of approaching Jamie's own perception of our current environmental crisis. For her the problem lies in our own growing sense of estrangement from the natural world: 'I don't recognise the idea of "the outdoors", or of "nature". We are "nature", in our anatomy and mortality. Regarding nature as the other, different, an "outdoors" an "environment" speaks volumes about our alienation from ourselves.'²² For Jamie the problem is the language we use to speak about the natural world. Our everyday speech differentiates us, and creates an artificial barrier between ourselves and the world around us. Here we might think about the abstract rhetoric of ecology and its frequent use of intangible and apocalyptic language. Meanwhile we are paralysed amid a welter of statistics and facts, and by the sensationalist character of our twenty-four-hour media culture. Again we can turn to Wordsworth who, more than two centuries ago, diagnosed this as one of the malaises of modernity. The poet identified such experience with a loss of sensibility, one that resulted from industrialisation and the mass urbanisation of society:

[A] multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most

effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies.²³

Arguably we have only become more blunted, our torpor more savage, in the intervening centuries. Critic Richard Kerridge comments: 'The real, material ecological crisis, then, is also a cultural crisis, a crisis of representation. The inability of political cultures to address environmentalism is in part a failure of narrative.'²⁴ The ecological crisis represents a failure of the political narrative, shackled as it is to national politics and the short-termism of the four-year electoral cycle. It is a failure of the scientific narrative, where diagnosis is one thing and cure quite another. And it is a failure of the traditional narratives of the Left. In the face of such global problems, arguments over class, gender and race can seem like rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.²⁵ Advances in biotechnology and agri-business mean that the relationship between nature and culture is one of the key intellectual problems of the twenty-first century. At the other end of the scale our challenge is to avoid the kind of green fascism and clichéd alternatives with which we have become familiar. Images of the dreadlocked tree-hugger spring to mind. As does Philip Larkin's ironic figure in his poem 'Poetry of Departures' which exposed the futility of 'chucking everything off' and retiring from the world 'all stubbly with goodness'.²⁶ Against this backdrop Kathleen Jamie offers us a poetry of reconnection and reclamation. In fact, if language has fostered our modern alienated existence, for Jamie it is poetry as a complex linguistic performance that holds the key to change:

I used to think that language was what got in the way, that it was a screen, a dark glass. That you could not get at the world because you were stuck with language, but now I think that's wrong. Now I think language is what connects us with the world.²⁷

Her recent volumes bring us closer to the natural world, to re-establish a sense of intimacy with the outdoors, to rediscover an interdependence that has been forgotten amidst the onrush of our contemporary age.

As the title of Jamie's collection *The Tree House* (2005) suggests, the poet is interested in reconfiguring our relationship with the natural world; in thinking of new ways to live a more interdependent existence. In 'The Whale-Watcher' the poet turns her back on civilisation, holing herself up in a beachside caravan in order to wait for a sign from the ocean.²⁸ The poem begins in declarative mood: 'And when at last the road / gives out, I'll walk –.' The end of the road has no sense of final destination, of arrival and

repose. It suggests a failed or aborted journey, and that we still have some way to travel. The crumbling tarmac is highly symbolic. We are reminded again of Jamie's 'walking-pace world', only here it resonates with the specious freedoms of technology. We may think of the open road and the iconography of car advertising, in contrast to which, of course, stands the more mundane reality of the gridlocked motorway and carbon emissions. The second verse announces the poet's determination to 'hole up the cold / summer in some battered caravan'. This is a world where the seasons are out of kilter, where climate no longer functions as it should. The battered caravan reminds us of a bygone era, before the low cost airline, the package holiday, and the unseen environmental price tag. From the caravan the poet will look out at 'the brittle waves':

till my eyes evaporate
and I'm willing again
to deal myself in:
having watched them

breach, breathe, and dive
far out in the glare,
like stitches sewn in a rent
almost beyond repair.

The poem climaxes with the whales breaking the surface of the water. The aborted future with which it began is resolved with the poet choosing to deal herself back in. Again the soundscape of Jamie's writing is important. The rhythm of the poem is deliberately reorganised by the single syllables and open vowels of 'breach, breathe, and dive'. Both rhythmically and thematically, the poem hinges on this moment. There is a sense of a slower, deeper rhythm welling up from the bottom of the ocean. The whales' immensity adds to the weight and majesty of the image. Their deliberate, measured breath stands in contrast to the road and its sense of hurried urgency. There is a process of recalibration at work, a sense of restoring some balance. The sight of the mammals renews the poet's spirit; it reinvigorates her and enables her to rejoin the tumult of living. The organic, natural rhythm of the whales as they breach, breathe, and dive spills over into the rest of the poem, which concludes on its only full-rhyme – 'glare' and 'repair'. Again the rhythmic qualities of the poetry underpin what is happening at a thematic level. For Jamie attending to nature is its own form of catharsis and consolation. The poem echoes Samuel Johnson's pithy observation: 'The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it.'²⁹ The *discordia concors*, or harmonious discord, between the image of surfacing whales and the notion of stitches is doubly suggestive. It echoes both the sewing up of a

garment and the post-operative stitching of a human body. We have the everyday inextricably bound up with issues of life and death. This cross-contextualisation recalls the nature of the environmental crisis, where our everyday behaviour has potentially catastrophic consequences for life on the planet. It calls to mind the popular environmental mantra 'Act locally, think globally'. If the poem opens with a feeling of resignation its conclusion is slightly more upbeat. The qualified nature of the tear, 'almost beyond repair', suggests it is not too late, that there is a possibility to mend and fix this damage.

As 'The Whale-Watcher' reveals, Jamie's acute interest in the natural world is informed by her own historical moment and an awareness of the contemporary environmental crisis. Her poetry can be theorised by way of a new school of literary studies operating under the term 'ecocriticism'. Emerging in the 1990s, ecocriticism is interested in the relationship between literature and the environment, particularly the representation of landscape, the treatment of wildlife and the economy of the natural world. It represents a change in emphasis, a digression from the more familiar literary analysis premised on gender, race, class and so on. The emergence of ecocriticism also reflects the changing political landscape of the 1990s and the emergence of environmentalism as part of our everyday vocabulary. This essay has already invoked Wordsworth twice. His importance to this new critical movement can be traced back to Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991). Bate sought to revisit Romanticism, and particularly the work of Wordsworth, to interrogate the aesthetic politics of this period and in particular its depictions of landscape and environment. According to Bate, rather than representing merely another modish trend in the academic study of literature, ecocriticism is part of an ongoing attempt to understand our relationship to the natural world: '[I]f one historicises the idea of an ecological viewpoint – a respect for the earth and a scepticism as to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society – one finds oneself squarely in the Romantic tradition.'³⁰ The current ecological crisis is a consequence of the ideological assumptions that underpinned the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century. Bate continues: '[T]he human claim to understand nature has led to Western humankind's understanding of itself as apart from nature and therefore able to use and reshape nature at will.'³¹ This sense of distance and estrangement accords with Jamie's own diagnosis above. We might also recall 'Meadowsweet' and its depiction of a recalcitrant natural environment; one which acted in defiance of the human community's desires to bury the female poet. Humanity's domination and exploitation of the natural world are fundamental to the contemporary environmental crisis. Such readings of modern ecology situate it within a wider debate about the core values of the Enlightenment and the belief in scientific rationalism as the engine of human progress. As a result we may

locate ecocriticism within a wider tradition; one that includes thinkers like Theodore Adorno and Jurgen Habermas, and is highly sceptical regarding the ideological foundations of modernity.³²

Jamie's poetry is interested in the tension between the economy of nature and the economy of human society. In contrast to human domination, her poetry enters into what Richard Mabey describes as 'a conversation with the natural world'.³³ Like 'The Whale-Watcher' there is a sense of recalibration at work, an attempt to reset the balance of power. The natural is not a passive object, but is instead replete with signification. Jamie's more recent poetry features the personification of trees, birds and animals. They speak through the poems as the poet asks them: 'how to live / on this damp ambiguous earth'.³⁴ Jamie's openness to the environment, her willingness to seek out its 'edgy intelligence' resonates with the work of the nineteenth-century American writer Henry David Thoreau.³⁵ For Thoreau the outdoors was not merely an economic resource to be harvested, it existed as a source of instruction: '[I]n wilderness is the preservation of the world'.³⁶ Jamie can be seen to adopt a similar position in her poem 'Alder'. Looking upon an old tree in bad weather she asks: 'Are you weary, alder tree / in this, the age of rain?'.³⁷ The rain conjures images of tearfulness, sadness and sorrow. We are also reminded of acid rain and the threat posed by the devastation of the tropical rainforest. The 'age of rain' might also imply a second diluvian flood, with an angry God punishing mankind's greedy exploitation of the world. In contrast to Enlightenment aspirations to understand and master nature, Jamie's poems adopt an uncertain and questioning tone. In her most recent prose work *Findings* (2005) she speaks of trying to recapture the original meaning of the word 'essay' which comes from French verb *essayer* meaning to try or endeavour.³⁸

We might also align Jamie's poetry with the Russian writer Anton Chekhov's definition of how art works: 'It is the business of art to pose questions in interesting ways, not to provide answers'.³⁹ Her poetry inverts the arrogance of humanism and mankind's wish to regard himself as the measure of all things. Jamie comments: 'Poets use language as a form of "seeing"'. More and more, however, I think the job is to listen, to pay attention . . .⁴⁰ Such comments echo the work of another Romantic poet, William Blake, who was profoundly influenced by the power of vision: 'To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is far more beautiful than the Sun . . . The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing which stands in the way'.⁴¹ In 'Alder' Jamie acknowledges the tree's historic pedigree. It unfolded 'before the glaciers' and as such partakes in a deep sense of time, one which predates human memory. The tree's vintage is offered as a foil to humanity's youthful arrogance. Like 'The Whale-Watcher' the poem shuns the advances of modernity, again foregrounding a slower wisdom and a walking-pace world. Rather than a passive object the alder tree is something to be spoken

to and learned from. It offers us access to a deeper form of cultural memory. Modern history is overshadowed; given a new perspective by a passage of time far greater than human reckoning.

If the official discourses of environmentalism alienate us through the sheer scale of their terms, poetry attempts to operate at a much more personal and subjective level. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge commented: 'He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small.'⁴² Shunning the grandiose and the abstract, Jamie's poetry delights in the minutiae of the natural world. It is pipistrelles, sparrows and frogs rather than epic and emotive scenery that capture her imagination. Her work stands in contrast to some of the more affected poses of traditional Romantic poetry. Her experience of the natural world is fleeting, stolen amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday life: 'Between the laundry and the fetching kids from school, that's how birds enter my life. I listen. During a lull in the traffic: oyster-catchers; in the school-playground, sparrows.'⁴³ 'The Buddleia' addresses the idea of such snatched moments in contrast to the more contrived and orchestrated epiphanies which poetry often offers us.⁴⁴ The poem opens with Jamie in high aesthetic pose, ironically contemplating the metaphysics of existence.

When I pause to consider
a god, or creation unfolding
in front of my eyes –
is this my lot?

The self-conscious tone of this verse has Jamie raise an eyebrow at the dramatic postures often associated with her craft. The use of the indefinite article 'a god' distances the poem from any affiliation with Christianity and its more dogmatic metaphysics. The mood of abstract musing, generated by the rhythm of the longer line, is cut short with the four short syllables 'is this my lot?' The poet is woken from her reverie by the most mundane objects, her parents with their broken Hoover and her quarrelling kids. The stylised musings of poetry are suddenly unhinged by the more mundane concerns of daily life. The second verse sets about reconciling this tension. Beginning 'Come evening, it's almost too late / to walk in the garden' it continues the sense that daily life is intrinsically inimical to the more meditative and enriched aspects of poetic experience. She attempts to 'retire the masculine / God of my youth', evoking the plants around her, the lupins, foxloves and buddleia, from which the poem takes its title. It is this last plant that the poet pauses over and describes. The 'heavy horns' of the buddleia:

open to flower, and draw
these bumbling, well-meaning bees

which remind me again,
 of my father . . . whom, Christ,
 I've forgotten to call.

Here it is nature's own organic process rather than the deliberate imagining of the poet that creates the association and subsequent moment of revelation. In contrast to the opening verse with the poet deliberately mining for metaphysical truth, it is the natural processes of the garden that enable her realisation. The poem stumbles upon these resemblances in an almost unconscious manner. It is not an abstract, heavenly quality but 'the bumbling, well-meaning' aspect of Jamie's father that is evoked. This leads to the understated disclosure of their deep bond and the remembrance of a forgotten phone call. We are cast back to the description in the first verse and 'my suddenly elderly parents'. The single word 'suddenly' reminds us of our tendency to take things for granted, to be blinded by our search for what we imagine to be a more meaningful encounter with the world. The shock of 'Christ, / I've forgotten to call' is a moment of reawakening. The poet realises something she always knew. The title 'The Buddleia' also invites us to consider the origin or seed of such thoughts, their own moment of budding. It is through being mindfully present, allowing nature to reveal itself, that the poetic insight is achieved. This sense of listening and the spiritual value in paying attention pervades *The Tree House*. In 'Pipistrelles' the poet watches a group of bats which 'vanished, suddenly, before we'd understood'.⁴⁵ In 'Daisies' it is the flowers themselves that are imbued with a sense of composure and self-awareness:

We are flowers of the common
 sward, that much we understand.
 of everything else
 we're innocent.⁴⁶

This mindfulness revisits the heightened state of consciousness to which her early travels through Buddhist Tibet exposed Jamie. In a poem from *The Autonomous Region* (1993) she imagines a fourth-century Chinese Buddhist monk setting out on a journey of discovery:

And our horse mayn't be divine,
 we must ride it and be astonished and glad
 to arrive at a clutter of gold roofs
 cupped in a valley:
 with a scented tree
 whose every leaf
 shimmers with the face of the divine.⁴⁷

In Jamie's poetry it is the realisation of the physical world that offers a gateway to philosophical revelation. Where *The Tree House* marks something of a departure is not only in its acute interest in the natural world, but in its paring down and Jamie's preference for the shorter lyric. Does such economy speak to our contemporary urge to recycle and live less wasteful lives? Perhaps. Where there is definite resonance is with Jamie's desire to attend to the world around her and elevate its importance. In this her poetry resembles the work of the Scottish poet Norman MacCaig. At the foot of one of the poet's favourite hills in the Scottish Highlands, Stac Polly, is a bench with a carving quoting MacCaig: 'I took my mind a walk.' It is this combination of earthy and Eastern, mountain and metaphysical, that Jamie's work also develops. The MacCaig line comes from his poem 'An Ordinary Day' which is a highly appropriate note on which to end:

and my mind observed to me,
or I to it, how ordinary
extraordinary things are or

how extraordinary ordinary
things are, like the nature of the mind
and the process of observing.⁴⁸