‘The Scene of Our Constant Negotiation’: Tracing the Development of Kathleen Jamie’s Ecopoetic Sensibility

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Prospectus

This thesis traces the development of an ecopoetic sensibility in Kathleen Jamie's works from *The Golden Peak: Travels in North Pakistan* (1992) to *Surfacing* (2019). Close readings of key poems and essays will be carried out in order to examine the continuities and developments that form this sensibility, showing that the overtly ecological themes of Jamie's later work grow out of and are informed by her earlier work, and that the socio-political issues (primarily regarding gender and nationality) that are central in the earlier work are still present in the later work and form an important part of her ecopoetic sensibility, departing from a critical tendency to separate Jamie's oeuvre into discrete stages. Attention will be paid throughout to the ways in which Jamie uses language to mediate with the non-human, with a particular focus on her ever-evolving use of Scots in this process.

This thesis will draw upon contemporary discourses of ecopoetics and ecocriticism as well as the writings of twentieth-century philosopher Martin Heidegger which have influenced these fields. Timothy Morton's theory of the ecological mesh will emerge as a particularly useful framework through which to understand Jamie's work, with its prioritisation of points both of interconnection and difference between the human and the non-human.

Jamie has been quoted as saying, 'People sometimes say writing is about "expressing oneself", which is ridiculous. It is the scene of our constant negotiation.'[1] This thesis seeks to prioritise the many negotiations Jamie undertakes, and her commitment to reengaging with these negotiations, over any kind of rigid conclusions or endpoints. This is reflected in its title, which identifies a fluid, shifting ecopoetic 'sensibility' in Jamie's output, rather than a fixed methodology. The aim of this work is to demonstrate that a reading of Jamie's work that prioritises interconnection, negotiation, tension, and open-endedness, as her writing does, is more fruitful than readings that attempt to impose fixed arguments upon it.

[1] Kathleen Jamie, 'Kathleen Jamie: More Than Human' (interviewed by Attila Dósa, 3 October 2001 for *Beyond Identity: New Horizons in Modern Scottish Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009)), pp. 135-145 (p. 144).

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Introduction

Kathleen Jamie's significance in the field of Scottish and British nature writing has already been well-established.[2] However, there has so far only been one sustained critical assessment of her oeuvre, *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work* (2015, ed. by Rachel Falconer), and while some critics have pointed to the potential reading of her later, more overtly ecological writing as having grown out of her early works,[3] there has yet to be an in-depth account of the development of what this paper will call her ecopoetic sensibility from the beginning of her career up until the present. This term is intended to indicate something more fluid and shifting than a fixed methodology, as Jamie constantly interrogates and re-envisions her own approach. The term 'ecopoetic practice' will also be used in this paper to refer to the specific techniques Jamie uses to convey this sensibility. Rachel Falconer argues that 'Jamie's writing has evolved through many distinct phases, though there are also strong lines of continuity and an inner coherence to her corpus.'[4] This thesis will examine the development of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility alongside her growth both as a writer and in her personal life (as she writes about childbirth, motherhood, the care of her aging parents and then their deaths) through close readings of key poems and essays, reading for continuities and noting developing interests and literary techniques, whilst also acknowledging the integrity of individual collections. This close-reading approach has been chosen in order to avoid the critical tendency to separate Jamie's oeuvre into discrete stages (which will be discussed later). Rather than attempting to impose any pre-fixed arguments upon the texts it takes as its study, this thesis will instead seek to employ the kind of exploratory, open-minded approach that Jamie herself develops in her writing, with its argument growing from careful examination of the contents of the texts. From this approach, it is hoped that a complex, nuanced picture of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility, and the ways in which it has evolved throughout her career, will emerge.

Timothy Clark defines ecopoetry as

> an aesthetic interested in formal experimentation and the conception of the poet or poem as forming a kind of intellectual or spiritual frontier, newly coupled with a sense of vulnerability and otherness of the natural world, distrust of a society dominated by materialism and instrumental reason, and sometimes giving a counteraffirmation of non-western modes of perception, thought or rhetorical practice. The poem is often conceived as a space of subjective redefinition and rediscovery through encounters with the non-human. What was taken to be in the romantic lyric an aggrandisement of the personal ego, the appropriation of natural

[2] See Rachel Falconer, introduction to *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 1-7; Deborah Lilley, *The New Pastoral in Contemporary British Writing* (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), p. 10.
[3] E.g., Paul Volsik, 'Somewhere Between the Presbyterian and the Tao: Contemporary Scottish Poetry', *Etudes Anglaises* 60.3 (2007), 346-360 (p. 351); Monika Szuba, *Contemporary Scottish Poetry and the Natural World: Burnside, Jamie, Robertson and White* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. 91.
[4] Falconer, introduction to *Kathleen Jamie*, p. 6.

> forms and encounters as a too easy source of personal meaning and endorsement […] gives way to a more chastening ethos of personal, bodily finitude and respect.[5]

This is the definition of ecopoetry that will be adhered to, with the addition that, in Jamie's writing, the non-fiction essay is also one of these 'spaces of subjective redefinition and rediscovery'. Indeed, Jamie maintains that her essays are in a sense poetic: 'they get called non-fiction, but they're more related to poetry than they are to fiction. They're not prose poems, but they're more affiliated to poetry.'[6] This thesis will demonstrate that Jamie's non-fiction prose works are equally as important to her ecopoetic practice as her poetry.

The ideal at the heart of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility is an active attentiveness to the world around us that is enabled by foregrounding the senses and quieting one's internal narrative. However, in Jamie's work, attentiveness to the sensory world sometimes only yields riddles, faint impressions of meaning that cannot be fully expressed by language. This negotiation between knowledge and mystery is key to Jamie's writing, and is one of many negotiations she carries out. Jamie has been quoted as saying, 'People sometimes say writing is about "expressing oneself", which is ridiculous. It is the scene of our constant negotiation.'[7] This thesis aims to show that the idea of negotiation is central to Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility. Points of intersection, contradiction, tension and risk are revisited and reworked throughout her career as she seeks to prioritise negotiations of the self (or selves) and one's place in the world and within the systems of the Earth over assertions of any fixed identity or self. Rigid categorisation and stabilities are challenged in her writing; she instead prioritises fluidity and uncertainty. However, within this realm of uncertainty Jamie is still able to make strong assertions about the way we live on and with the Earth. This thesis seeks to reconcile these negotiations and contradictions, as well as the changing terminology both used by Jamie and applied to her writing by critics, into a coherent (if not always comfortable) ecopoetic sensibility.

Firstly, some critical terms regarding ecological thinking and writing must be set out. As critics such as Clark have noted, there is no fixed lexicon or methodology in the field of ecocriticism as it is a relatively young school of criticism.[8] Clark offers a 'Working definition' of ecocriticism as '*a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, usually considered from out of the current global environmental crisis and its revisionist challenge to given modes of thought and practice*.'[9] This is a reasonably effective description. However, issues arise when we begin to consider which terms to use to discuss literary works themselves. Jamie has been frank about her

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[5] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 139-140.
[6] Kathleen Jamie, *The SRB Interview: Kathleen Jamie* (interviewed by Rosemary Goring for *Scottish Review of Books*) (8 June 2012) <https://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/2012/06/the-srb-interview-kathleen-jamie/> [accessed 18 October 2019].
[7] Kathleen Jamie, 'Kathleen Jamie: More Than Human' (interviewed by Attila Dósa, 3 October 2001 for *Beyond Identity: New Horizons in Modern Scottish Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009)), pp. 135-145 (p. 144).
[8] Clark, p. 3-4; p. 202.
[9] Ibid, p. xiii [Clark's italics].

distaste for the labels 'environmentalist' and 'ecological poet'.[10] She has also expressed her discomfort at the term 'nature writing', saying that 'Publishers and bookshops want a wee ticket to put on it. That's not serving us well.'[11] So how, then, are we to describe Jamie's writing? Given her characteristic resistance to categorisation and definition, it may be more useful to turn to ecocritics for answers.

Jonathan Bate is sometimes credited as beginning the ecocritical movement in British literature with *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991); as Bate himself writes, 'The book itself might be described as a preliminary sketch towards a literary ecocriticism.'[12] His main argument is that the basis of modern ecological thought can be traced back to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, John Clare and Lord Byron. Bate's early use of the term 'ecopoetry' in his follow-up work, *The Song of the Earth* (2000), is also of great significance. He draws upon the writings of German philosopher Martin Heidegger to define the term, writing that 'Ecopoetry is not a description of dwelling with the earth [in a Heideggerian sense], not a disengaged thinking about it, but an experiencing of it.'[13] This hints at the importance of sensory engagement in ecopoetry, the kind of sustained 'noticing' and 'attention' that form a vital part of Jamie's ecopoetic practice.[14] Heidegger's idea of dwelling also provides a useful framework for understanding Jamie's work, which will be discussed later in this introduction. Bate also emphasises the importance of locality to this strain of ecopoetry, foreshadowing discourses around thinking locally versus thinking globally that have come to the fore in more recent ecocriticism.[15] He uses the term 'nature' frequently and, while he does assert that it must be 'contested' due to 'the possibility of there being no part of the earth left untouched by man',[16] he does not interrogate the implications of the term in depth either in *Romantic Ecology* or *The Song of the Earth*.

Clark criticises Bate's use of the term 'nature', arguing that

> What Bate and Wordsworth idealise as 'natural' is more accurately described as a mode of relatively non-exploitative and stable settledness, a locally focussed pre-capitalist lifestyle that may endure for an indefinite period of time without destroying

[10] Jamie, 'More Than Human', p. 142.
[11] Kathleen Jamie, *Kathleen Jamie: 'Nature Writing has Been Colonised by White Men'* (interviewed by Patrick Barkham for *The Guardian*) (17 October 2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/oct/17/kathleen-jamie-surfacing-interview-nature-writing-colonised-by-white-men> [accessed 18 October 2019].
[12] Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 11.
[13] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 42.
[14] Kathleen Jamie, introduction to *Antlers of Water: Writing on the Nature and Environment of Scotland*, ed. by Kathleen Jamie (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2020), pp. xi-xvii (p. xvi).
[15] For example, Timothy Morton's call for a 'progressive ecology' that is 'global, not local (if not universal)', Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 28.
[16] Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 56.

> the resource on which it depends, whatever its original basis in the violence of prehistoric clearances.[17]

For Clark, the terms 'nature' and 'natural' must always be questioned as they can belie certain fundamental assumptions and preconceptions, often ethical or moral. He is accordingly sceptical of 'nature writing' as a generic label, complaining that the term is outdated and has 'a misleadingly cosy feel.'[18] He suggests that a more effective replacement for the term 'nature' would be 'environment', arguing that 'In the limited sense of places unaffected by human activity there is no 'nature' as such left on the planet, but there are various 'environments', some more pristine than others.'[19] This again points to the importance of locality in ecocritical discourses, but Clark still seems to be assuming that 'nature' is something that is fundamentally non-human, unaffected by our presence on the earth. However, he later asserts that 'Nature is already us, in mixed, uncomfortable and sometimes even disgusting ways, not something 'out there'.'[20] Still, the term 'environmental writing' arguably suggests externality, and is therefore an unsuitable label for Jamie's writing, which often takes the inner workings of the human body, and later psyche, as its subject.

Evidently, it is difficult for even the most self-aware of ecocritics to get away from the pervasive Cartesian assumption that culture and nature are two separate opposing forces. As Louisa Gairn points out, it is the challenges posed by modern ecological writing to such 'Cartesian hierarchies' that have popularised the genre.[21] However, these dualities are so deeply embedded in Western culture (and, indeed, the English language) that finding terms which do not unintentionally reinforce them can be problematic. Jos Smith's solution is to eschew the label 'nature writing' in favour of 'writing of place'.[22] 'Place', he argues, is a word which is more suggestive of 'the fusion of human and non-human' which is so often present in this kind of writing than 'nature', something which has traditionally been perceived as an external phenomenon.[23] He takes his argument a step further by offering 'The spatial metaphor of the archipelago with its fluid and neutral polycentrism' as a way of conceptualising the ecologically-minded contemporary writing in Britain which has often been labelled 'the New Nature Writing'.[24] This idea takes inspiration from Andrew McNeillie's *Archipelago* journal which, while primarily concerned with publishing writing from the United Kingdom and Ireland, is not parochial: 'while the unnameable archipelago is its subject, its vision is by implication global'.[25] This is the quality of the archipelago that Smith finds value in: 'Place and the

[17] Clark, p. 19.
[18] Ibid, p. 5.
[19] Ibid, p. 6.
[20] Ibid, p. 70.
[21] Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 6.
[22] Jos Smith, 'An Archipelagic Literature: Re-framing "The New Nature Writing"', *Green Letters* 17.1 (2013), 5-15 (p. 8).
[23] Ibid, p. 7.
[24] Ibid, p. 10.
[25] Andrew McNeillie, editorial to *Archipelago* 1 (summer 2007), vii-viii (p. vii).

local in an archipelagic literature are about recovering the particularities of a territory which encourage conversation with other locations as a part of the very progressive rethinking of the place itself. Groundedness, in this case, opens place up.'[26] While this is certainly true of Jamie's writing, the term 'writing of place' suffers the same shortcomings as 'environmental writing', still suggesting externality and imposing limitations on the subject matter of ecologically-minded writing – Jamie's essays that deal with the internal workings of the human body, such as 'Pathologies' (2012), could not easily be defined as 'writing of place'.

So, where does this leave us regarding terminology? Jamie's most recent creative endeavour has been to curate and edit *Antlers of Water: Writing on the Nature and Environment of Scotland* (2020). In her short introduction to the collection, Jamie claims that 'It announces a "new Scottish nature writing"', 'which concerns our relationship with the more-than-human world', indicating that she is perhaps now more open to the term 'nature writing'.[27] The collection contains short prose and poetry by writers from diverse backgrounds – though they all live or have lived at some point in Scotland – as well as photography and experimental artworks, breaking even the boundaries expressed by the word 'writing' in the book's sub-title. As Jamie recently said in an online event promoting the book, 'I did want diversity in all sorts, and of course that meant diversity in forms as well.'[28] This overt push for diversity may stem from the view she expressed in a 2019 interview that nature writing 'has been colonised […] by middle-class white men.'[29] Jamie's writing, as we shall see in the following chapters, is often concerned with seeking out alternative perspectives and modes of perception, so it is fitting that she would look to include as many different voices as possible in her overview of contemporary Scottish nature writing. Diversity is also represented in subject matter, as 'the range of concerns is as various as Scotland itself, from uninhabited island to tenement block, from rockpool to eagle's flight, from red deer to pigeons.'[30] These different levels of diversity work to destabilise any preconceived notions of what nature writing *should* be, instead presenting a radical vision of what nature writing *can* be. Perhaps, then, we do not need to replace the term 'nature writing', but rather work to redefine it. This thesis will use the term to describe any writing which is ecologically minded in the sense that, as Jamie puts it, it 'pay[s] attention to the world, and to language, and strive[s] to bring the two together',[31] while remaining aware of the many loaded implications it can carry. It will, however, attempt to avoid describing the animals, landscapes, and elemental forces in Jamie's writing as 'natural', as this could imply that humans are in turn *un*natural,

[26] Smith, p. 12.
[27] Jamie, *Antlers of Water*, p. xi.
[28] Kathleen Jamie, *Kathleen Jamie, Chitra Ramaswamy & Amanda Thomson:* Antlers of Water (interviewed by Clare English for Edinburgh International Book Festival) (broadcast 24 August 2020), <https://www.edbookfest.co.uk/the-festival/whats-on/kathleen-jamie-chitra-ramaswamy-amanda-thomson-antlers-of-water/player> [accessed 24 August 2020].
[29] Barkham, 'Nature Writing has Been Colonised by White Men'.
[30] Jamie, *Antlers of Water*, p. xiii.
[31] Ibid, p. xvi.

separate from the systems and cycles of the Earth. It will instead use the broad term 'non-human' in order to acknowledge their otherness from the human whilst allowing for a system of nature which also includes the human.

As well as contemporary ecocritical discourses, this thesis will draw upon the writings of Martin Heidegger, which have had a significant influence on many of these discourses. Many of Heidegger's ideas are relevant to Jamie's work, particularly that of dwelling. Dwelling, or being-in-the-world, relates to the way in which human existence, or Being, is grounded and located, something which is reflected in the word he uses to refer to humans (those creatures who are able to understand Being): *Dasein*, which literally translates as 'Being-there'.[32] Richard Polt explains that, for Heidegger, '"there" is so essential to us that we would be nothing at all without it. […] Our world is the context in terms of which we understand ourselves, and within which we become who we are.'[33] Much contemporary ecopoetry, ecocriticism and nature writing has grown out of this way of thinking, with writers questioning what it means to dwell on and with the Earth. In his later work, Heidegger argued that works of art 'make unconcealment as such happen in regard to beings as a whole'.[34] In simpler terms, works of art 'have the power to make us truly notice the Being of beings, instead of taking it for granted.'[35] As we shall see in the following chapters, many of Jamie's poems and essays enact unconcealment in the moment of sensory encounter with the non-human, raising questions about our way of dwelling.

In addition, Timothy Morton's idea of the ecological mesh is a particularly useful visual metaphor through which to view Jamie's work. He argues that 'The ecological view […] is a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a definite center or edge. It is radical intimacy, coexistence with other beings, sentient and otherwise – and how can we so clearly tell the difference?'[36] In Jamie's writing, that which is traditionally opposed – nature and culture, inner and outer, domestic and wild, private and public – is revealed to be interconnected, while the gaps in the mesh, as it were, are acknowledged and respect is given to the difference and autonomy of the non-human. As Morton maintains,

> "Mesh" can mean the holes in a network and threading between them. It suggests both hardness and delicacy. It has its uses in biology, mathematics, and engineering and in weaving and computing – think stockings and graphic design, metals and fabrics. […] Each point of the mesh is both the center and edge of a system of points, so there is no absolute center or edge.[37]

[32] Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 29.
[33] Ibid, p. 30.
[34] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 2nd edn., ed. by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, California: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1993), p. 181.
[35] Polt, p. 135.
[36] Morton, p. 8.
[37] Ibid, pp. 28-29.

This image of a system of points of both interconnection and difference will be applied to both the content of Jamie's writing and to an overview of her body of work, enabling seemingly conflicting preoccupations to be negotiated and reconciled into a coherent, if at times uneasy, ecopoetic sensibility.

The following chapters will examine the development of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility chronologically, beginning from the publications concerned with her travels in Asia: *The Golden Peak: Travels in North Pakistan* (1992) and *The Autonomous Region: Poems and Photographs from Tibet* (1993). This is not to suggest that her first three poetry collections, *Black Spiders* (1982), *A Flame in Your Heart* (1986) and *The Way We Live* (1987), are not of significance. However, as chapter one will argue, it is being dislocated in foreign spaces filled with political and cultural tensions, as well as the influence of eastern spirituality, folklore, and modes of perception, that forms a significant first step in the development of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility, even though these works are not overtly concerned with ecological matters. It is therefore more compelling to take her early travel writing as a starting point for this thesis. Chapter two focuses on *The Queen of Sheba* (1994) and *Jizzen* (1999), proposing that the common readings of these collections along gendered or national lines neglect Jamie's growing concern with ecological themes, and that Jamie's prioritisation of socio-political issues in this stage of her career should not be separated from her ecopoetic sensibility. Chapter three discusses Jamie's shift of focus to nature writing, examining the ways in which she self-consciously develops her ecopoetic practice with a focus on the immediate sensory encounter with the non-human in the poems of *The Tree House* (2004), and then applies it to the essay form in *Findings* (2005). Chapter four positions *Sightlines* (2012) and *The Overhaul* (2012) as a kind of 'midlife turn' into openness and uncertainty,[38] exploring the ways in which this affects her ecopoetic practice. Finally, chapter five argues that the renewed foregrounding (or resurfacing) within Jamie's ecopoetic practice of socio-political issues such as gender, nationality and national politics, and colonialism, as well as a new willingness to write about her own body and memories, suggests that Jamie has reconciled with the difficulty of negotiating between the various threads of the ecological mesh in her most recent works: *Frissure* (2013), *The Bonniest Companie* (2015) and *Surfacing* (2019). Throughout, attention will be paid to the evolving ways in which Jamie uses language to mediate with the non-human, with particular focus on her often fractious relationship with Scots. Attempts by critics to align Jamie with groups of writers – such as Romantics, Objectivists, Gaelic poets, late twentieth-century Scottish women writers, and contemporary ecopoets – at different points in her career will also be considered throughout to contextualise her writing within various literary traditions.

[38] Rachel Falconer, 'Midlife Music: *The Overhaul* and *Frissure*' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 156-166 (pp. 156-157).

It is important to note that Jamie is not easily categorizable – indeed, she rigorously questions categories, binaries, and taxonomies throughout her work. This thesis attempts to avoid imposing a rigid line of argument upon the texts it studies, instead prioritising negotiation, complexity, and ambivalence as Jamie does in so much of her writing. This thesis also acknowledges that, as Jamie is still actively writing, it cannot offer a closed account of her work. Rather, it remains open to further developments and possibilities, as is Jamie.

1. ‘A’m far fae Hame’: Location and Displacement in *The Golden Peak* (1992) and *The Autonomous Region* (1993)

In 1981, Jamie won an Eric Gregory award and used the grant to fund her travels in Asia, resulting in the publication of *The Golden Peak: Travels in Northern Pakistan* (1992) (which was later revised and republished with an additional prologue and epilogue as *Among Muslims: Meetings at the Frontiers of Pakistan* in 2002) and *The Autonomous Region: Poems and Photographs from Tibet* (1993) in collaboration with photographer Sean Mayne Smith. Both texts are located in politically fraught areas, where national borders are highly contested, and threat of state violence and oppression lies close to the surface. In a 2002 interview, Jamie explained her motivations for travelling:

> I think it was a time when I was thinking a deal about identity: national and personal identity. So, to go to a place where you are simply a westerner with all that means – I wouldn’t call it a holiday [from identity] but it was a different perspective for me.[39]

National and religious identity is complex and varied in these border regions; Jamie is interested in exploring zones of tension and risk. The word ‘perspective’ is key: it is in these texts that Jamie begins her search for different perspectives and ways of seeing, something which is crucial to her ecopoetic practice. This is indicated by her reengagements with similar concerns using different approaches: non-fiction prose, poetry, and photography. The later revision of *The Golden Peak*, too, suggests a desire to reengage with these concerns, with its revised title of *Among Muslims* indicating the importance of interaction with the people Jamie meets on her travels to this process[40] (this could also point towards the kind of interrelation between people and environment encompassed by the term ‘dwelling’).[41] Indeed, she explicitly outlines this within the text: ‘We all have duties and tasks, and mine, as travel-writer, is to our common humanity. Travel-writing is less about place than people, it describes people’s lives.’[42] In both texts, Jamie strives to make cross-cultural connections without eliding the difference and autonomy of other peoples, an ethos which she applies to the non-human world in later writing. A sense of spirituality which is not tied to any particular religion also emerges in these early works,[43] which has led to the description of Jamie as being ‘somewhere between the Presbyterian and the Tao’ (a description which so ‘delighted’ her that she includes it in her Twitter

[39] Jamie, ‘More Than Human’, p. 138.
[40] Carol Anderson, ‘Writing Spaces’ in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women’s Writing*, ed. by Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 113-121 (p. 121).
[41] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward S. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 78-90.
[42] Kathleen Jamie, *Among Muslims: Meetings at the Frontiers of Pakistan* (London: *Sort of Books*, 2002), p. 227.
[43] Sarah Dunnigan defines ‘spirituality’ as ‘a diverse and nebulous term describing emotional experience, devotional practice, or a system of belief which may conform to or resist orthodox or institutional practice.’ Sarah M. Dunnigan, ‘Spirituality’ in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women’s Writing*, ed. by Glenda Norquay, pp. 11-21 (p. 11).

biography to this day).[4445] Several critics have recognised the importance of Jamie's Asian travels to the development of her poetic voice,[46] but as of yet there has been no extended analysis of how this early travel writing is foundational to the development of her ecopoetic sensibility, and how it influences her later nature writing. This chapter will argue that the experience of physical and cultural displacement in Asia forms a starting point for the development of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility, setting up concerns of representation, culture, travel, alienation, belonging, and spirituality which will become vital to that sensibility, as well as discussing her early approach to writing about land and landscape. As Jamie herself has said, 'Overall, it was a very formative experience. I think a lot of what I hold and believe nowadays derives from the times I spent there.'[47]

The tension between displacement and belonging is a key negotiation that is in play throughout *Among Muslims*, and it is never fully resolved. Jamie describes several moments of intense, overwhelming alienation: 'That night, as I sat at the heavy table, the sense of foreignness closed in. I felt myself to be in a strange place, far from anywhere. […] I felt weird, displaced' (p. 34). The words 'strange' and 'weird' evoke a sense of unease which, as we shall see, is a recurring feature in Jamie's writing. Kay Kossick argues that, for Jamie, 'the experience of cultural displacement [is] a vital component in the transvaluatory processes of writing.'[48] A sense of displacement, while uncomfortable, is an important part of Jamie's travel writing, as it is being unrooted which enables her to see her surroundings with a sharper focus, unhindered by the comfortable trappings of the culture she is accustomed to. This could be read as a kind of Heideggerian anxiety or *unheimlich*. Polt explains:

> The security of everyday existence, in which the meaning of life seems well-grounded and obvious, has been shattered. Anxiety *is* a moment of meaningless confusion, as the everyday perspective has it – but it is "meaningless" not in the sense that it is trivial, but in the sense that it involves a deep *crisis* of meaning.[49]

The moment of *unheimlich* reveals layers of meaning which are normally concealed underneath our day-to-day preoccupations. Heidegger argues that in comparison to this habitual day-to-day dwelling, '*the "not-at-home" must be conceived as the more primordial phenomenon*'.[50] Jamie often utilises

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[44] Quoted in Kathleen Jamie, *Author Statement* (2010), <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/kathleen-jamie> [accessed 17 July 2020].
[45] This is very similar to Norman MacCaig's wry description of himself as a 'Zen Calvinist' when asked about his religion, but there is a sense that Jamie genuinely appreciates the fusion of different cultures and beliefs implied by this phrase. Norman MacCaig, *Norman MacCaig: An Interview* (interviewed by Jennie Renton for *Textualities*) (n.d.), <http://textualities.net/jennie-renton/norman-maccaig-an-interview> [accessed 10 October 2020].
[46] For example, Dorothy McMillan, 'Twentieth-century Poetry II: The Last Twenty-five Years' in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Dorothy McMillan and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 549-578 (pp. 555-558); Szuba, p. 91.
[47] Jamie, 'More Than Human', p. 138.
[48] Kay Kossick, 'Roaring Girls, Bogie Wives, and the Queen of Sheba: Dissidence, Desire and Dreamwork in the Poetry of Kathleen Jamie', *Studies in Scottish Literature* 32.1 (2001), 195-212 (p. 196).
[49] Polt, p. 77.
[50] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 234 [Heidegger's italics].

such moments in her later poetry when she encounters the non-human (e.g. 'Crossing the Loch' (1999) and 'Fragment 1' (2015), both of which will be discussed in later chapters), but it is being displaced in a foreign environment that first makes her sensitive to the *unheimlich*.

When staying with the Shah family in Gilgit, Jamie's feeling of displacement allows her to notice the strange sense of time there, as she feels 'displaced […] not so much in place or culture as in time.' (p. 56) Jamie emphasises the stark contrast between her own appearance and that of the Shia women in Gilgit when she first meets Rashida, who is wearing customary modest clothing, by framing their differences through the medium of time: 'For a moment I forgot I was in Pakistan and thought 'Victorian'. If she was a Victorian, then I was the ghost; the brash ghost of the future which she was puzzled to find in the drawing-room.' (p. 35) It is Jamie who is figured here as the supernatural outsider, a 'brash' intrusion upon the cultural norms of Pakistan. This image of Jamie as foreigner, rather than Pakistan as foreign, is an early example of her search to find alternative perspectives to destabilise her own point of view as well as the reader's, although it could be criticised for falling into a stadial perception of time. However, the dilation of time is a recurring theme in her work,[51] and can be seen here in her vision of the ancient, the Victorian and the modern overlapping in Gilgit:

> Still I felt displaced in time, but which time? I thought I could detect several, interfering with each other. […] These were all laid upon each other, like those children's pictures composed of several leaves of tissue paper. On each are drawn a few meaningless scratches. Only when all the leaves are laid on top of each other, and the marks seen as one, does the picture show through. (p. 62)

It is in her gaze as a foreigner, a traveller, that Jamie first becomes sensitive to these layers of time, learning to read the culture of a specific area through looking at its buildings, statues, and landscapes, and listening to the stories of its people. This is a process which Jamie will later carry out at home in various parts of Scotland, as will be discussed in the following chapters, and it forms a vital part of her ecopoetic practice, particularly in her essays on archaeological sites in *Findings* (2005), *Sightlines* (2012) and *Surfacing* (2019).

Gender also plays a part in Jamie's feeling of displacement, as she struggles to reconcile with the limitations placed upon the lives of Pakistani women and her own treatment as a woman travelling alone, without a husband (p. 56; p. 161; p. 211, etc.). She attempts to negotiate these seemingly irreconcilable cross-cultural differences:

> Women of purdah-observing families are protected from a violent and dangerous world out there beyond the gates, by men who take this responsibility seriously, as a duty born of love and Islam. If their lives seem to us joyless – then what they enjoy is being Muslim. What we enjoy is risk. We enjoy, even when we don't, running the

[51] This perception of time as disorienting and unstable can be related to modernist and post-modernist thought; see David R. Dickens and Andrea Fontana, 'Time and Postmodernism', *Symbolic Interaction*, 25.3 (2002), 389-396.

> gauntlet of the wide world; and all the experiences that offers. Experience of loneliness, of worry, of insecurity, or loss and displacement; all of which transform into exhilaration and, if we're lucky, wisdom. (pp. 56-57)

It would be easy enough to sensationalise and pass immediate judgement on purdah, the practice of secluding women from strangers and any men outside of the family, but Jamie avoids this and instead patiently attempts to understand a different point of view, emphasising the ethically positive values of 'protection', 'responsibility', 'duty' and 'love'. However, while she gives space and respect to that point of view, it is clear she does not share it as she extolls the many benefits of 'risk'. There is no comfortable resolution to these negotiations – much like there is no resolution to the long dispute over the Northern Areas themselves – but it is in the act of negotiating that Jamie is able to make cross-cultural connections and learn to see in different ways.

Jamie also attempts to understand unfamiliar cultures by drawing comparisons between them and Scottish culture. In the villages of Pakistan, Jamie sees the Highlands: the small houses are compared to Scottish 'blackhouses' (p. 27; p. 190), and Sost, on the border between Pakistan and China, 'could have been a Highland village' with its 'knackered vehicles stood on stones' and 'new bungalows [which] shone beside the old croft cottages which began to fall in and decay, their roof-beams gone.' (p. 117) By describing parts of this foreign landscape through a Scottish lens, Jamie familiarises it, encouraging the (presumably Western) reader to empathise with the people who live there. At one point, Jamie refers to this process of comparison directly, drawing attention to her self-conscious attempts to 'understand' that which at first glance seems alien or other:

> To understand their culture I found myself making analogies with my own, and it wasn't difficult. Was Mrs Shah so different to my own grandmother, who speaks a fine Scots, and left school young for a life of menial tasks; for whom Pakistan is as remote and unimaginable as is Scotland for Mrs Shah? My grandmother can't drive or speak a foreign language, has never crossed the threshold of a college; does not smoke, drink, swear or wear short skirts. She rarely goes out without a scarf. She'd get on well with Mrs Shah. (p. 56)

This analogy works both to familiarise Shia women by using the comforting, maternal figure of the Scottish grandmother, *and* to point out that Western culture is not necessarily as socially progressive as we may think. The life of Jamie's grandmother, who at the time of writing was a living figure, is in many ways as restricted as Mrs Shah's because of her gender. This active practice of drawing connections is something that will become central to Jamie's later work; as Paul Volsik notes, 'it is this openness to the "other" that is equally constitutive of her eco-poetic agenda'.[52] What links Jamie's approach to writing about other cultures and writing about the non-human is a curiosity that is both respectful and tenacious – she is wary of imposing herself upon the other but committed to learning as much as she can.

[52] Volsik, p. 351.

Another comparison Jamie draws between Pakistani and Scottish culture is regarding issues of language. While she does not use much Scots in *Among Muslims*, an approach which is consistent with the poetry of her earliest collections, she does acknowledge it on several occasions as a language under threat, alongside Gaelic. For example, when speaking to a man about 'This question of language' – or, more accurately, languages – in Pakistan, Jamie tells him of the similar question in Scotland: 'In my country […] we are struggling to keep native languages alive. English has taken over everything.' (p. 93) Later, too, she worries that impending modernisation in Baltistan will wipe out minority languages entirely: 'Will the Balti words she calls so proudly go the same way as other languages – Gaelic in my own country?' (p. 203) Douglas S. Mack identifies 'The immense and expanding power and dominance of English as an international language' as a 'legacy of Empire'.[53] In relating the suppression of Gaelic and Scots to that of minority languages in Pakistan, Jamie is subtly referencing the cultural legacies of imperialism in both countries.[54] As the following chapters will discuss, Jamie's attitude towards and use of Scots varies throughout her career, and this struggle is of great importance to discussion of her ecopoetic practice as issues of language and representation are key to all ecologically-minded writing, whether overtly addressed or not.

It is in *The Autonomous Region* that Jamie begins to use Scots more extensively, and some of the reasoning behind that decision can be found in *Among Muslims*. Robert Crawford offers an explanation for her initial avoidance of Scots, and her later change of heart:

> For many Scottish writers of her generation, the use of Scots was hard to separate from political trajectories. Hugh MacDiarmid's synthetic Scots seemed to have given the language an almost obligatory Scottish Nationalist inflection, and seemed to some younger writers suspect in terms of the politics of gender. […] It's as if the experience of travelling in Asia was needed to give her the freedom to write in a Scots that felt her own, rather than a speech laden with other people's politics and prejudices.[55]

It is seeing Scots out of context, displaced, that allows Jamie the freedom to later explore its transgressive possibilities. When she meets a small group of Scottish and Irish missionary doctors, she experiences the oddness of such a moment of displacement: 'It was the oddest culture shift, suddenly to be among Scots and Irish people, with their accents at once so familiar, but very strange for being out of context.' (p. 167) Once again, the experience of displacement allows the familiar to be seen from a different perspective, this time revealing Jamie's fondness of the language: 'It was language up to speed, we could even use Scots words and I realised I'd been missing it.' (p. 173) This idea of

[53] Douglas S. Mack, *Scottish Fiction and the British Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 232.
[54] Though it is important to note the complexity of Scotland's position within the British Empire; see Mack, pp. 1-6.
[55] Robert Crawford, 'Kathleen's Scots' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 33-41 (pp. 33-34).

'language up to speed' anticipates Jamie's use of Scots in her later poetry, where she revels in the physicality of its soundscape.[56]

While *Among Muslims* makes evident how much Jamie has gained from her travels in Pakistan, it also contains a thread of growing anxiety about the negative effects of tourism on the area. In Askole, a village on the verge of being made accessible by road, Jamie frets over the losses that modernisation could cause, and those it already has:

> Now the road was coming, would the old path fall into disrepair? Fall out of people's memories, become a thing the old ones remembered, like jinn-mothers. Like how to play a pipe or drum. Like how to build a home-made bridge out of twisted twigs. (p. 148)

The 'road' of tourism and globalism is set in direct opposition here to the 'old path' of collective cultural knowledge and memory, which plays into the Heideggerian conception of technology as an alienating force, an idea which is prevalent in modern-day ecocriticism.[57] However, Jamie also acknowledges the material benefits that come from modernisation: 'They know there is much to be lost, but it means they won't starve in a bad winter.' (p. 104) The negotiation between tourism and modernisation and cultural preservation is portrayed as a 'balancing act […] between the needs of the local men and the foreign visitors' which is rapidly being 'destroyed' (p. 77).

The tension and anxiety surrounding this negotiation is not just objectively observed, as Jamie herself grapples with feelings of guilt about her position as a tourist: 'I was beginning to torture myself about this business of implication. Don't interfere. Of course we interfered. Why were they building the last bridge, if not to bring the tourists in, in jeeps?' (pp. 148-149) The word 'interfere' suggests that tourism is causing a kind of corruption, which is then linked to environmental issues with the mention of the 'jeeps' and their connotations of exhaust fumes and pollution, as well as consumerism, foreshadowing concerns that will become prevalent in Jamie's later work. The irony of the effects of tourism is captured in a particularly sharp metaphor in the epilogue, written after a return trip to Gilgit post-9/11: 'The poisoned chalice of tourism. That which destroys what it seeks.' (p. 236) The conflict between the desire to travel and learn about other cultures and the realisation that such actions are actively causing damage to these cultures is never resolved in *Among Muslims*. Indeed, Jamie would later cease travelling altogether:

> I stopped travelling almost for moral reasons. I began to think twice about going to wretchedly poor third-world countries just to marvel at people living their lives. I felt I ought to go home and live my own life, look after my own children, have my own garden, so that made me stop doing that.[58]

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[56] Jamie has said of Scots, 'I like the feel of it and the texture of it in the mouth, just to keep it flavoursome.' Kathleen Jamie, *In the Nature of Things* (interviewed by Kirsty Scott for *The Guardian*) (June 18 2005), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jun/18/featuresreviews.guardianreview15> [accessed 17 July 2020].
[57] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 213-238.
[58] Jamie, 'More Than Human', p. 138.

As Chitra Ramaswamy so eloquently writes in a piece for *Antlers of Water*, perhaps 'the best way to love a place was to not go there at all.'[59]

That being said, these travels were evidently key to the development of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility. The sheer scale and difference of the Pakistani landscape is another source of displacement for Jamie, raising questions of language and representation:

> I realised I was feeling trapped by the Natural Beauty. Unless you manage to climb to a summit, you can go a long time without seeing far long vistas. […] I wanted to see the sea, the long low hills of home. I wanted a sense of ancientness, emptiness, mourning. Water-light. But you can't describe the Himalayan mountains; all you can do is pour adjectives and superlatives like libations at their feet. (p. 113)

The ironic capitalisation of 'Natural Beauty' suggests that the landscape does not, in fact, feel natural to Jamie, who is used to the smaller scale of Scotland, foreshadowing the ways in which Jamie goes on to interrogate the term 'natural' in her later writing. It also implies a kind of branding, a fixing of the purpose of this kind of travelling that Jamie, travelling with a sense of openness to experience that is less determined, is resistant to. The use of the word 'libations' creates a sense of quasi-religious awe here, which can be found elsewhere in *Among Muslims* in relation to encounters with the non-human. For example, after an arduous journey over a glacier to reach Askole, 'A lizard on a hot rock, a dog-rose bush, a bird, were like miracles' (p. 130), and the village itself is 'Eden, tucked in among the mountains.' (p. 132) Jamie is not a member of any particular church – her discomfort upon realising the Scottish doctor is a missionary is palpable (p. 172) – but there is often an attitude of reverence and wonder present in her descriptions of the non-human that could be described as spiritual.

However, this spiritual perception of the non-human is balanced by the practical awareness of environmental issues which will only grow more pressing in Jamie's later work. Twice the emissions of jeeps are described as 'evil' (p. 163; p. 212), and on one occasion the sight of the strange landscape of the Himalayas prompts a kind of apocalyptic vision: 'The glacier swept on, in its deep silence. I thought: Far in the future, when all is done, the M1 will look like this: a swathe of ice as far as we can see. It will serve us right.' (p. 130) While these are only brief hints to the possibility of ecological crisis, they constitute the beginning of a thread of deep concern which will run through the rest of her literary output, something that she identifies as a feature of a '"new" Scottish nature writing' in her introduction to *Antlers of Water*.[60] It is in the final section of Jamie's original trip, in the Hushe valley, that we see the beginnings of her response to these concerns: 'to appreciate the colour and textures, and notice them' (p. 205), and 'to walk, look and think.' (p. 209) This attentiveness to one's

[59] Chitra Ramaswamy, 'Poll Domhain' in *Antlers of Water*, ed. by Kathleen Jamie, pp. 65-71 (p. 67).
[60] Jamie, *Antlers of Water*, p. xii.

surroundings is perhaps the most important facet of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility, as she outlines in *Antlers of Water*:

> As we realise we must halt destruction, reduce emissions and renegotiate our relationship with the natural world, our noticing is a vital contribution. […] For me, this noticing and caring, this attention, this writing from within personal circumstances, whether about an insect or a mountain, amounts to a political act. In a time of ecological crisis, I would argue that simply insisting on our right to pay heed to natural landscapes and other non-human lifeforms amounts to an act of resistance to the forces of destruction.[61]

While this point of view is certainly far from developed in Jamie's early writing, it is evident that she has started to become mindful of the ways in which she is looking at the non-human world, perhaps again because of her displacement.

In fact, it is this act of walking, looking, and thinking that leads to the key revelation of the book:

> I was a person walking down a track in Baltistan all alone on a Wednesday morning. I was capable; and sometimes, a glimpse of what we could be opens in our minds like the fearsome blue crevasses I'd seen on glaciers. […] It was time to begin learning. To speak the language and work with these people […] But it would mean forgoing the children, and the shadowy figure that filled the vacuum when they asked, "Where is your husband?" (pp. 210-211)

Ironically, Jamie is torn between the freedom represented by travel – as Carol Anderson notes, 'women's mobility [is] frequently linked to a quest for greater freedom and challenge to patriarchal structures'[62] – and the desire to start a family of her own, like her Muslim friends whose riskless lives seem so alien. Of course, the introduction and epilogue of *Among Muslims* let us know that Jamie did in fact return to Scotland, marry and have children, but *The Golden Peak* ends on this note of indecision, leaving the possibility of multiple options and futures open.

The option of further travel is explored in *The Autonomous Region: Poems and Photographs from Tibet* (1993), where Jamie once again moves through disputed territories and areas of high socio-political tension, this time the ethno-culturally Tibetan area of China – although not the Tibetan Autonomous Zone itself, as Jamie explains in her preface to the collection: 'Our own journey was halted at the border of the "Autonomous Region" of Tibet by the events of the time: general strikes, closed borders, and then on 4th June 1989, the Tiananmen Square massacre.'[63] Jamie's contributions to the collection focus not only on the turbulent context of her modern-day travels, but also on the journeys of two historical figures: Fa-hsien, a 4th century travelling Chinese Buddhist monk, and

[61] Ibid, p. xvi.
[62] Anderson, p. 114.
[63] Kathleen Jamie, preface to *The Autonomous Region: Poems and Photographs from Tibet* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1993), p. 6.

Princess Wen Cheng, who travelled to Lhasa from Beijing in the 7th century to marry the Tibetan king. As Eleanor Spencer notes,

> Jamie performs a complex act of ventriloquism here, and both Fa-hsien and Wen Cheng seem to travel not only across space but also through time, and in many of the poems it is unclear who is speaking, and through whose eyes we are seeing.[64]

This plurality of voices across both space and time creates a layering effect (like Jamie's description of layered time in *Among Muslims*), as she weaves different threads of Tibetan history and culture together in a complex, and sometimes tangled, tapestry. Many of Sean Mayne Smith's photographs are portraits of Tibetan people looking directly into the camera, which both grounds the more mythical feel of the poetry and contributes to its sense of plurality. This kind of plurality of voice is a poetic technique that Jamie will continue to use, and one that is particularly well-suited to ecopoetry, which is discussed in the following chapter.

Jamie is clearly interested in the history and mythos of Tibet as well as contemporary political struggles, as she was in the 'fairy culture' of the Northern Areas in *Among Muslims* (p. 107). The inclusion of a monk is notable, signalling an interest in the spiritual practices of the region. As Mayne Smith explains in his preface,

> The monastic philosophers of Tibet believed that all phenomena, corporeal or otherwise, were related and interconnected. As this conclusion was reached through the medium of the human mind, mind seemed to be the linking feature that tied the universe together. And being human, therefore, was a unique opportunity to experience directly this knowledge of universality and individualism.[65]

This observation is strikingly similar to an assertion made by Jamie in a 2012 interview on her nature writing that she, as a writer, is 'the perceiving centre of the experience'.[66] The motif of interconnection is also key to her ecopoetic practice and is a central principle of Morton's mesh theory.[67]

In *The Autonomous Region*, Fa-hsien represents this kind of direct, attentive spirituality separate from strictly organised religion, as he is unrooted in both space and time on his travels through the region and through the poems. The act of travelling facilitates profound revelation:

> And sometimes, walking alone, he finds
> the centre of his being, flinches,
> for it's nowt

[64] Eleanor Spencer, 'Life Lines, Sight Lines: Collaborative Works' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 147-155 (p. 148).
[65] Sean Mayne Smith, preface to *The Autonomous Region*, pp. 7-9 (p. 8).
[66] Kathleen Jamie, *Interview: Kathleen Jamie, Author of* Sightlines (interviewed by Chitra Ramaswamy for *The Scotsman*) (April 14 2012), <https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/books/interview-kathleen-jamie-author-of-sightlines-1-2233424> [accessed 22 October 2019].
[67] Morton, p. 7.

but an alms bowl.[68]

It is 'walking alone' that allows Fa-hsien to see 'the centre of his being', which is reminiscent of the end section of *Among Muslims* where Jamie realises she has a central choice to make, also walking alone. In other words, movement of the body and sensory perception is required to reach what we may call spiritual perception. While 'nowt / but an alms bowl' may not seem like much, the Buddhist practice of almsgiving is in fact more meaningful than Western conceptions of charity: by receiving alms, 'monks provide laypeople with an opportunity to make merit', i.e. good karma, that will take them a step further on their journey to Nirvana.[69] At the centre of Fa-hsien's being, therefore, is a symbol of communal, spiritual exchange that is intrinsically linked to travelling. This idea of exchange for communal benefit is something that plays a significant part in Jamie's travel writing and will come to be a central tenet of her ecopoetic practice, as she interacts with archaeologists, conservationists and scientists, among others, to learn different methods of approach to the non-human.

Jamie's poetic interaction with landscapes encountered on these travels is also significant. In this part of the world, spirituality, mythos, and landscape are inextricably interconnected. As Mayne Smith outlines, the non-human plays an important part in Buddhist life and thinking:

> One thing […] that is inherent in this philosophy of the ephemeral is a respect for the things of the earth. Animals, plants and features in a landscape are all revered by Tibetans. They form part of the iconography of their inner life. And many of these people appear, superficially at least, to live happily and in relative harmony with the land around them.[70]

This idea of landscape forming one's 'inner life' can be seen in the group of poems that are situated roughly in the centre of the collection, in which all of the travellers – Fa-hsien, Princess Wen Cheng, and a voice that can be seen as representative of Jamie's contemporary journey – converge at Lake Quinghai. The name of the lake is significant in and of itself: 'qing' is the Classical Chinese word for 'blue-green'.[71] Kossick argues that Jamie's 'poems inhabit liminal landscapes',[72] and Lake Quinghai is one such landscape, its in-betweenness signalled by its name and its geographic position, crossing the border between the Haibei and Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures.

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[68] Kathleen Jamie, '11: *The Travels of Fa-hsien*' in *Kathleen Jamie: Selected Poems* (London: Picador, 2018), pp. 40-41 (ll. 31-34). All further references to the poems of *The Autonomous Region* will be from this edition.
[69] Thomas Borchert, 'Why Buddhist Monks Collect Alms and Visit Households Even in Times of Social Distancing' (14 July 2020), <https://theconversation.com/why-buddhist-monks-collect-alms-and-visit-households-even-in-times-of-social-distancing-128452> [accessed 24 September 2020].
[70] Mayne Smith, p. 9.
[71] James Smart, 'Qinghai: China's Largest and Most Striking Lake' (2 March 2020), <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/qinghai-chinas-largest-and-most-striking-lake/> [accessed 25 September 2020].
[72] Kossick, p. 200.

The lake's liminality enables the meeting of the travellers from different cultures and times, prompting a gleeful response:

> When we reached the lake, pure and shining,
> like a mirror of itself
> in sheer joy we jumped down, swirled round and round
> so our clothes belled out and graced the silt
> with a circle which we defined:
> Our space
> Mine
> which I hadn't done since we were bairns
> in gym-shoes. ('14', pp. 46-50, ll. 1-9)

Paradoxically, it is only in this liminal space that the traveller, displaced from her culture, is able to claim a 'space' with a childlike 'joy'. The image of the lake as a 'mirror' suggests that it has revelatory properties, which are exhibited when the lake is later disturbed by 'A sharp and sudden wind' (l. 69), scattering cards and coins that Fa-hsien then uses to divine Princess Wen Cheng's future. There is an almost supernatural sense of landscape and elemental forces working in tandem to reveal truth here.

However, this sense of spirituality is balanced by references to the contemporary political issues in the region. Dorothy McMillan argues that 'the poems of *The Autonomous Region* are located in the space between past struggles for autonomy and contemporary acts of erasure.'[73] This idea of a sublimated country struggling for autonomy has led critics to draw parallels between the cultural tensions shown in *The Autonomous Region* and those that Jamie later goes on examine in Scotland in *The Queen of Sheba* and *Jizzen*, despite, as Crawford puts it, being a 'book whose preface calls no attention to the way its title might wink towards Scotland while also indicating Tibet.'[74] It is, however, the first collection in which Jamie uses Scots in a more sustained manner. Crawford has argued that the removal of Scots from its normal context is what enables Jamie to use it despite her misgivings:

> It is this long-distance clearance, this clearing out, which gives Jamie an increasingly sure access to a home vernacular, one whose grain can make it sound more intimate than standard English, but whose use in this remote Asian context rescues it from the charge of sentimentality or any too easily predictable political manipulation.[75]

For example, in 'For Paola', one of a few poems in the collection written fully in Scots, it is her 'home vernacular' that Jamie uses to recount hearing of the horrific Tiananmen Square massacre from an Italian traveller: 'she telt me / they've killed 5000 people in Beijing.' ('18: For Paola', p. 52, ll. 8-9) This intermingling of Scots within wider European and Asian contexts is far removed from the nationalist trajectories Crawford identifies Jamie as being averse to, positioning it as a language that

[73] McMillan, p. 558.
[74] Crawford, p. 34.
[75] Ibid, p. 35.

can look outward as well as inward. Scots is used to depict the contradiction between the atmosphere of risk and violence and the openness to making cross-cultural connections: 'This is a place your frens disappear: / trust naebody. Luve a.' (ll. 15-16) As McMillan argues, Scots may be a particularly appropriate language in which to write about cultural suppression, as 'The vernacular tongue is also constantly under erasure unless it is able to reaffirm itself by persistent imaginative acts.'[76]

Jamie performs such imaginative acts with her use of Scots to describe the landscape of Tibet in several poems in the collection. Lake Quinghai, for example, is referred to as a 'loch' as well as a lake, most notably when Fa-hsien divines for Princess Wen Cheng:

> if she'd be true
>
> to her mirror
> cracked, her inner loch, that humble heart,
>
> the great force of that keen wind: her name
> would be revered. ('14', ll. 86-90)

The fusion of the landscape and elements with the 'inner' world of the woman creates a sense of intimacy with place, and the use of the Scots word 'loch' to convey this intimacy anticipates the way in which Jamie will use the language in her later nature writing, which will be discussed in the following chapters. Crawford argues that 'Jamie's use of 'loch' is […] culturally estranged from that word's Scots moorings; she has had to travel very far to locate her Scots voice. Linguistically location and dislocation are fused.'[77] Scots is used to similar effect in the final poem of the collection, '*Xiahe*', where Jamie uses Scots nature words to convey the sounds of the town's name:

> Xiahe. Wave droonin wave
> on a pebbly shore,
> the *ahe* o machair, o slammach ('20: *Xiahe*', p. 53, ll. 10-12)

Jamie uses the words 'machair' (low-lying grassland near the sea) and 'slammach' (cobweb) to familiarise the foreign sounds of the placename, once again bringing location and dislocation together in a complex negotiation that is mediated through the non-human and the vernacular, implying a kind of kinship between the two.

In both *Among Muslims* and *The Autonomous Region*, Jamie's displacement from home into these unfamiliar, disputed territories enables her to see alternative points of view, facilitating the making of cross-cultural connections while still acknowledging difference; a picture of various points of connection and difference that could be seen as a kind of mesh. McMillan argues that

> Both books indicate the need to travel to understand 'home' but also the need to come home in order to establish valid senses of both here and there. As a result of her

[76] McMillan, p. 558.
[77] Crawford, pp. 34-35.

> travels Jamie's understanding of Scotland and of the significance of her life within it becomes genuinely philosophical.[78]

Additionally, in this chapter we have seen the beginnings of several interests – spirituality, folklore, cultural memory, and environmental issues – that will go on to play a major part in Jamie's later nature writing. They also constitute the starting point of Jamie's ever evolving and often fractious relationship with the Scots language. It is evident that this early travel writing, although not overtly ecological in content, lays the foundation from which Jamie's ecopoetic method is built, as the following chapters will show. *The Autonomous Region* ends with the lines 'A'm far fae hame, / I hae crossed China' (ll. 19-21), which point both to the significance of Jamie's travels and to the pull of 'hame', as the distance travelled is still represented in relation to the site of origin. The following chapter will explore how Jamie turns the close, careful attention triggered by the displacement experienced during her Asian travels on home ground when writing about Scotland.

[78] McMillan, p. 558.

2. 'The Stuff About Identity': Gender, Nation, and the Non-human in *The Queen of Sheba* (1994) and *Jizzen* (1999)

Critical readings of *The Queen of Sheba* (1994) and *Jizzen* (1999) have often focused on issues of national and female self-determination.[79] Jamie has noted the influence of the 1997 Scottish devolution referendum on these collections, and emphatically denied any interest in continuing to write about national and gender issues in a 2001 interview:

> I didn't want to write about being a woman writer or being a Scottish writer all my life. […] There were those of us who were writers in Scotland at the time of the Devolution Referendum, so we had a job which was very simple – "very simple", well it took three hundred years – but it was very obvious and it seemed that we had to support that plan. Now that it is done we […] must start to think beyond that, and to make connections beyond that, be they with England or Europe or North America or Afghanistan, or be they with realms which are non-human. I think these are the tasks that are ahead of us, and not the stuff about identity.[80]

This could be read as a signal to ignore the 'stuff about identity' in Jamie's early writing and focus only on her career post-devolution; to draw a clear boundary between two different phases of her work. There are two problems with such an approach: one, that issues of nation and gender are in negotiation throughout Jamie's oeuvre, albeit not always as overtly as they are in *The Queen of Sheba* and *Jizzen*; two, that there is much more at play in these collections – including the further development of the ecopoetic sensibility we saw the beginnings of in chapter one. The ecological concerns of these collections have recently been noted by certain critics but have not yet been comprehensively examined.[81] Ecopoetics and issues of identity are interwoven in Jamie's work, informing and enriching one another throughout. This chapter will discuss the ways in which the poems of *The Queen of Sheba* and *Jizzen* enact plurality and negotiation to examine not only concepts of nation and gender, but also domesticity, urbanity, and wildness, and how these negotiations contribute to Jamie's developing ecopoetic sensibility.

Several critics have noted that *The Queen of Sheba* contains many plural, contradictory voices and juxtapositions (this plurality has been interpreted by turn in national, feminist and ecological terms).[82] The titular poem, for example, contains the voices of the persona addressing Scotland from

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[79] For example: Kossick; Nancy Gish, 'Complexities of Subjectivity: Scottish Poets and Multiplicity', in *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally*, ed. by Romana Huk (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), pp. 259-74; Alice Entwistle, 'Scotland's New House: Domesticity and Domicile in Contemporary Scottish Women's Poetry', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. by Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 114-23.
[80] Jamie, 'More Than Human', pp. 140-141.
[81] See Amanda Bell, 'Transcending the Urban: *The Queen of Sheba*' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 42-48; Timothy L. Baker, '"An Orderly Rabble": Plural Identities in *Jizzen*' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 62-70.
[82] Gish, pp. 267-268; Kossick, p. 200; Bell, 'Transcending the Urban', p. 42.

the first line, the 'lasses / in the awestruck crowd', the disapproving, parochial voice that asks '*whae do you think y'ur?*', and, of course, the Queen of Sheba demanding the crowd to 'Scour Scotland for a Solomon!'.[83] None of these voices are distinguished by quotation marks (these are a rarity in Jamie's poetry) which creates an image of a polyphonic country whose voices are in contradiction with one another. From the very beginning of the collection, then, there is no sign of any sort of national, or nationalist, unity, but instead a set of distinctive individual voices which come together to form an unstable collective. There are clear sets of oppositions in the poem: the 'peat and bracken' (l. 15) of Presbyterian Scotland and the 'desert sands' (l. 14) of 'heathenish Arabia' (l. 5); the poverty of urban Scotland and the luxurious 'jewels, frankincense' (l. 34) of the queen; folk culture embodied in the 'strip the willow' (l. 68) and academic knowledge in 'the National Library' (l. 70); English and Scots; and the central opposition of the men in power – 'the Masons and the elders and the police' (l. 50) – and the 'thousand laughing girls' (l. 89) emboldened by the queen's arrival. These oppositions are at once highly specific and localised, and universal, extending geographically far beyond Scotland. This anticipates a key ecopoetic strategy of Jamie's, which is to focus in intimate detail on the local and immediate in order to open up wider meanings; this is what Rhona Brown refers to as a 'twin poetic concern with the general and localised familiar' in the work of several twentieth-century Scottish women poets, including Marion Angus and Liz Lochhead.[84] The negotiation between the general and the specific is another of Jamie's key ecopoetic negotiations and will be discussed further in later chapters.

Amanda Bell argues that the key 'dualism' in *The Queen of Sheba* is between the urban and the rural. According to Bell,

> The rural mutates according to circumstance, but always comes with the alluring idea that there must be something better, something beyond the judgemental, impoverishing restrictions of sexism, constructed environments, social constraints and the language which articulates them. The desire for the rural, or wilderness, is an appeal to the authority of nature, a search for the ecosublime, and the concomitant search for an originary language represents a desire to transcend political affiliation, to be identified on one's own terms.[85]

'Wildness' is arguably a better word to use to describe this concept than 'rural', particularly given that it is a term which constantly comes up in Jamie's later work, albeit in changed contexts. In the case of 'The Queen of Sheba', the queen is the embodiment of an imagined alternative to a culture in which misogyny is deeply embedded, a wry inversion of the sexist Scots phrase which is her namesake. Kossick has written on the importance of myths and monsters to Jamie's treatment of gender, arguing that in 'The Queen of Sheba', 'The challenge that otherness presents to the symbolic order and to

[83] Kathleen Jamie, 'The Queen of Sheba' in *The Queen of Sheba* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), pp. 9-11, ll. 72-73; l. 88; l. 85.
[84] Rhona Brown, 'Twentieth-Century Poetry' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Glenda Norquay, pp. 140-151 (p. 140).
[85] Bell, 'Transcending the Urban', p. 43.

patriarchy is realized in Jamie's sign made sumptuous flesh.'[86] Wildness here comes in the form of the imaginary, mythical other who exists outside of the social order and offers a vision of a different way of living where women can transgress the boundaries of Scotland's urban towns and cities and their patriarchal structures.

Similarly complex negotiations are carried out in 'Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead'. The poem places antiquated notions of Scottishness, including traditional gender roles, 'On the civic amenity landfill site' ('Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead', p 37, l. 1) and asks the key question, 'Do we take them?' (l. 26) The dump holds physical objects such as 'postcards sent from small Scots towns' (l. 5), a 'pattern for a cable knit' (l. 16), the '*Dictionary for Mothers*' (l. 18), 'Mr Scotland's John Bull Puncture Repair Kit' (l. 20), 'his last few joiners' tools' (l. 24), and 'his shaving brush, her button tin' (l. 28). The postcards represent a picturesque Scotland marketed towards tourists, reducing living environments into small, consumable images, while the other items belong to the domestic sphere and are easily identified with traditional gender roles: knitting, sewing and mothering for women, DIY and personal grooming for men (it is of note that John Bull is a personification of the United Kingdom, and often England in particular, rather than Scotland, hinting at punctures in the idea of a coherent, unified British identity and the decline of an old Empire). These are man-made objects, products of consumerism and the marketplace which also function as symbols of home, both in the domestic and national senses. As Gairn points out, *The Queen of Sheba* 'pivots on the idea of "home" as a political, cultural and gendered entity.'[87] Jamie is at once criticising her 'home' for its parochialism and misogyny, looking back at a way of life which was more self-sustaining, and critiquing disposable consumerism.

The dump also holds the intangible 'old-fashioned views / addressed, after all, to Mr and Mrs Scotland' (ll. 29-30), as well as Mr Scotland's knowledge of the landscape:

> those days when he knew intimately
> the thin roads of his country, hedgerows
> hanged with small black brambles' hearts (ll. 21-23)

The idea of a people having intimate, deep knowledge of a place is something which Jamie will return to again and again in her later writing, particularly her essays, and can be related to Heideggerian dwelling.[88] In this poem, however, it is difficult to tell whether this is something that Jamie is genuinely warning us against throwing away, or an idyllic image of the past which is only conceived in the act of looking back nostalgically. Either way, we can see that there is an ecological element to her negotiation between tradition and progress in this poem, especially given that the imagined space

[86] Kossick, p. 211.
[87] Louisa Gairn, 'Clearing Space: Kathleen Jamie and Ecology' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. by Berthold Schoene, pp. 236-44 (p. 237).
[88] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 78-90.

for this negotiation is a landfill. Bell writes of the images of the dump that recur throughout the collection:

> Dumps in *The Queen of Sheba* are morally neutral environments, holding areas where objects await triage, dispensed with not for intrinsic uselessness, but for having outlived their usefulness. In the era of plastic, durability has ceased to be positive attribute, and the concept of disposability provides a strong starting point for a meditation on the human relationship to the environment.[89]

The question of whether durability is of any value is something that Jamie will return to with a clearer focus on material human waste in *Findings* (2005). In this poem, she utilises ecological concepts like durability and disposability to question the value of *immaterial* human waste, conceptions of nation and gender, asking if there is anything worth saving in the dump of old Scotland or if we should let our old ways go. Typically, she does not reach a clear conclusion.

'Flashing Green Man', as Bell has pointed out, brings 'a sense […] just over halfway through the collection, of breakthrough'.[90] It is here that we really see the beginnings of an ecopoetic development, as the poem emphasises the importance of taking the time to 'consider', which is exemplified by the persona stopping in a crowded Dundee street to watch a skein of geese flying above ('Flashing Green Man', pp. 38-39, l. 1, l. 9). There is a contrast between movement and stillness in this instance of consideration, as the geese, the passers-by on the street and the traffic keep moving in their daily rhythms – the geese 'banked / in the wind' (ll. 21-22); 'people flowed round me / intent on home' (ll. 27-28); the 'traffic wheeled off to the suburbs' (l. 29) – while the persona is stationary, as if caught in a moment outside of the normal passing of time. This is an early example of Jamie's method of detachment, attentiveness, and receptivity: the persona detaches from her day-to-day urban activities, is mindfully attentive to her surroundings, and is receptive to their meanings, or unconcealments.[91] She is drawing attention to a seemingly insignificant, everyday moment and revealing its overlooked depth of potential meanings. The skein of geese is

> a sign
> truer than the flashing green man
> or directional arrows below at a junction (ll. 35-37)

As Bell puts it, the geese 'are accessible harbingers of an alternative way of being'.[92] They point to the possibility of a way of life outside of the urban, an escape for the masses 'refuged in cities' like the green man (l. 10). Because of their metaphorical power, the geese's wings are 'more precious than angels'' (l. 40); the spiritual reverence towards the non-human first displayed during Jamie's Asian travels is now being applied to the wildlife of Scotland. 'Flashing Green Man' is perhaps the most explicit example of the negotiation between the urban and the wild in *The Queen of Sheba*. Jamie does

[89] Bell, 'Transcending the Urban', p. 45.
[90] Ibid, p. 46.
[91] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 83-140.
[92] Bell, 'Transcending the Urban', p. 47.

not make it clear if this negotiation should result in following the geese out of the cities to the north, or if simply taking the time to notice them and engage with them imaginatively is enough, but in either case, the poem enacts Heidegger's belief that works of art 'transport us out of the realm of the ordinary'.[93]

The final poem in the collection, 'Skeins o Geese', also utilises the image of geese flying in formation. This poem's focus is our inability as humans to understand the non-human world, as the skeins of geese 'write a word / across the sky' that is incomprehensible to the human observer ('Skeins o Geese', p. 64, ll. 1-2). In spite of this, the persona is once again receptive to the geese's message:

> I'm empty as stane, as fields
> ploo'd but not sown, naked
> an blin as a stane. Blin
> tae the world, blin
> tae a' soon but geese ca'ing. (ll. 6-10)

The persona has regressed to a kind of foetal vulnerability, 'empty' yet metaphorically connected to the 'stane' and 'fields' of the land – which, while currently barren, have the potential to be sown and therefore carry the possibility of new life – and open to the sound of the birds. The repetition of the word 'blin' suggests that the persona is unable to commune with the non-human, creating a feeling of hopelessness.[94] However, there is a glimmer of hope in the last line of the stanza, as the persona is able to at least hear, if not understand, the geese calls. It is not just the geese that are sending a message, either: barbed wire is like 'archaic script' (l. 11) as 'The barbs / sign tae the wind' (ll. 12-13). Human history is written onto the land, 'the past which lies / strewn aroun' (ll. 16-17), and it is just as meaningful as the wild geese. There is a sense of prehistoric time in the poem, as the geese's message is 'struck lik a gong / afore I wis born' (ll. 3-4); it is 'A word niver spoken or read.' (l. 22) There is an implication that it is something which humans used to know a long time ago which is now lost to us – but could perhaps be regained, or rebirthed, if we learn to be attentive to the world around us. This is an example of the 'primordial' conception of the non-human which Heidegger identifies as having been replaced by a detached, theoretical, *scientific* way of understanding.[95] In the final lines of the poem, the persona hears 'a soun, / maybe human, bereft' (ll. 24-25), the source of which is left unclear, blurring the line between the human and the non-human even as we are left 'bereft' by the failure of communion with the geese.

'Skeins o Geese' is one of the few poems in *The Queen of Sheba* which is written predominantly in Scots, though it is still blended with English. The issue of language is of particular

[93] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 191.
[94] Interestingly, the persona is 'blin' to both sight and 'soon', which is an early example of the kind of complex, decentred networks of sensorial input that Jamie later explores in her essays.
[95] This is summarised well in David E. Cooper, 'Heidegger on Nature', *Environmental Values*, 14.3 (August 2005), 339-351.

importance in this poem due to its preoccupation with communication and meaning. Bell notes the significance of Jamie's use of Scots in this context:

> It is particularly noteworthy […] that Jamie shifts into Scots to articulate this straining towards connection with the non-human world: to truly transcend the constraints hitherto represented by the urban–rural dichotomy, it may also be necessary to transcend the official language.[96]

The Scots language is itself a kind of wild space, with its unofficial status, regional variations, and comparative lack of regulations, as well as the physicality of its glottal stops and velar fricatives; Bell describes Jamie's use of the language as 'a reclamation of linguistic biodiversity'.[97] Scots is also arguably more place-bound than standard English, making it a particularly appropriate language for the expression of Heideggerian dwelling. This closing poem is not just an ecopoetic negotiation, then, but also a negotiation between languages and with the ideas of home and nation. Nancy Gish has argued that the use of multiple voices and languages is a distinctive feature of contemporary Scottish poetic experimentation, which enacts 'the freeing up of multiple subjectivities and the concomitant release of suppressed lexical and aural possibilities.'[98] The polyphony of *The Queen of Sheba*, of its individual poems and the collection itself, works to suggest an alternative, wilder way of being that disrupts any kind of stable categorical interpretation, but still allows for a sense of collectivity, if not communion.[99]

In many ways, *Jizzen* continues and develops the themes present in *The Queen of Sheba*: negotiations of gender and nationality, identity and subjectivity, and domesticity and wildness. The idea of birth also plays a significant part in the collection, which is made apparent by its title, the Scots word for childbed. Jamie has spoken about the choice of this title:

> I chose the word because at the time of writing I was having my own two children. So the very physical, organic business of giving birth was in the front of my mind. Also, it was the time of the Devolution Referendum when it seemed to be that Scotland was having a rebirth of its own. So the title functions both ways: personally and politically.[100]

We can begin to see here a process of female maturation that can be traced throughout Jamie's career and that, in this collection, is paralleled with national issues. In terms of critical reception, Timothy L. Baker explains the narrow focus which critics have applied to *Jizzen*:

> Like *The Queen of Sheba*, *Jizzen* has often been approached in terms of its clear parallels between national and individual identity, particularly in relation to its focus on birth and development. […] In *Jizzen*, however, Jamie not only ironises or renegotiates ideas of self and nation, as in her earlier work, but further challenges any concept of stable identity. Throughout the volume, as can be seen in relation to

[96] Bell, 'Transcending the Urban', pp. 47-48.
[97] Ibid, p. 48.
[98] Gish, p. 269.
[99] Peter Mackay, '"The Tilt from One Parish to Another": *The Tree House* and *Findings*' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 84-91 (pp. 87-88).
[100] Jamie, 'More Than Human', p. 143.

> Jamie's use of intra- and intertextual reference, she presents individual and collective identity not in terms of unity but rather, in the worlds of 'Lucky Bag', as an 'orderly rabble' […] Identity is figured not simply in terms of shared experience, but also through what might be termed a politics of difference, whereby the nation and the self are both seen in terms of individual relation.[101]

This challenging of stable identity also contributes to Jamie's developing ecopoetic sensibility as she engages with the non-human world in *Jizzen* more than ever before, creating a kind of poetic biodiversity.

In *Jizzen*'s opening poem, 'Crossing the Loch', identity, memory and time are all presented in plural and collective terms. The poem begins with an invocation of memory: 'Remember how we rowed toward the cottage / on the sickle-shaped bay'.[102] Time is already functioning on two levels, the remembered past and the present in which the act of remembering is taking place, as is identity. Baker argues that 'Both the presumed audience and the unnamed other or others in the boat are necessary to the constitution of the speaker's self, but remain silent.'[103] Self is collective yet unstable in this poem. The first line of the second stanza contains the first instance of 'I' used in the poem, as the speaker admits 'I forget who rowed.' (l. 8) This disrupts any stable sense of collective identity and reveals the unreliability of memory, throwing the whole poem into question. Jamie only uses 'I' one more time, again in the second stanza, for another admission: 'Out in the race I was scared' (l. 11). This is a moment of risk and uncertainty which again disrupts any sense of effortless collectivity.

The negotiation between risk and safety is key in 'Crossing the Loch'. There is a sense of underlying threat throughout the poem, from the 'deadheads, ticking nuclear hulls' (l. 14) imagined under the water to the acknowledgement that 'It was surely foolhardy, such a broad loch, a tide' (l. 24). However, the risk is made worthwhile by what they experience on the loch:

> and who first noticed the loch's
> phosphorescence, so, like a twittering nest
> washed from the rushes, an astonished
> small boat of saints, we watched water shine
> on our fingers and oars,
> the magic dart of our bow wave? (ll. 18-23)

There is something supernatural in this moment of attentiveness: the group are 'astonished' by the 'magic' of their non-human surroundings. Their metaphorical comparison to saints calls back to the Irish Celtic saints who sailed to the Hebridean Islands of Scotland, such as Columba, suggesting that this crossing is a similarly spiritual voyage of discovery. This, combined with the element of risk, creates a moment of Heideggerian *unheimlich*.[104] The group experiences a moment of alienation which reveals to them something uncommunicable, something pre-human and beyond the realm of

[101] Baker, p. 62.
[102] Kathleen Jamie, 'Crossing the Loch' in *Jizzen* (London: Picador, 1999), pp. 1-2, ll. 1-2.
[103] Baker, pp. 65-66.
[104] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 228-235.

language, which Jamie clearly sees as worthy of attempting to record and remember. This encounter with the *unheimlich* must end, however, and the poem ends with a return to safety and familiarity: 'we shipped oars and jumped, / to draw the boat safe, high at the cottage shore.' (ll. 31-32) For Jamie, an encounter with the non-human in a circumstance of risk can create a moment of collectivity, but this is always fleeting as the human can never fully subsume the non-human or vice versa.

Jizzen's preoccupation with birth comes to the fore with the 'Ultrasound' sequence. These seven poems differ in form – there are couplets, tercets, octaves, and stanzas of mixed length – as well as language, with 'Bairnsang' being written entirely in Scots, 'Ultrasound' and 'February' in blended Scots-English, and the rest in English. Although the speaker is the same woman across the sequence, at first pregnant and then mother to an infant son, the differences in form and language between the poems (and, indeed, the separation of the poems in the first place) create a sense of polyphony. Baker notes the effect of this polyphony on the formation of identity in the sequence:

> 'Ultrasound' not only focuses on an idea of relational identity, but enacts it through its juxtaposition of diverse styles and forms. […] The voice of the speaker, and the unity of the sequence, is made possible only by this stylistic diversity. The coherence of the sequence rests not on repetition, but difference: by opening up a space for a fluid or even prismatic identity, in which the voice of the speaker changes in every poem yet remains consistent, Jamie suggests a possibility for thinking of identity in a less rigid way.[105]

Identity is a kind of wild place in 'Ultrasound', where instability is a foundational principle rather than a disruptive force. The 'relational identity' Baker mentions is that of mother and son. In the first two poems the speaker and her son are part of one body, but a process of separation begins in 'Thaw' when she gives birth and a new body enters the world: 'we were two, from my one.' ('Thaw', p. 13, l. 26) Throughout the sequence, 'The speaker's identity is formed in terms of separation from an other who was once part of her.'[106] Again, the concept of an enclosed individual identity is eschewed for an unstable collectivity, an idea which can also be applied to Jamie's conception of the relationship between the human and the non-human as it reflects the structure of an ecosystem.

The non-human world is a crucial element in the formation of identity in the sequence, where it is juxtaposed with the domestic realm – the 'heap of nappies' ('February', p. 14, l. 1) and 'the hanging out, my mouth / crowded with pegs' (ll. 4-5). 'Sea Urchin', for example, compares the care with which the speaker holds her son to the care with which she has treated the natural world, as his head

> rests as tenderly
> as once I may
> have freighted

[105] Baker, p. 65.
[106] Ibid, p. 64.

water, or drawn
treasure, whole
from a rockpool (‘Sea Urchin’, p. 17, ll. 5-9)

This reveals the reverence the speaker has for the non-human ‘treasures’ in her environment and creates a sense of interconnectedness between the human and the non-human, of which birth and motherhood play a crucial part. As Luca Valera notes, ‘The first point of similarity between Women and Nature is arguably the concept of maternity: both are mothers’, and the child depends upon the mother as humanity depends upon nature.[107] Place and placenames are also important in ‘Bairnsang’, where each stanza ends with an invocation of a specific Scottish locations ranging from the Borders to the Shetland Islands. (‘Bairnsang’, pp. 15-16, l. 8; l. 16; l. 24; l. 31) These various environments are presented as a kind of inheritance for the speaker’s son, made accessible through the Scots language. There is an implication here that Scots is a language which allows more intimacy with the landscape than English, enabling an identity rooted in place to be formed.[108] Juliet Simpson identifies the ‘Ultrasound’ sequence’s engagement with the non-human and its rootedness, as well as its ‘sparseness of effect, image and poetic metrical structure’, with the Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetic tradition, particularly ‘praise poetry’ and ‘its use of startling juxtapositions of familiar images to stimulate unexpected insights of nature–spiritual connections.’[109] In this sense, Jamie could be placed within a Scottish Gaelic-influenced line of nature poetry including Duncan Ban MacIntyre and Sorley MacLean. In the ‘Ultrasound’ sequence alone, Jamie undertakes complex negotiations of identity, domesticity and wildness, nation and language, and poetic tradition and innovation, all within the context of birth and motherhood – which she describes as yet another ‘wild place’.[110]

‘Lucky Bag’ is Jamie’s most explicit negotiation with nation in *Jizzen*. The poem takes the form of a lucky dip bag – ‘one for each wean’ (‘Lucky Bag’, p. 42, l. 16) – listing a wide variety of items and places whose only common qualities are their connection to Scotland and a refrain of an ‘o’ sound in a loose, free verse form.[111] Locations again range from the Borders to the Highlands, religions from evangelical Presbyterianism to Tibetan Buddhism, time from the prehistoric Picts to modern-day giros. Alice Entwistle outlines the context of the poem:

> Commissioned by the National Museum of Scotland, inaugurated in the year of the 1997 referendum, ‘Lucky Bag’ […] cheerfully weighs in on the reinstitutionalising of the nation’s imaginative and cultural life. In playfully poststructural mood, the poem assembles a proliferating array of official and unofficial signifiers exposing how

[107] Luca Valera, ‘Françoise d’Eaubonne and ecofeminism: rediscovering the link between women and nature’ in *Women and Nature? Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body, and Environment*, ed. by Douglas A. Vakoch (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 9-24 (p. 12).
[108] Juliet Simpson, ‘“Sweet-Wild Weeks”: Birth, Being and Belonging in *Jizzen*’ in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 71-81 (p. 77).
[109] Ibid, pp. 72-73.
[110] Kathleen Jamie, ‘A Lone Enraptured Male’, *London Review of Books*, 30.5 (6 March 2008), 29-35 (p. 35).
[111] Baker, p. 68.

> Scotland's public and private, secular and spiritual, historical and contemporary experiences intrude on one another.[112]

It would be easy, in this context, for 'Lucky Bag' to fall into an overtly nationalist or patriotic tone, but Jamie avoids this to instead celebrate the oxymoron of the 'orderly / rabble' (ll. 16-17) that is the reality of Scottish culture. Indeed, other cultures play a part in the formation of collective identity presented in the poem: 'Brattisani's chips' (l. 4) are the product of Italian immigrants settled in Edinburgh, while the 'shalwar-kameez' (l. 8) and 'Samye Ling' centre in Dumfriesshire (l. 11) are representative of Asian cultures. Gaelic culture is represented too by 'a clootie well' (l. 5), a reference to the ancient Irish/Scottish tradition of pilgrimage to holy wells to make offerings, usually in order to cure illness.[113] Volsik argues that Jamie creates 'a "national space" which is […] "welcoming" to the foreign, curious about the possibilities of "métissage" – something which is perhaps the result of her own travels in exotic spaces'.[114] 'Lucky Bag' is the epitome of this métissage, as Jamie dismantles the idea of a stable, unified national identity in this poem, revealing the many contradictory voices that make up a nation. However, as Entwistle points out, the poem is cheerfully optimistic – the somewhat mournful tone of 'Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead' is replaced by a sense of celebration and excitement created by the fast pace of the short lines.

Like 'Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead', 'Lucky Bag' also presents a knowledge of place and environment as an important part of national identity. Knoydart, Broxburn and Kirkcaldy are all mentioned by name, and there is a sense that a similar selection of small towns or islands could be included in a child's lucky bag of identity depending on their experiences and heritage. Landscapes are referred to by their Scots names: 'gloup', 'clachan' and 'bing' (l. 10) are used instead of their English versions (sea cave, hamlet, and ash heap, respectively). This again highlights the ties between language and land, the crucial inheritance of a local vocabulary with which to describe one's surroundings. Also present is a tension between the non-human, 'natural' world and human waste: a 'field o whaups', or curlews (l. 3), and a 'midden', or waste heap (l. 14), as well as technology in the form of 'computer bits' (l. 5) are all equally part of this Scottish inheritance. Jamie is revealing and revelling in the fact that national identity, while undeniably tied to the landscape, is not one stable truth, but instead a set of complex negotiations between contradictory forces – negotiations which are constantly in action.

'Meadowsweet', the final poem in *Jizzen*, brings together the collection's major themes of birth, gender, nation, and the non-human world. An epigraph lends context to the poem: 'Tradition suggests that certain of the Gaelic women poets were buried face down.' ('Meadowsweet', p. 49) From the beginning, then, we feel the presence of history and of cultural practice which is tied to both

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[112] Entwistle, p. 120.
[113] Undiscovered Scotland, *The Clootie Well* (2019), <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/munlochy/clootiewell/index.html> [accessed 28 March 2020].
[114] Volsik, p. 351.

art and land. Archaeologists have not been able to determine why such 'prone burials' took place,[115] but in 'Meadowsweet' there is a sense of fear involved – fear that, as in the poem, the woman poet will rise from the dead. Jamie is asserting the power of female artists to disrupt societal norms, a power which she portrays as being rooted in environment and culture. The buried woman is returned to the land where she is able to connect with and learn from the seeds of wildflowers 'caught' in her hair (l. 7):

> meadowsweet, bastard balm,
> tokens of honesty, already
> beginning their crawl
>
> toward light, so showing her,
> when the time came,
> how to dig herself out (ll. 10-15)

As Matt McGuire points out, '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.'[116] Jamie draws upon the long tradition of women being associated with nature,[117] but in a manner charged with subversive energy. The non-human is shown as an active agent here; the land has gifted the poet with these 'tokens' to facilitate her rebirth. That they are 'tokens of honesty' implies that the poet is being given the gift of rebirth because of her power to reveal truth, which aligns with Heidegger's theory of unconcealment being attained through art.[118] The poet is reborn with the help of the landscape to communicate from beyond death, her mouth 'full again / of dirt, and spit, and poetry.' (ll. 17-18) 'Meadowsweet' is a fitting ending for the pairing formed by *The Queen of Sheba* and *Jizzen* as it pulls the three threads of nature, gender, and nation into one short, tightly controlled poem which boldly asserts the place of the female Scottish poet, revealing the interconnected nature of poetry and physical environment.

In both *The Queen of Sheba* and *Jizzen*, Jamie presents a discordant polyphony of voices in negotiation with one another within and between individual poems. By discussing issues of nation and national identity – made more urgent by the context of the 1997 Scottish devolution referendum – in this pluralistic manner, Jamie foregrounds the unstable nature of collective identity while also celebrating it, as we can see in 'Lucky Bag'. Gender, too, is in negotiation in both collections, with fragmented and plural female voices speaking from the margins of the patriarchal nation state to assert

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[115] Current Archaeology, *Buried face down: Prone Burials* (2009), <https://www.archaeology.co.uk/articles/features/buried-face-down-prone-burials.htm> [accessed 30 March 2020].
[116] Matt McGuire, 'Kathleen Jamie' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Poetry*, ed. by Matt McGuire and Colin Nicholson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 141-153 (p. 145).
[117] See Karen Ya-Chu Yang, introduction to *Women and Nature? Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body, and Environment*, ed. by Douglas A. Vakoch, pp. 3-8.
[118] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 83-140.

an alternative, wilder kind of identity – something which Alison Lumsden and Aileen Christianson identify as a common feature of writing by Scottish women writers in the late-twentieth century, grouping Jamie with writers such as Lochhead, A. L. Kennedy, and Janice Galloway.[119] The connections made between women and nature in poems such as the 'Ultrasound' sequence and 'Meadowsweet' align with ecofeminist thinking, which Karen Ya-Chu Yang explains:

> the realignment between women and nature is not an essentialist return to feminizations of nature or naturalizations of women that previous feminist movements have fought hard to dismantle; on the contrary, ecofeminism argues for critical deconstructions of historical, cultural, and social dominions of women and nature in favor of a more complex, diversified, and hybrid bridging of the relationship between women and nature.[120]

Jamie's negotiations with gender, birth, motherhood, and the non-human world in these two collections can be seen as this kind of 'hybrid bridging', working to trouble the boundaries of an andro- and anthropocentric society.

It is clearly reductive to focus only on Jamie's handling of nation and gender in these works, as the non-human world is engaged with in virtually every poem. The sense of unstable collectivity built in both collections can be interpreted as a kind of metaphorical ecosystem, or mesh,[121] which Jamie uses to question concepts of national and female identity. In some poems, such as 'The Queen of Sheba', 'Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Dead' and 'Flashing Green Man', images of the non-human are utilised as a tool in negotiating these identities. However, the nexus between gender, nation, and the non-human becomes increasingly complex from the end of *The Queen of Sheba* and through *Jizzen*, incorporating the non-human into the formation of plural identity and pointing toward Jamie's growing interest in the 'world which is more-than-human',[122] which we will see in the following chapter as she turns to nature writing with greater determination and focus.

[119] Alison Lumsden and Aileen Christianson, introduction to *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 1-7 (p. 2).
[120] Yang, p. 3.
[121] Morton, pp. 28-58.
[122] Jamie, 'More Than Human', p. 142.

3. The Shamanic Mediator: *The Tree House* (2004) and *Findings* (2005)

The Treehouse (2004) and *Findings* (2005) signify a significant shift in Jamie's focus. In an interview conducted in 2001, just two years after the publication of *Jizzen*, Jamie noted this ongoing shift herself: 'I'm only half-way through my career and I can get on with what is actually important. […] I am interested in the world which is more-than-human, which is beyond the human. I believe that's where our problems actually lie.'[123] This could be read as implying that her previous work only addressed where our problems *seemed* to lie. In *The Tree House*, Jamie departs from the issues of gender and nation presented in her previous poetry (although there are still several poems written fully in Scots, and Scots words and phrases are included in many of the English-language poems, which will be discussed in detail in this chapter), choosing instead to focus solely on the non-human world and our relationship to it, as well as its relation to poetry and the poet. *Findings*, while not Jamie's first foray into non-fiction writing, is her first collection of essays and is again primarily concerned with the non-human and the ways in which it intersects with the human. It is appropriate to discuss *The Treehouse* and *Findings* together because of their similar preoccupations and their unusually close publication dates, rather than separating them by form. As we saw in the introduction, Jamie has described her essays as 'poetic', showing her characteristic resistance to conventional definitions and characterisations as she insists upon the interrelatedness of these two literary forms.[124] This chapter will examine the ways in which Jamie develops her ecopoetic practice in *The Tree House* and how she then applies it to the essay form in *Findings*, expanding on the thread of interest in the interconnection between the human and the non-human we have seen in her writing thus far. In these collections, Jamie prioritises the immediate sensory encounter with the non-human and attempts to take on the role of shamanic mediator, which she outlined in a 2001 interview: 'the role of the poet is not to be political but shamanic (it's the only word I can think of), mediating between various worlds and bringing messages back and forth between them.'[125] For Jamie, poetry is an artform which is vital in helping us to negotiate and understand our place in the world. A shaman is 'believed to achieve various powers through trance or ecstatic religious experience', and 'typically thought to have the ability to heal the sick, to communicate with the otherworld, and often to escort the souls of the dead to that otherworld.'[126] Jamie's use of this word suggests that the poet's mediating process is not an expression of ego, but a public service of sorts,[127] and also points to the importance of the moment of

[123] Jamie, 'More Than Human', pp. 141-142.
[124] Jamie, *The SRB Interview*.
[125] Jamie, 'More Than Human', p. 142.
[126] 'Shamanism', in *Encyclopædia Britannica* [online], <https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/levels/collegiate/article/shamanism/109509> [accessed 11 October 2020].
[127] This could be linked to Bate's assertion of 'the capacity of the writer to restore us to the earth which is our home.' Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. i.

encounter with the non-human to this process, which could be taken as an alternative to the shamanic 'trance.'

Before discussing the content of the poems in *The Tree House*, it is important to note their forms. They are generally much shorter than those in Jamie's earlier collections, rarely taking up more than one page, and their line and stanza lengths are similarly concise. Lucy Collins identifies this tendency with a common argument in ecocriticism:

> The impact of scarcity on environmental balance demands that the fulfilment of real need should be given priority over consumerism. In Jamie the articulation of scarcity is to be found in language itself, in the lack of superfluity and ornamentation of both poetry and prose.[128]

Jamie avoids the often-ornamental language used in traditional Romantic nature writing,[129] instead choosing to prioritise lucidity in a style reminiscent of Norman MacCaig.[130] McGuire argues that Jamie's nature poetry draws from a 'Romantic inheritance',[131] prioritising continuities (although he does allow that 'Her work stands in contrast to some of the more affected poses of traditional Romantic poetry.'[132]) However, what Jamie chooses to discard is an equally important part of this inheritance. As Monika Szuba argues, 'she moves beyond Romantic visions of the self and the natural world, refuting an ego- and anthropocentric tilt.'[133] Most significantly, we shall see that William Wordsworth's infamous assertion that 'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'[134] is not a view that Jamie shares, as she carefully avoids imposing her own ego and emotion upon her non-human subjects, instead attempting to listen to and respect them.

The Tree House opens with 'The Wishing Tree', a poem written in the voice of a tree into which people have hammered coins hoping to be granted a wish. This is a folk ritual like that of the clootie well mentioned in 'Lucky Bag'; Jamie is clearly interested in the intersection between such spiritual human practices and the non-human world they are rooted in, with the presence of the coins indicating a transactional element in this relationship. In an essay identifying Jamie with contemporary ecopoets John Burnside and Robin Robertson, David Borthwick argues

> In the work of Burnside, Jamie and Robertson, uncanny references to folk tradition and supernatural phenomena are used to highlight contemporary relationships with the natural or nonhuman world, foregrounding a form of connective estrangement;

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[128] Lucy Collins, '"Toward a Brink": The Poetry of Kathleen Jamie and Environmental Crisis' in *Crisis and Contemporary Poetry*, ed. by Anne Karhio et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 150-66 (155).
[129] E.g. note the rich, sensual language in John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale' in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson et al., 5th edn. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005), pp. 935-937.
[130] Jamie's similarity to MacCaig has been noted by critics, e.g., McGuire, 'Kathleen Jamie', p. 153.
[131] Ibid, p. 141.
[132] Ibid, p. 151.
[133] Szuba, p. 93.
[134] William Wordsworth, preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems* (1802) in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch et al., 2nd edn. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), pp. 559-579 (p. 573).

> that is, connection to nature is often expressed through its apparent failure: in terms of estrangement, loss, or the inability to found a relationship with the nonhuman world.[135]

'The Wishing Tree' is one such 'uncanny reference'. It is located 'neither in the wilderness / nor fairyland',[136] but instead in 'the tilt from one parish / into another.' (ll. 5-6) The tree is refuting the narratives of pure, unspoiled wilderness and supernatural fairy-tale that have been projected onto it by humans, instead asserting a position of liminality which is not fully knowable to humans. It is this aspect of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility that Mackay associates more with Emmanuel Levinas than Heidegger. Mackay suggests that Levinas' 'ethics founded on being-in-the-world [in a Heideggerian sense] and on "respect" for the other, but which recognised the limits of knowledge, the uneasiness of being' is a good approach to understanding Jamie's often frustrated attempts to know the non-human other.[137] He argues that 'There is an element of Jamie's attention that is repeatedly drawn beyond the limits of human knowledge, beyond the limits of attentiveness, into death and absence, into a realm that is "unchancy".'[138] In speaking from the tree's perspective and protesting against its co-optation into human narratives, Jamie affords it a respect which is emblematic of her treatment of the non-human world. However, even while speaking in the tree's voice she acknowledges that it is not fully comprehensible to humans as it inhabits a space which is inaccessible to us; she is able to highlight its otherness without treating it as a resource to be used for human gain. The central paradox of poems such as 'The Wishing Tree' is that, by giving the non-human other a voice, its otherness is being absorbed into the human realm of language, form, and poetics.

The human world plays an important part in 'The Wishing Tree' beyond just language. The tree reveals something of human experience:

> To look at me
> through a smirr of rain
>
> is to taste the iron
> in your own blood (ll. 7-10)

This is a bodily experience even in a poem written from a non-human perspective; sensory perception leads to deeper meaning, or unconcealment.[139] The coins embedded in the tree are a physical manifestation of the human 'common currency / of longing' (ll. 12-13). As Lynn Davidson points out, 'The tree uses its 'voice' to reflect back the projection onto it of human longing and wishing.'[140]

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[135] David Borthwick, '"The tilt from one parish / into another": Estrangement, Continuity and Connection in the Poetry of John Burnside, Kathleen Jamie and Robin Robertson,' *Scottish Literary Review*, 3.2 (2011), 133-48 (pp. 135-136).
[136] Kathleen Jamie, *The Tree House* (London: Picador, 2004), pp. 3-4, ll. 1-2.
[137] Mackay, p. 87-88.
[138] Ibid, p. 87.
[139] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 83-140.
[140] Lynn Davidson, 'Repetition, Return and the Negotiation of Place in *The Tree House*' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 93-98 (p. 94).

Although the tree is 'poisoned' (l. 21) and 'choking' (l. 22) because of this human projection, it is assertive in its survival: 'look: I am still alive – / in fact, in bud.' (ll. 25-26) It would have been easy enough to simply condemn this practice because of the damage it causes to trees, but Jamie is resistant to this kind of reductive thinking, instead embracing a Levinasian 'uneasiness of being'.[141] She walks a fine line between on the one hand respecting the tree's otherness and showing the violence with which humans have treated it, and on the other celebrating the beauty of what it reflects of human experience for the persona looking at it (of course, the tree-voice does not necessarily share this view, which raises questions of passive and active forms of agency). Jamie's visual imagery provokes a deep uneasiness, as we are left unsure of there being any 'correct' interpretation of what it reveals of the interconnection between the human and the non-human. Gairn argues that in Jamie's work, 'the possibility of breaking down the division between the human and natural worlds is often contemplated in the context of transformative or liminal spaces'.[142] The wishing tree is one such liminal space, where the boundary between the human and the non-human is at its thinnest – but is still present.

An alternative approach is applied in the next tree poem in the collection, 'Alder', which is also written in couplets. Instead of speaking with the tree's voice, Jamie instead addresses the alder tree, asking questions to which there are no direct answers. The similarity of subject and form in 'The Wishing Tree' and 'Alder' works to highlight their difference in approach, once again showing Jamie's willingness to reengage with the same subjects to glean as many meanings as possible. Davidson notes the opposing effects of these two poems:

> In contrast to the wishing tree, which speaks words we may not want to hear, the alder does not speak at all. We might want to scuttle back to the wishing tree, to our tilting parishes, in the chill fact of the alder's innate unfolding.[143]

This 'innate unfolding' refers to the lines 'alder, who unfolded / before the receding glaciers' ('Alder', p. 7, ll. 7-8). 'Unfolding' in this context could be read as a synonym for dwelling, for growing and being in one particular place.[144] The alder's being is 'chill' to the reader because it is prehistoric; it has been witness to a long history (including the development of the many current climate crises hinted at by the image of 'receding glaciers') that we can imagine, but never hope to experience. Two of the four sentences comprising the poem are questions. The speaker first asks if the alder tree is 'weary' in 'the age of rain' (ll. 1-2), and then makes a request of the tree:

> won't you teach me
>
> a way to live
> on this damp ambiguous earth? (ll. 10-13)

[141] Mackay, p. 88.
[142] Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature*, p. 178.
[143] Davidson, p. 95.
[144] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 78-90.

Faith Lawrence identifies what she calls a 'listening poetics' in Jamie's work, arguing that the practice of paying attention is more important to Jamie than expression of her own self.[145] She highlights the importance of questions to this kind of poetry: 'Listening spaces inevitably follow question marks (a question mark could be described as a listening notation), and when a question enters a Jamie poem, the poems are at their listening best.'[146] In 'Alder', the speaker is straining their ear to learn a different way of being from the tree, one that can be reconciled with the ambiguity and indifference of the earth. This is an ecopoetic technique that can be seen in opposition to Romantic forms in 'address to' or 'ode to' the non-human, in which the persona speaks at their subject rather than listening to it.[147]

While the tree does not reply as such, it is not totally silent. Jamie invokes the sound made by rain hitting the branches in musical terms: 'The rain showers / release from you a broken tune' (ll. 13-14). The word choice of 'broken' hints at the possibility of an unbroken song that could allow clear communication between the tree and the speaker, but this possibility is frustrated in the poem. However, what the speaker does gain is poetic inspiration. The sun makes the tree 'sparkle', 'like a fountain in a wood / of untold fountains.' (ll. 16-18) As Michael O'Neill has pointed out, fountains have often been utilised as an 'image for poetic creativity';[148] Jamie pulls from this tradition to suggest that while the tree cannot speak in our language, it can serve as a source of inspiration and thus enable poets to use language. The issue of language is central in ecological discourses, as Clark explains:

> A pervasive argument in ecocriticism is that language is a decisive human environment and that its currently dominant forms can rightly be called an environmental problem. This refers to such things as the instrumentalist and anthropocentric language of politics and administration or of official documents for regional planning […] More strikingly, it also includes human-centred assumptions about what language is – a mere tool for humans to represent and manipulate the world?[149]

Jamie is keenly aware of the difficulties involved in using the human construct of language to represent the non-human world. We can see the ways in which she attempts to combat this in 'Alder': she acknowledges that the non-human is fundamentally unknowable and cannot be fully expressed in words, but still advocates for a practice of listening and attentiveness by which a sense of collectivity can be achieved.

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[145] Faith Lawrence, 'A Poetics of Listening' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 10-19 (p. 13).
[146] Ibid, pp. 15-16.
[147] E.g. Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind' in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson et al., 5th edn., pp. 872-874.
[148] Michael O'Neill, 'Form in *The Tree House*' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 103-111 (p. 105).
[149] Clark, p. 46.

Jamie's use of Scots is also significant in her negotiations between the human and the non-human. Interestingly, two of the four poems in *The Tree House* written fully in Scots are translations of the German poet and philosopher Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843). As a key figure of German Romanticism, much of his poetry deals with our relationship to the non-human world – Heidegger's later essays were in fact inspired by his work, as well as that of other German Romantics.[150] Clearly, then, Jamie sees something of interest or value in at least some Romantic poetry, placing herself in dialogue with rather than opposition to it. As Collins points out, 'for a collection preoccupied by what it is to dwell, completely and ethically, on this earth, the influence of Hölderlin is instructive.'[151] In 'Hame', ideas of dwelling, language and home are all in negotiation within an ecopoetic framework. There is a sense of celebration in the rich Scots words Jamie bestows upon the plant life observed in the poem, such as 'jags' (thorns), 'gean-trees' (wild cherry trees), and ickers (ears of corn) ('Hame', p. 28, l. 6; l. 7; l. 12). There is also a sensory element to Jamie's Scots with verbs such as 'dauner' (stroll), 'slocken' (quench) and 'reeshle' (rustle) evoking very specific bodily sensations (l. 2; l. 5; l. 11). In comparison, Michael Hamburger's standard English translation feels far more placid, lacking the sense of play that Jamie's Scots brings to the poem.[152]

Language, in Heidegger's view, is key to understanding being, as Bate explains:

> For Heidegger, language is the house of being; it is through language that unconcealment takes place for human beings. By disclosing the being of entities in language, the poet lets them be. That is the special, the sacred role of the poet. What is distinctive about the way in which humankind inhabits the earth? It is that we dwell poetically (dichterisch).[153]

In 'Hame', Jamie taps into this Heideggerian-Hölderlinian idea of poetic dwelling, signalled by the poem's title and its address to the 'Yird' (Earth), and makes the very deliberate choice of Scots as the language of dwelling. This is not a choice made with nationalist motivations, but instead one that foregrounds the importance of locality and intimacy in our understanding of the non-human world and our place in it. In a 2018 essay on Scots, Jamie explained that she sees a connection between Scots and the non-human world:

> The two meld together in my mind: the wildlife I love and the Scots language. Both seem fugitive and assailed. If I hear one of the townsfolk here speak a long spiel in Scots, I feel the same pleasure as if I saw a flock of peewits.[154]

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[150] Bate, *Song of the Earth*, p. 262.
[151] Collins, p. 163.
[152] Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Home' in *Friedrich Hölderlin: Selected Poems and Fragments*, trans. by Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 267.
[153] Bate, *Song of the Earth*, p. 258.
[154] Kathleen Jamie, 'The View from Fife: The Wild Life of Scots', *Irish Pages***,** 10.1 (2018), 68-71, <https://ginkgoprize.com/the-view-from-fife-the-wild-life-of-scots-by-kathleen-jamie/> [accessed 24 May 2020].

Scots is 'wild' in the sense that it is a living, changing language that remains largely unstandardized; it has also been 'assailed' and denigrated by dominant cultural narratives, as has the non-human. Thus, for Jamie, Scots is an appropriate language for poetic expression of the non-human, as its specificity and locality speaks to a way of dwelling on and with the Earth that is less destructive. Collins argues that 'It is through language, through the "translation" of a German poet to a Scottish world, that the power of the local to speak of the universal finds particular form.'[155] Jamie's ecopoetics are grounded in an immediate, intimate understanding of one's environment, but this is not exclusive; it is a groundedness which opens out, or unfolds, into wider meanings. In the case of 'Hame', this meaning may lie in the simple act and practice of communication, making gestures of connection both across languages and across the divide between the human and the non-human.

The final poem in *The Tree House*, 'The Dipper', returns to the question of mediation that runs through the entire collection. The poet recalls seeing a bird emerge from a waterfall and land on a rock, singing a 'supple, undammable song' ('The Dipper', p. 49, l. 8), and wrestles in the present with the issue of representing this song in language:

> It isn't mine to give.
> I can't coax this bird to my hand
> that knows the depth of the river
> yet sings of it on land. (ll. 9-12)

The bird is able to cross boundaries in a way that the poet cannot; its way of being allows access to knowledge which is simply unattainable for the human. Jamie is unable to be shamanic here as she cannot pass on the bird's message (if indeed it even *is* a message), but the act of listening and noticing is still worth creative expression. In fact, as every second line is end-rhymed – a rarity in Jamie's work – the poem could in a sense could be read as the poet's own song inspired by her moment of attentiveness to the bird. 'The Dipper' is another poem which aligns more with the philosophy of Levinas than Heidegger, 'the notion of collectivity rather than communion – the necessary stymieing of any attempt to know the "other" and an ethics then founded on an understanding that the "other" or others are inherently unknowable.'[156] The unconcealment in this poem is ironically of the fact that language cannot reveal the nature of the bird's being beyond its otherness.

'The Dipper', then, is a fitting end to a collection which is in a constant balancing act between interconnection and alienation. As Mackay argues, 'The poem asserts our inability to commune, to be a community with nature; what we are left with is an ongoing mortal collectivity, an unstable, disordered engagement with creatures who we cannot fully know.'[157] 'Unstable' is a key word in understanding Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility. Different voices, methods of approach, and languages are

[155] Collins, pp. 163-164.
[156] Mackay, p. 88.
[157] Ibid, p. 90.

in negotiation throughout *The Tree House*, with each poem in discussion with the others, and with each potentially aligning with various different literary traditions and ecocritical arguments. These poems can even be seen as responding to or growing from Jamie's earlier work. For example, Laura Severin reads 'The Dipper' as 'a companion to "Meadowsweet", but one that speaks in counterpoint', foregrounding the otherness and inaccessibility of the non-human world in contrast to the communion between the human and the non-human in 'Meadowsweet'.[158] Amongst all these discourses, however, there is one consistent belief: the importance of attending to and respecting the non-human world, and of poetry's shamanic position in mediating between human and non-human realms. This described neatly by Gairn, who writes that 'The poems in *The Tree House* speak of the need to find or construct spaces for reverie as a way of attending to and living with nature.'[159] This is a new approach to the non-human in Jamie's writing – though one that was hinted at in poems like 'Flashing Green Man' and 'Skeins o Geese' – that she develops further in *Findings*.

Clark argues that the essay is a form which 'suits the often perplexingly interdisciplinary nature of environmental issues' because of its ability to draw on material from many different sources and its resulting 'openness to the contingency of fact, as opposed to the cognitive closure of more "finished" writing.'[160] This is certainly true of Jamie's use of the essay form in *Findings*, as she combines the scientific, the anecdotal, the sensory, the reflective, and the personal in her ecopoetic practice. In 2010, Jamie said, 'I couldn't even say what I write "about," because I distrust the relationship expressed by the word "about". I'd rather say that I write "toward". Or perhaps "within". At the moment, I'm writing a lot "toward" the natural world'.[161] Deborah Lilley explains the effects of this approach:

> By working "toward" a topic, Jamie can be seen to build up a composite picture of relations around a place or object, rather than a representation as such. The result effectively conveys the sense of mediation with which Jamie characterises her approach to her work.[162]

It is such 'composite pictures' that can be found in *Findings*, with Jamie writing not just toward the non-human world (animals, plant life, water, etc.), but also toward remnants of human activity and structures left on the landscape such as the Neolithic cairn at Maes Howe or ruins of shielings. It is in *Findings* that Jamie's ecopoetic outlook expands to emphasise the interconnected nature of the human and the non-human as a part of one ecosystem, even while maintaining a respect for and distance from the other. She also begins to develop a theory of the internal workings of the human body as a kind of

[158] Laura Severin, 'A Scottish Ecopoetics: Feminism and Environmentalism in the Works of Kathleen Jamie and Valerie Gillies', *Feminist Formations*, 23.2 (Summer 2011), 98-110 (p. 100).
[159] Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature*, p. 177.
[160] Clark, p. 36.
[161] Jamie, *Author Statement*.
[162] Deborah Lilley, 'Kathleen Jamie: rethinking the externality and idealisation of nature', *Green Letters*, 17.1 (2013), 16-26 (p. 19).

wilderness in the essays 'Fever' and 'Surgeons' Hall', which anticipate concerns in her later work, particularly *Sightlines* and *Frissure*.

The first essay in the collection, 'Darkness and Light', details Jamie's trip to Maes Howe in Orkney at midwinter. She sets out her motivations for travelling there as a way of escaping the traditional metaphorical associations of darkness:

> I'd a notion to sail by night, to enter into the dark for the love of its textures and wild intimacy. I had been asking around among literary people, readers of books, for instances of dark as a natural phenomenon, rather than as a cover for all that's wicked, but could find few.[163]

Jamie approaches the concept of darkness with 'love' and reverence instead of fear to see it as it is, as a 'natural phenomenon'. The word 'intimate' is used more than once in this essay (p. 9), showing Jamie's desire to perceive her surroundings on a smaller, more personal scale. From the very beginning of *Findings*, Jamie details her commitment to approaching the non-human from unconventional angles to release it from the heavy load of projected human meaning: 'We couldn't see the real dark for the metaphorical dark. Because of the metaphorical dark, the death dark, we were constantly concerned to banish the natural dark.' (p. 10) This is the kind of attitude towards the non-human that Heidegger argues is a result of 'the hidden anthropocentrism of western thought',[164] as the 'natural dark' is concealed by human metaphor. However, Jamie is unable to find the 'Real, natural' (p. 5) dark she seeks, as the lights from mainland coastal villages and oil rigs are visible from the ferry to Orkney, and then the dark of Maes Howe is interrupted by the torches and lasers of workers conducting stereo photography for Historic Scotland. Her quest for pure communion with the natural world is 'frustrated' (p. 9), as it so often is in both her essays and poetry.

What Jamie does find at Maes Howe, however, is of just as much (if not more) interest as 'real' darkness. In watching the workers survey the cairn for minute cracks – which would suggest a concerning movement of the entire structure – Jamie experiences a moment of connection with its original builders:

> It occurred to me, sometime during our brief conversation, that I would never again get so close to real Neolithic ancestors. Had this scene not happened before, thousands of years ago? Had not skilled workmen stood within this very tomb at the end of a working day, and taken a moment to survey their handiwork? Real people, flesh on their bones, tools in their hands, words on their lips in some language now utterly lost? (pp. 19-20)

Jamie's interest in the interrelation between human history and experience and landscapes comes to fruition in *Findings*. In this essay, although she sets out to escape human meanings and find something wild and 'wholesome' (p. 6), what she finds of value in the end is the 'artifice' and 'skill'

[163] Kathleen Jamie, *Findings* (London: Sort of Books, 2005), p. 3.
[164] Clark, p. 56

(p. 13) of the Neolithic builders, which is evidenced in their lasting use of the landscape for 'drama' (p. 23) and mirrored in the physicality of the modern-day workers: their 'flesh', their use of 'tools', the 'words on their lips'. Here, human history is remembered through repeated or related actions, the enactment of relations between human physicality and shaped landscape, which change in every instance but are nevertheless connected (this is another example of reapproaching or reengaging that could be paralleled to Jamie's writing process). For Jamie, Maes Howe is a space where a linear sense of time bends and distorts into something more fluid, where the distant past and the present can be experienced simultaneously, a concept which we first saw in *Among Muslims* and which Jamie will continue to explore in later essays such as 'The Woman in the Field' (2012) and 'Links of Noltland' (2019).

In 'Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes', Jamie's attentive gaze turns towards the birds she can see in her local area. This essay, among others, troubles any potential categorisation of *Findings* as travel writing as it operates on a domestic scale: 'Between the laundry and the fetching kids from school, that's how birds enter my life.' (p. 39) This marks a change in perspective from the 'Ultrasound' sequence, in which markers of the domestic world also related to housework and childrearing were positioned in contrast to the non-human world. In 'Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes', Jamie is not just living her life at home, but affording home the same close, intimate attention she pays to other places on her travels. She explicitly outlines the development of the 'listening practice'[165] that has been present throughout her work to differing degrees:

> This is what I want to learn: to notice, but not to analyse. To still the part of the brain that's yammering, 'My god, what's that? A stork, a crane, an ibis? – don't be silly, it's just a weird heron.' Sometimes we have to hush the frantic inner voice that says 'Don't be stupid,' and learn again to look, to listen. You can do the organising and redrafting, the diagnosing and identifying later, but right now, just be open to it, see how it's tilting nervously into the wind, try to see the colour, the unchancy shape – hold it in your head, bring it home intact. (p. 42)

The language Jamie uses here is rich with subtle implications. The words 'weird' and 'unchancy' suggest that there is something eerie about the spectacle of the bird flying above her. The bird is not portrayed as something that is innately more natural than the human because of its wildness but is instead characterised by its unfamiliarity in the eye of the observer. Jamie's use of the word 'nervously' to describe the motion of the bird is noteworthy – is it really the motion that is nervous, or is this perception affected by her own feelings even despite her attempts to quiet her internal narrative? Her appeal to 'bring it home' also raises questions as to where exactly 'home' is beyond just a physical place: it could be Jamie's memory, or her writing.

In this essay, the intricacies of Jamie's ecopoetic practice are made apparent. Bodily, sensory experience is prioritised in the instant of attentive encounter with the non-human as Jamie attempts to

[165] Lawrence, p. 12.

detach from her everyday self, and mediation and reflection come later, in the process of writing. The importance of the human body in this practice is something that Jamie will return to and expand on throughout her writing, developing what Gairn calls a 'bodily eco-poetics'.[166] Severin points out the way in which Jamie foregrounds listening over the other senses in 'Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes':

> Unlike much nature poetry that relies on sight imagery, Jamie's essay emphasizes the sound of the birds, their differing cries. […] This emphasis on sound over sight, on one of the most connective senses, underscores that the birds are part of humanity, in that their cries enter the human body.[167]

An example of this comes at the beginning of the essay, where Jamie is first alerted to the peregrines' presence by their calling: 'It's the kind of sound that drills into your head, and even when she's silent you carry the sound in your brain.' (p. 29) The image of the sound 'drilling' into the brain suggests that the connectivity which listening enables is not entirely comfortable; as Lawrence argues, 'A listening poetics should foreground and trouble the boundaries of the self rather than shore them up.'[168] Listening, in this essay, allows the strange and unchancy other – 'the stuff of omens and portents' (p. 46) – to cross the boundary between wilderness and domestic life, revealing the interconnectedness of the human and the non-human and undermining any comfortable sense of human exceptionalism or superiority. While Jamie knows that she cannot be at one with the birds, she celebrates their liminality: 'The peregrine flickers at the edge of one's senses, at the edge of the sky, at the edge of existence itself.' (p. 47) There is a sense of struggle here, once again foregrounding a Levinasian 'uneasiness of being' that can be seen in contrast to the more confident tone of some of Jamie's previous work,[169] such as 'The Queen of Sheba'.

Findings' titular essay also examines the interconnection of the human and the non-human, but from a very different perspective. Jamie recounts a trip to the uninhabited islands of Ceann Iar and Ceann Ear (a diversion from her original destination, St Kilda – this essay is once again built on a foundation of frustration), which she is careful to point out are not truly uninhabited: 'birds were breeding here, the air was worked by oystercatchers, fulmars, terns, and there were many rabbits, and sheep.' (p. 53) She disrupts the idealised image of these islands as deserted, silent places by presenting a cacophony of animal sound and activity. This image is further disrupted by the presence of man-made materials on the islands, as their sand dunes are 'choked with plastic.' (p. 59) The word 'choked' shows Jamie's awareness of the damage human waste is doing to the Earth, but she also sees these materials as worthy of attention:

> They had their own fascination, the shampoo and milk cartons, the toilet-cleaner bottles we could turn over with our feet. Though the colours were faded and the

[166] Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature*, p. 186.
[167] Severin, p. 102.
[168] Lawrence, p. 13.
[169] Mackay, p. 88.

> labels long gone, we knew their shapes, had seen them ranked in supermarkets and hardware stores. (p. 59)

The familiarity of these domestic objects in a supposedly wild setting creates a sense of unease, as Pippa Marland argues: 'Pelagic plastic waste is no respecter of the local, washing up in locations far from its origin, providing a material embodiment of uncanny dislocation and acting, perhaps, as the ultimate strange stranger.'[170] This has a 'deterritorialising' effect, shifting the essay's sense of scale from the immediate to the global.[171] Interconnection between the human and the non-human is figured in 'Findings' as the intrusion of durable synthetic materials upon the non-human realm ruled by the laws of life and death, which is shown by the natural waste materials of the lamb, rabbit and whale remains Jamie finds among the plastic.

There is a question of value in this essay, as Jamie ponders the keepsakes that the group take from the island: 'This is what we chose to take away from Ceann Iar: a bleached whale's scapula, not the door of a plane; an orb of quartz, not a doll's head.' (p. 60) Although the human and non-human waste objects are observed together, creating an equalising effect, it is the non-human that Jamie prioritises in the moment. She muses on the motivations behind these decisions:

> It seemed that what we chose to take – the orb of quartz, the whalebones – were not the things that endured, but those that had been transformed by death or weather. […] I wondered if it's still possible to value that which endures, if durability is still a virtue, when we have invented plastic, and the doll's head with her tufts of hair and rolling eyes may well persist after our own have cleaned back down to bone. (pp. 66-67)

Duration and transformation are placed in opposition here, with transformation deemed to be the more desirable process. The doll's head is used as an uncanny image of the human,[172] symbolising our unnaturally long-lasting impact on the earth. Here, man-made materials have in fact transcended the mortal human to become something frighteningly unfamiliar (although, in the context of ecological or geological time, even the most durable plastic is reduced to ephemera).

However, Jamie expresses regret at her choice of findings: 'I wish now I'd brought back home the doll's head too. I'd have put her on a corner of my desk like a paperweight' (p. 69). Marland reads Jamie's desire to have the doll as a 'paperweight' on her desk, amongst such natural objects as gannet and whale bones and the orb of quartz, as a suggestion

> that she might be welcomed there as a necessary corrective to the possible transcendental associations of the orb of white quartz – to the temptation to construct pastoral landscapes and "wildscapes", rather than engaging with their more complex

[170] Pippa Marland, 'The Gannet's Skull Versus the Plastic Doll's Head: Material "Value" in Kathleen Jamie's '"Findings"', *Green Letters*, 19.2 (2015), 121-131 (p. 124).
[171] Lilley, *The New Pastoral*, p. 74.
[172] Ibid, p. 72.

> social and ecological realities. The doll might usefully weigh down any moves towards flights of transcendental rhapsody, might keep the writing earthbound.[173]

Although Jamie is more than aware of the ominous implications of the plastic waste on Ceann Iar, her thinking does not stop there as she pushes to see things from multiple perspectives. There *is* value to be found in synthetic waste: it is a reminder of both the interconnection of the human and the non-human, the uneasy ecological mesh,[174] and of the need to interrogate our own preconceived notions of supposedly 'wild' places. Jamie's initial idea of these islands as 'Windswept, […] remote, all vast skies and seascapes' (p. 56) is thoroughly undermined by her own rigorous questioning, resulting in a conception of nature that includes the human in its systems.

This conception of nature is given yet another dimension in 'Fever' and 'Surgeons' Hall', where the human body is examined in as much detail as the animals and landscapes Jamie writes about elsewhere in *Findings*. In 'Surgeons' Hall', Jamie observes exhibits of human organs and makes the crucial point that 'We consider the natural world as "out there", an "environment", but these objects in their jars show us the forms concealed inside, the intimate unknown' (p. 141). The boundary between the human and the natural collapses with the realisation that the internal workings of our bodies are, in effect, just as wild to us as a peregrine or a whale. In 'Fever', Jamie records the process of developing this idea as her husband is hospitalised with pneumonia and she becomes immediately aware of human mortality and the fragility of our bodies. In this condition of risk, Jamie's senses are heightened without the concentrated effort needed in 'Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes': 'I noticed acutely the cobwebs and the tiny flies adrift in the sunny morning air […] I noticed, or rather felt, the sunlight intensifying and fading on the stone wall behind me' (p. 102). The rarity of this 'acute' noticing is emphasised at the end of the essay where Jamie admits, 'Writing this, I'd wanted to look again at the cobwebs. I hadn't noticed them with such intensity since. Not the spider webs nor anything else' (p. 113), which is yet another example of a moment of anxiety enabling unconcealment.[175]

Jamie applies the same intensity of noticing to her imagining of the internal workings of the human body, prompted by the X-ray image of her husband's lungs:

> What are we to imagine, the breathing area of our lungs, the 600 million alveoli? Spread out like what? Tarpaulin? Frost? A fine, fine cobweb, exchanging gases with the open air? And what of our nerves? There are hundreds of miles of neurones in our brains. I tried to imagine it, all that nerve, all that awareness and alertness spread out around me. All that listening. (pp. 104-105)

Jamie's search for an appropriate simile links the internal to the external, highlighting the natural processes of the human body and undermining the Cartesian division between the interior human self

[173] Marland, p. 129.
[174] Morton, pp. 28-58.
[175] Heidegger, *Basic Writings,* pp. 83-140.

and the exterior world.[176] The boundary between the human and the non-human collapses as Jamie is confronted with the reality that the human body is subject to the natural actions of disease and death, which is a subject she will return to in *Sightlines* and *Frissure*. As Lilley argues, 'Jamie's examination of nature on a visceral scale challenges conceptions of nature as external or stable'.[177] By zooming in, as it were, to the most intimate place possible, our own bodies, Jamie is once again revealing the deep interconnection between the human and the non-human.

The importance of listening and 'alertness' is also returned to in 'Fever'. Jamie not only documents her own listening practice here, but also admires that of the doctor who treats her husband: 'As she listened, she created around herself a screen of privacy. Her eyes disengaged. She folded herself into the stethoscope, in towards Phil's back, attending to the sound as a musician might.' (p. 104) This process is similar to the one which Jamie enacts in 'Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes', where detachment, or 'disengagement', from the self enables heightened sensory perception. Attentiveness is portrayed as an artform in the comparison of the doctor to a musician. The word 'attending' is repeated again when Jamie imagines what is being done with her husband's blood samples: 'Perhaps even now someone was attending to it, focusing through the lenses of a microscope.' (p. 106) The word implies both care and presence, creating a sense of reverence which Jamie uses as a form of prayer:

> Could I explain to Phil that – though there was a time, maybe 24 hours, when I genuinely believed his life to be in danger – I had not prayed? But I had noticed, more than noticed, the cobwebs, and the shoaling light, and the way the doctor listened, and the flecked tweed of her skirt, and the speckled bird and the sickle-cell man's slim feet. Isn't that a kind of prayer? The care and maintenance of the web of our noticing, the paying heed? (p. 109)

The influence of Jamie's Asian travels can be seen here, as attentiveness and 'paying heed' is conceived of as a spiritual practice. 'Paying heed' is a phrase that recurs both in her writing and interviews, and it implies that maintaining a reverent, careful attention is a way of respecting the non-human. Here, Jamie avoids any trite imagery of nature as a deity, Nature with a capital 'N', by including the human in her prayerful noticing: the doctor's listening art; the use of natural resources by humans represented by the tweed skirt; the human body affected by disease. By listing these alongside the non-human cobwebs, water and sunlight, Jamie presents a vision of nature which is fully inclusive of the human – and one which it is vital to attend to.

In reference to 'Fever' and 'Surgeons' Hall', Severin argues that

[176] This is explained well in Polt, pp. 55-56.
[177] Lilley, 'Rethinking the externality and idealisation of nature', p. 21.

> It is important to note that these essays sit somewhat uneasily next to essays like "Peregrines, Ospreys, and Cranes", in that they focus on the perishable aspect of nature, its link to mortality, rather than to nature's beauty and spiritual sustenance.[178]

I would argue that, rather than sitting 'uneasily' with the other essays in *Findings*, 'Fever' and 'Surgeons' Hall' share their preoccupations and enhance them with their alternate approach. Each of these essays offers a different perspective of the interconnection between the human and the non-human, whether that be the interrelation between human history and landscapes, the way in which the non-human borders on daily domestic life, questioning how we value human and non-human waste materials, or showing that the human body is subject to natural processes and is therefore not separate from the systems of nature. Furthermore, an awareness of mortality and temporality plays a part in 'Darkness and Light' and 'Findings', and beauty and spirituality play a part in 'Fever'.

These essays, while utilising different approaches to the non-human, share the common motive of disrupting traditional conceptions of nature as separate from and outside of the human. They also share a preoccupation with modes of sensory perception as a means of respecting and attending to the Earth. These central concerns are carried over from *The Tree House*, making the two collections companion pieces of a sort and therefore highlighting the importance of literary forms in ecological thinking, showing once again Jamie's commitment to rigorously reengaging with related subjects using different approaches, something that grows ever-more crucial to her ecopoetic practice. In these collections, Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility develops towards something like Morton's ecological mesh, which 'consists of infinite connections and infinitesimal differences.'[179] The following chapter will examine how Jamie develops this idea of connectivity between the human and the non-human even further as she enters mid-life and delves deeper into the realm of uncertainty and the 'uneasiness of being.'[180]

[178] Severin, p. 103.
[179] Morton, p. 30.
[180] Mackay, p. 88.

4. The 'Midlife Turn': *Sightlines* (2012) and *The Overhaul* (2012)

Much like *The Tree House* and *Findings*, *Sightlines* (2012) and *The Overhaul* (2012) form a complementary pairing. The essays and poems in these collections also share a concern with the interconnection of the human and the non-human and the question of how to mediate between the two. Gairn argues that they 'build on the exploratory ecopoetics of Jamie's previous collections, driven by the need to seek out 'truths' about the nature of belonging, however provisional or shape-shifting these may ultimately be.'[181] The concept of building on an existing foundation is key here, as Jamie consciously works to develop her ecopoetic practice, resulting in her negotiations with the non-human becoming even more complex as she leans further into the 'uneasiness of being'.[182] It is also important to note that her attitude towards the role of language in the process of negotiation had changed by this point, as she outlined in a 2012 interview:

> I used to believe that language was what got in the way, and that if only we could stop thinking in language we'd have more direct access to the world, to the extent I could jump out of bed and go outdoors without getting my head into gear. But now I think that's rubbish. I've learned now through reading that language is what we do as human beings, that's where we're at home, that's our means of negotiating with the world. So it doesn't get in the way, it enables. We do language like spiders do webs.[183]

Language is formulated as a natural process in this comparison to spiderwebs, showing that Jamie now considers it as vital in negotiating our place on and with the Earth rather than a barrier to it. Her use of 'do' rather than 'use' as the operative verb is particularly interesting, suggesting that to 'do' language is to partake in an active, open process of construction, rather than 'using' it to certain ends.

In another 2012 interview, she also noted her changing perspective because of age: 'Maybe I'm getting over myself […] Maybe I'm developing a wee bit of confidence at the grand old age of 50. Have I changed as a writer? I think I've accepted it in myself.'[184] In what seems like a contradiction of this assertion, the many negotiations carried out in the essays and poems of *Sightlines* and *The Overhaul* are often left without definitive answers or judgements; instead, a feeling of uncertainty prevails. Falconer identifies this uncertainty with a 'midlife turn' in Jamie's focus, a narrative pattern which originates in Dante's *Commedia* where the soul is lost in midlife but then found by the end with a sense of purpose and certainty. However, Falconer argues that Jamie subverts this tradition:

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[181] Louisa Gairn, ''Connective Leaps': *Sightlines* and *The Overhaul*' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 134-144 (p. 136).
[182] Mackay, p. 88.
[183] Jamie, *The SRB Interview*.
[184] Jamie, *Interview: Kathleen Jamie*.

> I'd like to suggest that Jamie's conception of being at the midlife "hinge" is a very different kind of experience: rather than leading on to a singular trajectory, the midlife threshold opens out onto a resonant, mobile sense of subjectivity. Quite the opposite of affirming one's sense of personal identity (whether or not in relation to a quest, a cause or an adversary), the midlife turn discloses a more diffuse sense of being.[185]

Jamie's emphasis on this open, 'diffuse sense of being', as opposed to one which is enclosed, stable, and individual, is the result of her newfound confidence in middle age. This chapter will examine how Jamie develops her ecopoetic practice by foregrounding this diffuseness of being in *Sightlines* and *The Overhaul* and connect this to the ongoing development we have seen in her writing thus far.

The first essay in *Sightlines*, 'Aurora', lays out several questions that are key to the entire collection. Jamie recounts, in immediate present tense, a voyage to the Arctic with a boatful of other tourists and their guide. At first, what they see is a tranquil picture of 'the sea, deceptively calm and blue and serene with icebergs',[186] but then their guide suggests they be quiet and listen:

> That's what we see. What we listen to, though, is silence. Slowly we enter the most extraordinary silence, a radiant silence. It radiates from the mountains, and the ice and the sky, a mineral silence which presses powerfully on our bodies, coming from very far off. It's deep and quite frightening, and makes my mind seem clamorous as a goose. I want to quell my mind, but I think it would take years. I glance at the others. Some people are looking out at the distant land and sea; others have their heads bowed, as if in church. (p. 4)

There is a sense of the Sublime here in the total otherness of the 'mineral silence', which the passengers attempt to negotiate by actively attending to their surroundings, some by submitting in a spiritual sense with their 'heads bowed'. Jamie attempts to pay heed to the silence similarly to how she pays heed to the birds in 'Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes': 'Be quiet, I tell myself. Listen to the silence.' (p. 5) However, she is not fully successful:

> Some people say you can never experience true silence, because you come to hear the high whine of your own nerves. That is to say, you hear the very nervous system which allows you to hear at all. Nerves because we are animals, not ice, not rock. Driven by cold and hunger. It's cold, our animal bodies say; best get moving. (p. 5)

Jamie's realisation that 'we are animals' frustrates the possibility of communion with the 'mineral silence', but there is also a sense of comfort in her assertion as she 'discovers a sense of belonging in her own subjective and physical reaction'[187] which acts as an antidote to the alienation of the silence and the icebergs which are 'huge and utterly meaningless.' (p. 6) Gairn notes that this assertion of our animality, which is repeated throughout *Sightlines*, indicates that Jamie 'draw[s] on a phenomenological point of view, where the apparent divide between mind and body, or self and

[185] Falconer, 'Midlife Music', pp. 156-157.
[186] Kathleen Jamie, *Sightlines* (London: Sort of Books, 2012), p. 3.
[187] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 136.

world, is rejected in favour of holistic lived experience, the world encountered through the senses.'[188] This is an extension of Jamie's emphasis on sensory experience in *Findings*, but the same listening is now extended in radical new directions, first to silence itself, then to the inner workings of her own body.

The frightening 'passivity of icebergs' is contrasted with the experience of seeing the aurora borealis, which is described as a 'fluidity of mind; an intellectualism […] Not the performance of a finished work but a redrafting and recalculating.' (p. 12) Jamie finds comfort in the changeability of the lights, linking this quality to the act of writing or, indeed, the creation of any kind of art. Another passenger makes a remark which furthers this interconnection between the human and the non-human: 'she whispers, "They are changing without moving", which is true, and I fall to wondering if there are other ways of changing without moving. Growing older perhaps, as we are. Reforming one's attitudes, maybe.' (p. 12) The processes of aging and changing is something which Jamie is open to throughout *Sightlines* as she continues to challenge her own ideas and look for alternative perspectives, whilst also carrying an awareness of her entrance into middle age with the death of her mother and the growth of her children mentioned in later essays. In 'Aurora', she sees something of her current phase of life reflected in the sky: 'There's something in the lights I recognise – a restlessness, a dissatisfaction with their own arrangements.' (p. 13) This sense of 'restlessness' is further explained: 'I wanted to change my map. Something had played itself out. Something was changing.' (p. 16) Rather than settling down into comfortable familiarity in her mid-life, she once again feels the instinct to set out, to change the contours of her internal map. For Jamie, knowledge is never fixed: 'I sail on the surface of understanding, a flicker here, a silence there.' (p. 17) 'Aurora' functions as a mission statement of sorts for *Sightlines*, setting up Jamie's desire to look for different modes of perception and engagement with the non-human to further negotiate our place on the Earth.

One such mode of engagement is scientific enquiry. In 'Pathologies', Jamie builds on the idea of the internal human body as a part of the system of nature that she first developed in 'Fever' and 'Surgeons' Hall'. She begins by considering her mother's death from pneumonia – where 'nature' had been 'allowed to take its course' (p. 21) – in contrast with a conference she attended soon after on 'humanity's relationship with other species', where the speakers had all insisted, 'We have a crisis because we have lost our ability to see the natural world, or find it meaningful. There had been a breakdown in reciprocity. Humanity had taken a wrong path, had become destructive and insulated.' (p. 22) Jamie is, typically, resistant to this dogmatic message, questioning their use of the term 'nature':

> What was it, exactly, and where did it reside? I'd felt *something* at my mother's bedside, almost an animal presence. Death is nature's sad necessity, but what when it

[188] Ibid.

> comes for the children? What are vaccinations for, if not to make a formal disconnection from some of these wondrous other species? (p. 23)

Here, Jamie is criticising both the easy distinction between the supposedly external realm of nature and the internal realm of the human, *and* the call for total communion with nature which ignores issues of disease and death, both of which are fundamental parts of nature. Her questioning of the term is a continuation of her careful scrutiny of our categories of thought and puts her in step with many contemporary ecocritics, who have rigorously interrogated its problematic connotations. Morton, for example, argues that the term has led to a separation between the human and the non-human in our cultural consciousness: 'thinking […] has set up "Nature" as a reified thing in the distance, under the sidewalk, on the other side where the grass is always greener, preferably in the mountains, in the wild.'[189] Jamie expressed similar concerns in a 2012 interview: 'We can't make distinctions about what to admit, about 'good' and 'bad' nature. […] To hanker after the truly wild is a fantasy.'[190] There is a suggestion here that Jamie wishes to look underneath the false narratives of nature that form our conception of the non-human and find the truth (or truths) about the way we live on and with the Earth. This requires a break with certain kinds of taxonomies and binaries, but Jamie does not stop at deconstructing these categories; she attempts to assert more dynamic, complex visual metaphors to think with.

In 'Pathologies', Jamie attempts to do this by enlisting a scientist friend to show her parts of the human body under a microscope, allowing her to literally look deeper into our internal nature. As Gairn points out, this interest in scientific methods is at odds with Heideggerian ecocriticism, where science and technology are accused of turning the non-human world into mere resources and thus causing our alienation from nature. In contrast, 'In *Sightlines*, hard-won knowledge wins out over idealism. Knowing the scientific or objective facts, however, does not preclude a sense of mystery or respect.'[191] We can see this sense of mystery in Jamie's description of a colon viewed through the microscope:

> for one unused to microscopes it was like slipping into a dream. I was admitted to another world, where everything was pink. I was looking down from a great height upon a pink countryside, a landscape. There was an estuary, with a north bank and a south. In the estuary were wing-shaped river islands or sandbanks, as if it was low tide. It was astonishing, a map of the familiar; it was our local river, as seen by a hawk. (p. 30)

While the colon is mysterious, dreamlike and otherworldly, Jamie contextualises it by turning it into 'a map of the familiar', although this is still mediated through a hawk's point of view, creating a complex mesh of human, animal, landscape and technology. The language of landscape painting is used here to mediate the encounter with uncanny human nature; it is 'Pastoral, but wild too.' (p. 35)

[189] Morton, p. 3.
[190] Jamie, *Interview: Kathleen Jamie*.
[191] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 137.

Eleanor Bell argues that the result of this 'uncanny flip' is 'to make the unknown somehow manageable, comprehensible, to partially domesticate the wild without usurping its innate magic.'[192] Once again, we are brought back to the idea of the writer as shamanic mediator, in this instance utilising scientific processes to reveal the fallacy of the internal-external divide between the human and the wild.

At the end of the essay, Jamie reflects on the impact of her close look at the internal world: 'The outer world also had flown open like a door, and I wondered as I drove, and I wonder still, what is it we're *just not seeing?*' (p. 37) This invocation of scale, of inspection of the microscopic (literally) leading to larger discovery, is key to her ecopoetic practice. As Gairn argues, '*Sightlines* seems to evoke an ever deeper sense of kinship between the writer and the scientist in terms of observational ability; the capacity for attention, precision and insight.'[193] However, the collection also creates the same kind of kinship between the writer and the archaeologist, as we can see in 'The Woman in the Field', in which Jamie recounts her first experience of working on an archaeological dig as a teenager. As it follows on directly from 'Pathologies', there is a sense that she is looking to her own past to answer the question of what it is we are not seeing, which is a departure from her previous essays which were predominantly based on more immediate events.

Time is a key concept in this essay and is tied to issues of ecology and landscape. As in 'Darkness and Light', Jamie sees archaeological remnants as 'living memories' (p. 49), human history – and the history of human interaction with the non-human – made accessible through engagement with the land. Lilley uses the term 'palimpsest' to describe this interwoven conception of time and land, describing it as

> an ecological and archaeological sense of the present as composed of a series of traces: the permanent marks and remainders of the endeavours and experiences of the past that exist indelibly across time despite the physical and ideological changes to the landscape. The sense of ecology in this context can be described as an accumulation. However, this is not so much an accumulation in terms of a silting up of experience, but rather as a process, wherein action and reaction, cause and effect, continue to occur unceasingly, but the trace of every change is carried forward into its product and so on into the next, influencing the change that takes place and remaining, detectable, within it.[194]

The word 'palimpsest's origin in manuscript history is notable, as it points once again to the nexus between language, representation, and mediation. We can see this process in action in 'The Woman in the Field' as the everyday activities of the people engaged in the archaeological dig, which would not have taken place without the building of the Neolithic structure in the first place, mirror the lives of

[192] Eleanor Bell, 'Into the Centre of Things: Poetic Travel Narratives in the Work of Kathleen Jamie and Nan Shepherd' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 126-132 (pp. 131-132).
[193] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 139.
[194] Lilley, 'Rethinking the externality and idealisation of nature', p. 24.

the original Neolithic builders: the bosses are 'tribal elders' (p. 52); the workers carry out 'the ritual ceremonial of the tea break' (p. 56); the same manpower is required to take apart the structure as was to build it (p. 56). As in 'Darkness and Light', the distant past is connected to the present by physical labour and the continual reworking of the relationship between human and land.

The key discovery on the site is not the Neolithic structure itself, but a buried Bronze Age woman, whose exhumation is reminiscent of that of the buried female poet in 'Meadowsweet'. As Gairn notes, 'Implying endurance and renewal, the re-emergence of the buried woman resonates symbolically throughout Jamie's work'.[195] Jamie describes the eerie occurrence of thunder just as the cist is opened, relating it to the process of writing poetry:

> The opening of the cist under that thunderclap was thrilling, transgressive. So, in its quiet way, was writing poems. The weight and heft of a word, the play of sounds, the sense of carefully revealing something authentic, an artefact which didn't always display "meaning", but which was a true expression of – what? – a self, a consciousness. That was thrilling too. (p. 66)

We return once again to the idea of writing as a way of revealing truth, paralleled here with the process of archaeological excavation, which Jamie refers to as a 'process of dismantling; of running the narrative of construction backwards.' (p. 61) She is clearly aware that it is an unavoidably destructive act, but she also recognises its capacity for unconcealment.[196] In the same way, writing about the non-human world risks playing into harmful narratives of nature which enable its destruction. However, as Gairn argues, 'poetry cannot provide an immediate access to the truth of the world, but may enact a process of revelation'.[197] 'The Woman in the Field' is another example of Jamie seeking to broaden her vision and find alternative ways of approaching the relationship between the human and the non-human in her writing, this time by delving into the past in both an archaeological and a personal sense. She has once again challenged her own perspective, embracing change: 'It was a turning place, a henge, a hinge indeed.' (p. 65)

Finally, Jamie explores a new perspective on the animal world in the essays 'The Hvalsalen' and 'Voyager, Chief', both of which take whalebones as their subject, which in the former are housed in a Norwegian museum exhibit, and in the latter are scattered around Britain as folk relics. Jamie does not see the whalebones as just dead matter, instead sensing a ghostly memory of the living whales in their remains: 'A silence, an aura, call it what you will, emanated from the skeleton too, as though the bones recalled their flesh.' (p. 104) A process of identification is also enabled in 'The Hvalsalen' when Jamie walks through the skeleton of a blue whale:

[195] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 140.
[196] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 83-140.
[197] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 140.

> Despite the size, you could, with a minimum of effort, extend your sense of self, and imagine this was your body, moving through the ocean. You could begin to imagine what it might feel like, to be a blue whale. (p. 115)

This encounter with whalebones not only reminds Jamie of the living whales, but also allows her to imagine things from a non-human point of view. As Gairn explains, 'Such encounters rely on the poetics of phenomenology, on physical empathy as well as an imaginative "connective leap".'[198] Jamie is keenly aware that, as writer and narrator, she is 'the perceiving centre of the experience',[199] the mediator of her own physical, sensory experiences, but within these limitations she is able to enact 'connective leaps' in order to escape the potentially destructive self-centredness she has criticised in other nature writing.[200]

There is a key negotiation at work in these two essays about the meaning of the whalebones. In 'Voyager, Chief', Jamie describes them as 'near mythic; part mammal, part architectural, inhabitants of an imagined otherworld.' (p. 230) However, earlier in 'The Hvalsalen' she checks the impulse to mythologise the whales, asserting that they are 'Not otherworldly. Actually, *of* this world, as they had been for a very long time, long before we appeared.' (p. 119) There is clearly a tension in her interpretation of the whalebones: they are animal bodies, as we are, and therefore related to us, but their forms appear as something other and mysterious. Jamie also acknowledges the destruction to the whale population caused by human technology, providing a balance to her enthusiasm about scientific technology in 'Pathologies'. This is made clear in 'The Hvalsalen':

> I asked the conservators if they thought of the objects they were working on as animals, or objects. "Animals," they said. They were all of a mind. Several times I heard the words "waste" and "slaughter" and "holocaust" and "shame". (p. 111)

Jamie repeats this highly emotive language to highlight the violent history of the acquisition of the whalebones – they are not just objects of beauty, but a painful reminder of humanity's destructive capabilities. However, Jamie does not see the exhibition of these remnants as a victorious symbol of human conquest: 'Whatever it is, a whale arch is not a triumphal arch; these are not trophies.' (p. 228) Instead, she views the whalebones as 'elegiac', writing, 'Such has been our violence toward these animals that we sense in a jawbone arch a memorial not just to that particular whale, but almost to whale-hood itself.' (p. 234) Whalebones are figured here as a means for humanity to remember the harm they have caused to the non-human, carrying a sense of both respect and remorse. For Jamie, whale relics hold a multitude of meanings all in negotiation and tension with one another, and all revealing some facet of the interconnection between the human and the non-human, points of connection and difference within the ecological mesh.[201]

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[198] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 142.
[199] Jamie, *Interview: Kathleen Jamie*.
[200] See Kathleen Jamie, 'A Lone Enraptured Male', *London Review of Books*, 30.5 (6 March 2008), 29-35.
[201] Morton, pp. 28-58.

It is for this reason that, at the end of 'Voyager, Chief', Jamie is left feeling uneasy at the discovery that a whalebone arch in North Berwick has been replaced with a 'fibreglass replica':

> No doubt this is right and good. But you have to wonder, standing on the hilltop at Berwick, if this is how it must be. If we are adjusting our relationship with these greatest of animals, and with the non-human world as a whole, if we're now, at last, refusing to slaughter or torture any more whales, does it mean that when we do reach out for the natural, in wonder or shame or excitement or greed, what we must touch is a man-made substitute? (p. 236)

The replacement of the whalebone with manmade plastic is seen as a kind of loss of authenticity and communion with the animal other. However, Jamie has shown that whale hunting is an unsustainable and unethical practice. Even here, towards the end of *Sightlines*, there is still uncertainty; there is no easy resolution to Jamie's negotiations with the relationship between the human and the non-human. The whalebones are, more than anything, a symbol of the difficulty in negotiating our interconnection with the non-human world, encapsulating the violence and destructiveness of that connection as well as the commonality and respectfulness. As Gairn argues, '*Sightlines* as a whole recounts an ongoing education of perception and understanding',[202] and this education is in no way complete or closed by the end, as we shall see in *The Overhaul*.

The development of Jamie's ecopoetics, as a result of her essay writing and her personal maturation, can be seen clearly in *The Overhaul*, which departs from the lucidity and immediate physical encounters found in the poems in *The Tree House* and delves further into the realm of the uncertain, often foregrounding an 'uneasiness of being'.[203] Gairn notes that the idea of dwelling is central to the collection, as 'Jamie imagines further reconciliations with or escapes into the "other" of nature […] These versions of "dwelling" are necessarily fleeting and unstable'.[204] Just as in *Sightlines*, there are no comfortable resolutions to be found in *The Overhaul*; instead there are contradictions and tensions which Jamie attempts to negotiate to further understand how we are to live on and with the Earth. As Jamie herself has said, 'The poems are more wrangly and difficult' than her essays.[205] This is perhaps because they resist the relative security of the essay form, with a shifting insistence on other perspectives that is often discomforting. Accordingly, the 'diffuse sense of being'[206] which emerges in *Sightlines* is amplified in *The Overhaul* as her poetic forms 'begin to look beyond their borders'.[207]

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[202] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 138.
[203] Mackay, p. 88.
[204] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 135.
[205] Jamie, *Interview: Kathleen Jamie*.
[206] Falconer, 'Midlife Music', pp. 156-157.
[207] David Wheatley, '"Proceeding without a map"': Kathleen Jamie and the Lie of the Land' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. by Rachel Falconer, pp. 52-60 (p. 58).

The collection's opening poem, like 'Aurora', is declaration of intent for the collection. Jamie invites the reader to join her on a journey in the first stanza of 'The Beach':

> Now this big westerly's
> blown itself out,
> let's drive to the storm beach.[208]

Beginning the collection with the word 'now' creates a sense of immediacy, locating us firmly in the present (in contrast to 'The Wishing Tree', which opens *The Tree House* with a sense of timelessness). By using the word 'let's', Jamie is encouraging the reader to apply the same attention and care to the act of reading as the group of people collecting debris from the beach apply to their search, to be curious and present in the process. As in 'Findings', natural waste and man-made waste are placed alongside one another, 'driftwood' (l. 6) and 'heaps of frayed / blue polyprop rope' (ll. 7-8) – one an object of transformation and one an object of durability. The rope has been 'thrown back at us' (l. 9), which suggests a personified anger on the part of the sea but is also another instance of the recurring idea in Jamie's work of truths about humanity being reflected by the non-human, if one takes the time to look closely. In this poem, we are once again confronted by the damage we are doing to the Earth as the environmental crisis of pollution is signified by the rope.

'What a species' (l. 10), the poem proclaims, seemingly referring to the violence inscribed in the blue rope. However, the dash at the end of this exclamation leads to a consolation of sorts:

> still working the same
> curved bay, all of us
>
> hoping for the marvellous,
> all hankering for a changed life. (ll. 11-14)

'What a species' is therefore an exclamation at the inherent contradiction of our interaction with the non-human world: we are destroying it, but at the same time paying heed to it, 'working' the beach to find natural treasures, or perhaps to rid it of our own litter. The word 'still' indicates the duration of our relationship with the non-human, the ritualistic quality to the act of going to the beach and collecting. This is what Jamie is doing with her writing: returning to the point of intersection between the human and the non-human and tenaciously working it over again and again in the hope of attaining 'a changed life', a way of dwelling which is less destructive to and alienated from the non-human.

As a part of this working over, Jamie returns to the poetic sequence in 'Five Tay Sonnets'. These are not sonnets in the traditional sense, as they do not share a pattern of stanza length or any kind of rhyme scheme; their only similarity is that they are fifteen lines long (excluding the final poem, 'Doing Away', which is sixteen lines long). Their forms in fact become less stable as the

[208] Kathleen Jamie, 'Storm Beach' in *The Overhaul* (London: Picador, 2012), p. 3 (l. 3).

sequence continues, with lines moving further along the page. This visually mimics the movement of the River Tay, the subject of the sequence, while also emphasising its shifting, fluid nature. This is contrasted with a sense of stability created by the invocation of the passing of time on the river. In 'Ospreys', the birds return to 'the self-same riverside / Scots pine' ('Ospreys', p. 5, ll. 5-6) and use the same materials as the year before to build their nest:

> still here, pretty much
> like the rest of us – gale-battered, winter-worn,
> half toppled away… (ll. 7-9)

Despite its constant movement and change, the Tay is still there, as are the natural materials around it, year after year for the birds to make use of; it is a constant in the lives of both the birds and the poet who is observing them. However, time is shown to be gradually transforming the land and the humans who live on it, their lives 'half toppled away', the ellipses suggesting a lingering awareness of animal mortality and the threat of environmental crises against the backdrop of the ever-present river.

The Tay also reveals animal life, both human and non-human, in 'Springs'. As the river overflows, 'Evidence of an inner life, secrets / of your estuarine soul' ('Springs', p. 6, ll. 9-10) are washed up into the town

> in swags all through the swing-park: plastic trash and broken reeds,
> driftwood, bust TVs…
> and a salmon,
> dead, flung beneath the see-saw, the crows are onto at once. (ll. 12-15)

Yet again, Jamie places human and non-human waste alongside each other, but in this poem, they are all conceived of as a part of the Tay's 'estuarine soul'. An estuary is where a river flows into an ocean or sea, with freshwater and saltwater mixing to become brackish water.[209] By describing the 'soul' of the Tay – which can be taken to mean something like its essence or spirit – as 'estuarine', Jamie is drawing attention to its position as a liminal, transitional space. That the 'inner life' of the river consists of durable human plastic and technology, plant material transformed by time, and mortal animals whose death is a necessary part of the food chain, suggests that in the Tay can be found a microcosm of the mesh of the human and the non-human that is our ecosystem, fraught with tensions and conflicts but nevertheless inextricably interlinked.[210] The river's 'soul' is inherently plural, which relates back to the idea of a midlife openness of being.

Another secret of the river is uncovered in 'Excavation and Recovery', where Jamie recounts the removal of a Bronze Age wooden boat from its depths, prompting her to question how Bronze Age locals conceived of the Tay: 'What were you to them, river'? ('Excavation and Recovery', p. 8, l.

[209] National Geographic, *Estuary* (2012), <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/estuary> [accessed 13 May 2020].
[210] Morton, pp. 28-58.

9) Issues of language and representation of the non-human world are raised in her musings on this question:

> *an estuary with a discharge of 160 cubic metres of water per second*
> as per the experts' report?
> *or Tay/Toi/Taum* - a goddess;
> the Flowing (?), the Silent One (?). (ll. 12-15)

The practice of naming is key to this poem, particularly given that the sequence is the first of Jamie's poems to use placenames since *Jizzen*. While *The Tree House* resists placenames, perhaps because of a fear of language 'getting in the way' of the non-human world,[211] here Jamie is open to exploring the complexities and multiplicities inherent in how humans talk about place over time. The use of placenames also works to root these more speculative poems, keeping them from becoming abstractions. As Gairn notes, Jamie is

> calling attention to the different linguistic registers in which the River Tay has been addressed over the centuries. The poem sounds out the right words to describe the river; using the potentially reductive language of science […] or attempting to invoke a more ancient and ambiguous identity […] The possibility for language to reconcile us with the natural world is an open-ended question.[212]

The abundance of question marks in the poem make it clear that this issue is not resolved; Jamie does not choose between the scientific and the spiritual. Instead, the identity of the river is left open to interpretation, and the possibility of a plural, shifting, 'open-ended' conception of the non-human which resists rigid categorisation remains.

This sense of open-endedness can also be found in *The Overhaul*'s animal poems. As Gairn notes, in numerous poems in the collection the 'animal encounter' provides 'an opportunity to explore the borderline between self and other, human and animal identities'.[213] Two such poems are 'Fragment 1' and 'Hawk and Shadow'. In these poems, Jamie returns to a more explicit exploration of the formation of one's identity, something which was again resisted in *The Tree House*, possibly in an attempt to avoid anthropocentrism. In 'Fragment 1', the poet's identity is destabilised in an encounter with a deer:

> you don't even glance
> at the cause of your doubt
>
> so how can you tell
> what form I take?
>
> What form I take
> I scarcely know myself ('Fragment 1', p. 10, ll. 5-10)

[211] Jamie, *The SRB Interview*.
[212] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 141.
[213] Ibid, p. 142.

The poet's uncertainty about her own 'form', her identity and mode of being, is revealed by the physical encounter with the non-human animal. The movement of the deer running away out of reach is mimicked by the 'sparse rhythm' of the poem with its short two-line stanzas,[214] and can be read as a sense of stable identity slipping out of the poet's grasp. Clark argues that, in ecological writing, 'The animal not only disrupts an anthropocentric point of view but breaks the illusion of a seemingly closed human horizon, the familiarity of given significances, dimensions.'[215] This is certainly true of 'Fragment 1', where the animal encounter undermines personal identity as separate and closed-off (that the poem ends on a line with no closing punctuation is significant), leaving us instead with a diffuse, uneasy intermingling of the human and the non-human, both reflected in one another.

In 'Hawk and Shadow', a similarly discomforting animal encounter is played out as 'a hawk gliding over a hill becomes the basis for a dialogue of self and soul, as the poet seeks to establish the contours of identity amid the transience of nature.'[216] The image of the hawk is doubled in her shadow as she carries 'her own dark shape / in her talons like a kill' ('Hawk and Shadow', p. 15, ll. 3-4), an eerie second self which is positioned as prey instead of hunter. David Wheatley argues that this suggests 'the thin line between imagination achieving the form it seeks and a vain capture of one's own shadow',[217] mirroring Jamie's anxiety about her writing being overly self-centred.[218] It also suggests a tension and violence in the plural self. As the hawk changes course, she is separated from her shadow. The poet chooses to watch the shadow, as she is

> out of sorts
> with my so-called soul,
> part unhooked hawk,
> part shadow on parole (ll. 9-12)

Once again, the poet's uncertainty about her 'soul', her selfhood and way of being, is revealed in the animal encounter. The words 'unhooked' and 'parole' suggest that the two selves are incomplete without one another: the hawk is unstable without her shadow, and the shadow is controlled by the hawk, bound to return to her. The eeriness of this split self leaves the poet 'afraid' (l. 20) as the hawk and her shadow fly out of sight and she is left only with her own uncertain soul, just as in 'Fragment 1'.

As was mentioned in the introduction, Falconer argues that such animal encounters in Jamie's midlife poetry do not align as well with Levinasian ethics as her earlier work does:

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[214] Ibid, p. 139.
[215] Clark, p. 197.
[216] Wheatley, p. 58.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Speaking about her essays, Jamie has expressed her frustration at her own presence in her writing: 'I annoy myself […] I look at a page I've written, see that I've used the word "I" 17 times and go back and reduce it by two thirds.' Jamie, *Interview: Kathleen Jamie*.

> I see Jamie's later work exploring the porous edges and interpenetration of being. […] In Jamie's midlife writing, the face-to-face encounter is contagious rather than differentiating. That is to say, what Jamie's work explores here is the sense of an openness of being that overrides or dissolves distinctions between self and other.[219]

This 'porousness' (or diffuseness) is what we see in 'Fragment 1' and 'Hawk and Shadow', as the poet's own uncertain self is revealed in her encounters with the deer and the hawk. It is important to note that these revelations do not offer a conclusion or solution to Jamie's uncertainty; the animal encounter is a liminal space in which identity is questioned rather than affirmed. Gairn argues that 'This liminality also reflects our own human subjectivity, our provisional and limited knowledge of the natural world which may equally lead to belonging or alienation.'[220] In these two poems, it would seem to be the latter – there is a sense of resignation and almost frustration at the end of 'Fragment 1':

> always a deer
> breaking from a thicket
>
> for a while now
> this is how it's been (ll. 13-16)

Jamie is not only alienated from the non-human world, as she often is in her earlier poetry, but also from her own sense of self. The ecological mesh is discomforting here, enabling the poet to see something about her own being that is not easily comprehended or settled.[221]

The presence of Scots is curiously absent from the first two-thirds of *The Overhaul*, except for 'Five Tay Sonnets', but it begins to enter in the collection's final poems, with two more Scots translations of Hölderlin, one original poem written fully in Scots, and Jamie's signature blend of English and Scots in 'Materials'. In the case of 'Five Tay Sonnets', where the issue of the language we use to represent the non-human world is a key concern, Scots takes the important place of a specific, local vernacular that can express an intimate way of dwelling within the land. However, that Scots is not scattered as evenly throughout *The Overhaul* as in Jamie's previous collections is undoubtedly significant. Jamie has recently discussed the many difficulties in trying to write in Scots: 'Personally, I've given up even trying to write in Scots. But I want to. I long to. It's the most intimate, heart-felt speech I have. It's also wild and diverse and scunnerations and un-establishment.'[222] Her return to Scots in the final section of *The Overhaul* suggests an embracing of the uncertainties and tensions inherent in the language – if only temporarily – and an openness towards the uncertainty of being which so unsettles the poet in 'Fragment 1' and 'Hawk and Shadow'.

The final poem in the collection, 'Materials', returns to the space of the beach, as in the first poem. In its opening stanza, Jamie self-consciously refers to the act of writing:

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[219] Falconer, 'Midlife Music', p. 158.
[220] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 139.
[221] Morton, pp. 28-58.
[222] Jamie, 'The Wild Life of Scots'.

> See when it all unravels – the entire project
> reduced to threads of moss fleeing a nor'wester;
> d'you ever imagine chasing just one strand, letting it lead you
> to an unsung cleft in a rock, a place you could take to,
> dig yourself in – but what are the chances of that?

It is easy to read the 'project' Jamie refers to as just the process of writing *The Overhaul*, but it is more than that: it is Jamie's ongoing search for a way of mediating between the human and the non-human worlds, a way of coming to terms with our relationship with the Earth, throughout her career. The image of delicate 'threads of moss' scattered to the wind shows the futility of this search. Here, at the end of the collection, the project has 'unravelled' (another word which is reminiscent of Morton's mesh theory) as Jamie fantasises about an imagined 'place you could take to, / dig yourself in' – a place, in other words, where one could comfortably belong. However, such a place does not exist in her 'vision of unravelling and incompletion'.[223]

Instead, what we are left with is 'half a dozen waders' that 'mediate between sea and shore' (ll. 7-8) – the birds, like the one in 'The Dipper', can negotiate their existence in a liminal space – the waves, and yet more debris: 'scraps of nylon fishing net' (l. 11) and 'Bird-bones, rope-scraps' (l. 17). As Wheatley points out, '*The Materials* was the title of George Oppen's second poetry collection […] and Jamie's poem honours the Objectivist approach in returning all to process and bricolage.'[224] The Objectivist principle of 'emphasizing sincerity and the poet's clear vision of the world' is also relevant to Jamie's work.[225] She is able to see what is in front of her on the beach, rather than a fantasised complete 'project': animals, the elements, objects of waste of both human and non-human origin, all sharing the same space, all in states of negotiation and tension with one another but ultimately part of the same system.[226] Wheatley argues that 'The poem […] finds its vision at last not in transcendence but the recognition of immanent truth.'[227] It is 'a cursory sketch – but a bit of bruck's / all we need to get us started, all we'll leave behind us when we're gone.' (ll. 17-18) 'Bruck', a Scots word for rubbish or scraps, is enough to sustain Jamie's poetry, and her broader negotiation of her place on and with the Earth. The poem does not end on an unrestrainedly optimistic note, however, as the word 'gone' echoes and reminds us both of our mortality and our lasting impact upon the Earth.

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[223] Wheatley, p. 59.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Poetry Foundation, *Objectivist Poets* (n.d.), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/objectivist-poets> [accessed 23 May 2020].
[226] Another connection that may be drawn between Jamie and the Objectivists is a preoccupation with the process of mediation; Ruth Jennison argues, 'Objectivism […] is less interested in objects or even the perceivable data of the material world, than it is in the forms these objects take and the paths by which they travel, mediated, to become available to our perception […] Objectivism not only formally embodies the processes of mediation, but its works count themselves among the many mediations they survey.' Ruth Jennison, *The Zukofsky Era: Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 19-20.
[227] Wheatley, p. 59.

The bookended nature of *The Overhaul* contributes to its vision of the midlife turn, as Falconer argues:

> Stretched between the "now" which opens the first poem, and "gone" which closes the last, *The Overhaul* sets resonating the sense of being on a temporal threshold between *arrival* at a certain stage of maturity, and *departure* into an openness that senses its limit.[228]

This is also true of *Sightlines*, which opens on an arrival at a state of midlife restlessness and follows Jamie's journey into the uncertain spaces in which the human and the non-human intersect, while still respecting the mystery and otherness of the non-human. Falconer argues that 'Jamie's writing emphasises the need for a sense of limit, because without this resonant edge the voice becomes inarticulate, strangles or suffocates.'[229] In both *Sightlines* and *The Overhaul*, Jamie pushes up against this limit, never breaking through it but expanding her boundaries by constantly searching for alternative ways of seeing and listening, by enacting the 'connective leaps' which 'help to dissolve the conventional barrier between subject and object.'[230] The acknowledgement that the barrier cannot be fully dissolved is crucial in stabilising Jamie's ecopoetics, and there is a sense that she has come to terms with this by the end of *The Overhaul*, contrasting her frustration in earlier collections (e.g. 'The Dipper', 'Darkness and Light'). However, as the following chapter will discuss, Jamie continues to erode the barrier further in her most recent work, where she delves deeper into the realm of the personal and private than ever before.

[228] Falconer, 'Midlife Music', p. 160.
[229] Ibid, p. 165.
[230] Gairn, 'Connective Leaps', p. 139.

5. Personal and Political Renewals: *Frissure* (2013), *The Bonniest Companie* (2015), and *Surfacing* (2019)

The sense of openness discussed in the previous chapter carries over into Jamie's most recent writing. However, the issues of gender and nation – the 'stuff about identity'[231] – which Jamie previously claimed she no longer wished to write about also return to the fore. *Frissure: Prose Poems and Artworks* (2013), written in collaboration with artist Brigid Collins, is an explicitly feminine work, while one of the main concerns of *The Bonniest Companie* (2015) is the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the discourses of nationality that surround it. Jamie also returns to her early Asian travels in *Surfacing* (2019), another topic she had claimed to be finished with. These resurfacing concerns are enfolded in Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility, creating a mesh of different threads and ideas that encompass traditionally opposing realms: the public and the private; the cultural and the natural; the wild and the domestic; the global and the local; the inner and the outer. Jamie does not so much reconcile these binaries as renegotiate them, seeing them in a far more relativised way. The sense that Jamie may have viewed social and, to a lesser extent, personal issues as getting in the way of mediating with the non-human world is now gone, instead replaced with an openness to these discourses that is incorporated into her ecopoetic practice. Her use of Scots in her poetry also regains some of the determination that was lacking in *The Overhaul*, as it is once again woven throughout both *Frissure* and *The Bonniest Companie*.

Frissure takes Jamie's mastectomy scar as a starting point from which come works of art and fragmentary poems. In the introduction, Jamie recounts how she first saw her scar primarily 'as a site of change, of injury', but upon looking at it more closely, it was transformed: 'As I turned this way and that, I thought it looked like the low shores of an island, seen from afar. Or a river, seen from above. A bird's eye view of a river. Or a map.'[232] This is reminiscent of 'Pathologies' as Jamie once again looks for alternative perspectives from which to look at the human body, this time beyond the medical and the scientific – she remarks that the artist's gaze is 'different to the medical looking, longer and softer.' (p. ix) Another development from her previous writing about the human body is that in this instance it is her *own* body which is the site of meditation, making the collection intensely intimate and personal from the start, more so than any of her previous works. That it is a mastectomy scar, and therefore a specifically female site, is not lost on either the poet or the artist, as we shall see. It is in *Frissure* that we see Jamie begin to bring gender back into her work in a more explicit manner (although, of course, it has always been present in her mentions of motherhood and the domestic

[231] Jamie, 'More Than Human', p. 141.
[232] Kathleen Jamie, *Frissure: Prose Poems and Artworks* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013), p. vi.

realm, such as in 'Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes') and to explore her personal life in a vulnerable and embodied way.

Ideas of shape and form are key to the collection. Jamie muses on the form of her scar in the introduction:

> Whatever it was, it was a line, drawn on my body. A line, in poetry, opens up possibilities within the language, and brings forth voice out of silence. What is the first thing an artist does, beginning a new work? He or she draws a line. And now I had a line, quite a line! inscribed on my body. It looked like a landscape. Because it was changing colour as it healed, it seemed to me as if it had its own weather. (p. vi)

The scar is formulated as a point of opening out here, onto both art and the non-human world. Like the land, it changes over time but maintains its basic form; like the land, it is a site of endurance and transformation. This is reflected in the fragment 'Line', where the poet asks, 'What is a line?' ('Line', p. 17, ll. 1; 4; 6) and answers herself: a line is 'landscape' (l. 1); 'something heard, half-remembered – a fragment of poetry, / a scrap of an auld sang' (ll. 4-5); 'a beginning' (l. 5), and, finally, 'A border, a symbol of defence, of defiance.' (l. 6) These answers sit in tension with one another – non-human land and human art, the fragility of the words 'fragment' and 'scrap' and the strength of 'defence' and 'defiance', the openness of a 'beginning' and the closedness of a 'border'. This multitude of contradictory meanings inferred from a single form attests to what Falconer refers to as 'Jamie's sense of truth being transitive, liminal, edgy'.[233] For Jamie, the line of her scar is an ecosystem of meanings all enmeshed together in spite of their tensions and could potentially be read as a kind of uneasy resolution of the tensions that she has previously explored in her writing.

The form of her fragments reflects this uneasiness, as she explains, 'At first I tried to write 'poems' but the tone was all wrong. Too smart, too concluded. A looser weave was required, something thready, gauzy that could be unpicked.' (pp. xi-xii) The poetic fragments of *Frissure* exist in liminal spaces, embodying the vulnerability and uncertainty of their author. This is also true of Collins' artworks, among which Jamie's fragments often float eerily. Falconer argues that Collins' work 'probes and loosens distinctions between human and plant life, between human body and land, sea and sky.'[234] In her fragile, wavery watercolour paintings, the line of Jamie's scar is transformed into the stem of a dog rose; the line where sky meets sea; the line of an island viewed from a distance; the ridge of a mountain. These are imaginative connective leaps like those we have seen in Jamie's writing, pushing at the boundary between human and non-human. Falconer notes the effect that Collins' artworks have on Jamie's writing in the collection: 'The visual images seem to free up Jamie

[233] Falconer, 'Midlife Music', p. 157.
[234] Ibid, p. 160.

to play more loosely with words. The verbal fragments auscultate, play while listening for, a diffuse, echoistic sense of being'.[235] Take for example 'Healings 1':

> Sometimes I almost hear a sweet wild music a kind of fairy music at the edge
> of sense. It's audible in the spaces between the rowan leaves, in the breeze,
> in the robin's song, in the sound of distant traffic whose destination
> is nothing to do with me.
> The sound of a handing over, the best surrender. The sound of knots
> untying themselves, the sound of the benign indifference of the world. ('Healings 1',
> p. 3, ll. 1-6)

The lack of punctuation between 'a sweet wild music' and 'a kind of fairy music' creates a sense of breathlessness, giving the impression that the fragment itself is being uttered in the 'spaces between'. As Falconer points out, 'References to Celtic fairy-lore have always had a place in Jamie's poetry, but they come to the fore in […] *Frissure*, providing a sonorous edge to the sense of human finitude.'[236] Invocation of the fairy world in conjunction with the 'wild' creates a sense of an openness of being beyond the conventionally closed human realm, while acknowledging the profound mystery of the non-human. The oxymoronic turn of 'the benign indifference of the world' counteracts the alienation that might come from this acknowledgement of mystery and otherness, suggesting that the poet takes comfort in the experiencing of a liminal existence. It seems that Collins' artworks have enabled Jamie to embrace even further the uncertainty in the blurring of boundaries.

As well as paintings, Collins' contributions to the collection include sculptures, abstract structures made from plants, material and scraps of Jamie's poetry. She explains these works:

> I call these forms Poem-Houses. They are places of safe-keeping – for words,
> memories, experiences – and are at once fragile and strong. I was creating a feminine
> embrace, a container, a sewing-box, or skirt, which might keep one safe from the
> world. Dialectics of inside and out also brought to mind the push-pull tension of
> being in such an embrace. I was reminded of how the individual identities of women
> have often become subsumed by their domestic roles. (p. 29)

Again, Collins' artworks operate in a similar way to Jamie's poems, many of which could also be considered 'places of safe-keeping'. Jamie's 'Hereditary 2' sits alongside one of these poem-houses, 'Kist', and evokes the names of her female ancestors along with the land they lived on, 'Girls of the Borders and Ayrshire, of hills and rivers / and burghs' ('Hereditary 2', p. 25, ll. 2-3). She yearns to 'hear their rich Scots speak!' (l. 6), remembering how her grandmother 'called her breast her "briest", her bosom her "kist". / "Come for a wee nurse aff yer Nana," she'd say. "Courie in, hen."' (ll. 7-8) Femininity, land and language are all interconnected in this fragment, as they are in Collins' poem-houses. Land is seen as a foundational aspect of these women's identities, and Scots as a language of feminine intimacy and embodiment. This is Jamie's most direct dealing with gender since her

[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid, p. 163.

declaration that she was turning away from 'the stuff about identity',[237] suggesting a renewed openness to these issues and their interconnection with ecopoetics which we will see continued in *The Bonniest Companie* and *Surfacing*.

The Bonniest Companie is the result of Jamie's attempt to write one poem every week in 2014, the year of the Scottish independence referendum. As the blurb notes, Jamie's reasoning for this project was to 'embrace' the 'tremendous energy' of the year and to 'participate in my own way'.[238] This marks Jamie's return to engagement with national politics in her poetry for the first time since *Jizzen*. However, this is not in any sense a radical departure from the primarily ecological concerns of the collections discussed in the previous two chapters – only one poem mentions the referendum explicitly, so to read the collection along political lines is only one of many potential readings. As was argued in chapter two, even pre-devolution, Jamie's engagement with politics of gender and nation was fused with an emerging ecopoetic sensibility, and now at this later stage the realms of politics and the non-human both form part of the ecological mesh.[239] In a review of *The Bonniest Companie*, Stuart Kelly questions the reading of Jamie's 'nature writing' as apolitical: 'And yet I've never quite bought that interpretation – how can writing about land, environment, ecology and the body not be political? – and her new collection, *The Bonniest Companie*, seems to prove the point.'[240] The energy Jamie mentions runs throughout the collection as she deftly weaves an indirect political engagement into her negotiations with the non-human world. Lucy Collins identified this intersection in Jamie's writing in a 2011 essay:

> Though Jamie is not an activist, she recognizes the relationship between action and reflection in her work and her commitment to explore ideas of national identity and gender remains linked to her appreciation of nature and her involvement in it. It could be argued that Jamie's body of work demonstrates the interwoven aspect of ecological concern, its connections to social structures and personal events that indicate the resonance of these debates in the wider world.[241]

This is only truer of Jamie's recent writing, where these negotiations are explored with even greater determination.

'Eyrie II', for example, captures the atmosphere of tension, excitement, and risk in the lead-up to the referendum. Jamie begins the poem with an invocation of 'That wind again' ('Eyrie II', p. 15, l. 1), the movement of which is reflected in the scattering of the lines across the page. The wind is portrayed as a force of change here, the word 'again' referring to Scotland's long struggle with the issue of self-government. It carries the prospect of danger with change, too, as it is 'fit to flay you' (l.

[237] Jamie, 'More Than Human', p. 141.
[238] Kathleen Jamie, *The Bonniest Companie* (London: Picador, 2015).
[239] Morton, pp. 28-58.
[240] Stuart Kelly, 'Book Review: *The Bonniest Companie* by Kathleen Jamie', *The Scotsman* (15 November 2015), <https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/book-review-bonniest-companie-kathleen-jamie-1489673> [accessed 26 May 2020] [my italics].
[241] Collins, p. 151.

2). This sense of danger and risk is further conveyed in the language of the poem, with the harsh 't' sound in 'fit' being repeated in 'snatched' (l. 2), 'flit' (l. 3), and the 'p' sound in 'slips' (l. 7) and 'snaps' (l. 9) being used to similar effect. It is in these conditions of risk that Jamie has always found the most creative potential, and 'Eyrie II' is no exception. The wind starts a chain reaction in the poem: 'a slate slips, wheelie-bins coup' (l. 7), causing a branch on a Scots pine to break and an osprey's nest to fall 'cradle and all.' (l. 10) Jamie's use of the nursery rhyme invokes memories of childhood, creating an uncomfortable tension between the safety that nursery rhymes represent and the destruction and death of the nest and the osprey eggs. As Phoebe Powers outlines,

> Rhymes stick in the memory and therefore contain something of a past moment. The same is true of Jamie's dialect words […] whether Scots, archaic-English or both, [they] belong in the past but can and are still used today, in colloquial speech or by Jamie the adult poet.[242]

Like many of the poems in this collection, 'Eyrie II' blurs the boundary between the past and the present – and, indeed, the future, which is where the collection as a whole is in movement toward. Although the wind in this poem is destructive, it also brings the potential for change, as Jamie asks

> What will the osprey do then, poor things
> when they make it home?
>
> Build it up, sticks and twigs –
> *big a new ane*. (ll. 11-14)

It is only destruction and change that can allow the building of a new home. As Kelly points out, in the final italicised line 'The use of Scots is clearly political, but it brilliantly dallies between the English reading – big as size – and the Scots – big as build.'[243] Jamie is being playful with language here, 'flitting' back and forth across the boundary between English and Scots to suggest a 'big' confidence in the rebuilding of Scotland, even though it is fragile, made of just 'sticks and twigs'.

However, the concept of home is not as stable as it may at first seem when discussing ospreys, who migrate to West Africa for the winter.[244] The same can be said of the Scots pine which, while Scotland's national tree, is a 'pioneer species, due to its ability to regenerate and thrive in poor soils' and can therefore be found across Eurasia.[245] Jamie is careful not to lapse into a kind of ecological ethnonationalism, where Scottish wildlife (and, by extension, people) are seen as more valuable for being 'purely' Scottish. For Jamie, belonging to a nation is a more unstable matter: one can be equally tied to other geographies, but being present in Scotland even some of the time

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[242] Phoebe Power, '*The Bonniest Companie* by Kathleen Jamie', *The London Magazine* (22 December 2015), <https://www.thelondonmagazine.org/the-bonniest-companie-by-kathleen-jamie/> [accessed 26 May 2020].
[243] Kelly, 'Book Review.'
[244] Scottish Wildlife Trust, *Osprey Migration and Arrivals* (March 18 2014), <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/2014/03/osprey-migration-and-arrivals-18th-march/> [accessed 05 June 2020].
[245] Forestry and Land Scotland, *Scots pine* (n.d.), <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/learn/trees/scots-pine> [accessed 05 June 2020].

contributes to the discordant polyphony that makes up the country. Although the independence referendum is not mentioned once in 'Eyrie II', it is evident that the poem is politically charged. While this could be read as a tendency to 'objectify nature for human needs and purposes', as Jamie has previously been accused of,[246] she still affords the non-human its autonomy and difference, treating it with respect even while searching for meaning.

It is only in the immediate aftermath of the no vote that Jamie directly refers to the independence referendum, in a poem simply titled '23/9/14' – the date five days after the referendum. As Power notes, 'The poem contributes to a broader theme throughout the book by describing the failure of radical change.'[247] The poem has an overtly melancholic tone, with the supporters of independence having been left 'dingit doon and weary, / happ in tattered hopes' ('23/9/14', ll. 2-3). In brackets, Jamie refers to these hopes as 'an honest poverty' (l. 4). This likely a reference to the opening line of Robert Burns' anthem of universal brotherhood, 'A Man's a Man for a' That' (1795), which was performed by Sheena Wellington at the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.[248] Failure is expressed in natural terms, as the 'flags are wede [weeded] awa' (l. 5) and 'the withered leaves o shilpit trees / blaw across deserted squares' (ll. 6-7). The phrase 'wede awa' is undoubtedly a reference to 'The Flowers of the Forest' (lyrics written by Jean Elliot c. 1756), the Scottish folk song commemorating the defeat of the army of James IV at the Battle of Flodden,[249] while 'shilpit' could be an oblique reference to Edwin Morgan's infamous use of the word in the opening line of one of his 'Glasgow Sonnets' (1972).[250] The lines are scattered across the page, mirroring the movement of the leaves and, metaphorically, the dissipation of the Yes movement. The natural decay that autumn brings, expressed in rich Scots, functions neatly as a signifier of the failure of the independence movement. However, this pessimism is balanced by the Jamie's subtle invocation of various works of Scottish literature,[251] asserting a kind of national collectivity whilst indicating the complex relationship between literature and national (or nationalist) politics in Scotland.[252]

The tone shifts towards the end of the poem as wind makes another appearance, as in 'Eyrie II'. Although in this poem it is seen as a 'harbinger of winter' (l. 9), its earlier depiction as a force of change charges the poem. That it brings winter is not, in fact, necessarily a negative thing; the

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[246] Severin, p. 99.
[247] Power, '*The Bonniest Companie* by Kathleen Jamie.'
[248] See Robert Burns, *A Man's a Man for a' That*, Sheena Wellington, online video recording, YouTube, 10 February 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hudNoXsUj0o> [accessed 11 October 2020].
[249] Scots Language Centre, *The Flowers of the Forest* (n.d.), <https://www.scotslanguage.com/articles/node/id/433> [accessed 11 October 2020] (l. 4).
[250] Edwin Morgan, 'Glasgow Sonnet II' in *Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry*, ed. by Douglas Dunn (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. 199-200 (l. 1).
[251] Jamie also uses this technique in her poem inscribed on the rotunda at the Battle of Bannockburn site. Kathleen Jamie, *Here Lies Our Land* (2013), <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/here-lies-our-land/> [accessed 11 October 2020].
[252] See Hames (ed.), *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence* (Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2012).

changing of the seasons represents time passing, with all the potential that entails. Jamie pokes fun at her own melodramatics in the final lines:

> – and so on and etcetera.
> We ken a' that. It's Tuesday. On wir feet.
> Today we begin again. (ll. 11-13)

The sense of frustration and impatience that Jamie allowed herself is in the end replaced by pragmatism. The repeated use of 'we' and 'wir' throughout the poem is brought to a head here, putting an emphasis on collectivity and cooperation. Collins argues that 'Collective experience and responsibility are important dimensions of reading Jamie's work that draw us in to an important relationship with the poem.'[253] This sense of collectivity is reminiscent of the vision of a plural kind of Scottish identity that Jamie presented in *The Queen of Sheba* and *Jizzen*, but in this poem it is charged with an active energy, an encouragement, if not a call, to stand up and continue fighting for change. This poem is one of Jamie's bolder moments, as if it is in failure that she finds the confidence to make a judgement from her many negotiations.

The final poem in *The Bonniest Companie*, 'Gale', consists of just three lines in full, rich Scots. It opens on a question:

> Whit seek ye here?
> There's noucht hid i' wir skelly lums
> bar jaikies' nests. ('Gale', p. 59, ll. 1-3)

The poet directly addresses the wind of change that has blown throughout the collection, asking why it is still present when change has apparently failed. Jamie uses the Scots possessive pronoun 'wir' again, ending the collection on a note of collectivity. The poet's claim that there is 'noucht' of importance in Scotland's crooked chimneys, signifiers of the domestic sphere, is contradicted in the final line. Jackdaws, referred to here by their Scots name, are small, common birds, but they carry a transgressive energy as wild creatures who often build their nests in chimneys and other crevices in buildings;[254] they live on the border between the wild and the domestic, the non-human and the human. Their nests also carry the potential of new life and growth. The sense of transformative energy that runs through *The Bonniest Companie* is still present at its end, even after the failure of the independence referendum, and it has not yet reached its conclusion. The collection ends on a sense of open-endedness which is typical of Jamie, but there is also, importantly, hope and potential for change. Alan Riach argues that, for Jamie, 'The nation is a wild place of contesting forces.'[255] *The Bonniest Companie* epitomises this view, articulating Jamie's pluralistic visions of Scotland through

[253] Collins, p. 158.
[254] RSPB, *Jackdaw* (n.d.), <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/jackdaw/> [accessed 14 June 2020].
[255] Alan Riach, 'Mr and Mrs Scotland Are Taking a Vacation in the Autonomous Region' in *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, ed. Rachel Falconer, pp. 21-31 (p. 21).

an ever-present ecopoetic lens. In this collection, she proves without a doubt that writing concerned with the non-human world need not be divorced from the political sphere, and that Scottish nationalism would do well to make room for ecological points of view – and, crucially, that ecological and political discourses become richer and more nuanced when intertwined.

While it may be tempting to group *Surfacing* (2019), Jamie's most recent book of essays, alongside *Findings* and *Sightlines* as a trilogy, I would argue that it is more fruitful to read *Surfacing* in the context of *Frissure* and *The Bonniest Companie* as the latest stage of Jamie's ecopoetic development. The title alludes to her preoccupation with the process of uncovering, or unconcealment,[256] in multiple ways, as Amanda Bell notes in her review of the collection:

> The title of *Surfacing* refers not only to the unearthing of artefacts in digs but to a multiplicity of personal renewals: miners re-emerging from the pit, her grandmother recovering from depression, her own experience of cancer. Surfacing is also a stage of life, the rediscovery of the self in late middle-age, when parents are dead and children grown.[257]

It is vital to consider Jamie's position in her personal life when reading this collection, as it informs its methodology as well as its contents throughout. It is in *Surfacing* that the openness and uneasiness of Jamie's poetic forms are most fully applied to her essays. The bulk of the collection is concerned with two archaeological digs, and these essays are written in a style consistent with *Findings* and *Sightlines*. Towards the end of the collection, however, the essays become 'staccato',[258] as Jamie delves into her own past to revisit her Asian travels, her grandmother's memories, and the death of her father, and form and coherence begin to break down, ending in the dreamy, impressionistic 'Voice of the Wood'.

Surfacing's longest essay, 'In Quinhagak', details Jamie's time at an archaeological dig in the Yup'ik village of Quinhagak in Alaska, where rising sea levels and temperatures have caused the 'eroding' of the tundra and the recovery of a buried village, and with it a wealth of artefacts: 'For generations the frozen earth had held these objects fast, like charms in a Christmas cake, but now the objects were falling to the seashore to be washed away for good.'[259] A sense of threat hovers over this essay in both an ecological sense as global warming is causing the tundra to melt and even catch fire (p. 22), prompting worries that the Yup'ik people may not be able to stay on their land, and in a

[256] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 83-140.
[257] Amanda Bell, '*Surfacing* by Kathleen Jamie: Digging deep on several fronts', *The Irish Times* (12 October 2019), <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/surfacing-by-kathleen-jamie-digging-deep-on-several-fronts-1.4032795> [accessed 15 June 2020] [my italics].
[258] Marina Benjamin, 'Kathleen Jamie's *Surfacing*: documenting the beauty of our endangered earth', *New Statesman* (4 September 2019), <https://www.newstatesman.com/kathleen-jamie-surfacing-climate-change-essays-review> [accessed 12 October 2019].
[259] Kathleen Jamie, *Surfacing* (London: Sort Of Books, 2019), p. 18.

cultural sense as the old objects are in danger of being 'washed away for good' (p. 18), representing the loss of indigenous Yup'ik culture. Benjamin argues that

> Every now and then […] [Jamie] cuts through the assemblage of beautiful prose with a stinging comment: a reminder that the natural balance is out of whack, or that violence and menace can surface just as easily as venerable artefacts from the past.[260]

These 'stinging comments' are scattered throughout *Surfacing* with more frequency than Jamie's previous essay collections; there is a constant sense of urgency, that our time to rectify environmental crises may be running out. In 'In Quinhagak', the erosion of the land and indigenous culture are intertwined, stressing the deep interconnection between human and non-human and the conventionally opposed realms of culture and nature.

The dig itself is a site of contradiction, as it is facilitated by ecological damage but also enables cultural revival:

> the dig was revitalising traditional skills which had been lost, that local people were so interested in the rediscovered artefacts that they were making replicas, and that meant relearning old techniques – ivory carving, for example. That was the point. Although the dig had turned out to be rich beyond imagining, it wasn't a treasure hunt; it was rebuilding a whole culture lost to colonialism, to missionary zeal. (p. 20)

While Jamie is acutely aware of the dangers of global warming, she is also open to the paradoxical benefits it has brought this community. The objects both represent and facilitate the relationship between the human and the non-human, as they are 'All made by knowing hands from caribou antler, wood, stone, walrus ivory, grass' (p. 18) – natural materials. The word 'knowing' is key here; Jamie foregrounds the importance of communal knowledge and skill passed from generation to generation within a community, as she did in *Among Muslims*. Even in the case of objects made from animal materials, often the results of hunting, Jamie admires the respect that the Yu'pik afford them in death: 'The materials were the gifts of other creatures: fish, owls, caribou, seals, walrus, whales.' (p. 86) In the absence of industrial farming and fishing, the Yup'ik do not exploit non-human resources, but utilise them in a sustainable way. Food and landscape are inextricably linked in their cultural consciousness: 'Any conversation about food – and these folk speak a lot about food – becomes a conversation about the land or the sea.' (p. 56) This is in contrast with urban conceptions of food, which are divorced from people's immediate surroundings. The Yup'ik are presented as a people with a far healthier relationship with the non-human than our own. It is important to note, though, that Jamie is careful not to be carried away by escapist fantasies, wryly drawing attention to modern interventions in the village which disrupt potential narratives of pure, untainted wildness – 'A grocery store. Wi-Fi. I was beginning to hear Rick's droll humour in his phrase "Alaskan wilderness"' (p. 24) – and the lingering damage caused by colonialism.

[260] Benjamin, 'Kathleen Jamie's *Surfacing*'.

Throughout the essay, Jamie strives to observe and learn from the Yup'ik approach to the non-human world. For Jamie, the Alaskan landscape is strange and 'astonishing', and she struggles to 'come to terms with its vastness.' (p. 30) Its unfamiliar scale causes optical illusions, such as when she sees what she believes to be a bear or a human figure across the tundra which turns out to be a raven:

> Clearly, there was work to do with scale. One had to make allowances for this extraordinary light. But then again, maybe it showed how readily, in this unfixed place, the visible shifts. Transformation is possible. A bear can become a bird. A sea can vanish, rivers change course. The past can spill out of the earth, become the present. (p. 31)

For Jamie, the tundra carries a transformative energy; it is one of many liminal places in her writing where boundaries are blurred, including those between the human and the non-human and the past and the present. However, she acknowledges that, for the Yup'ik, this land is not so 'unfixed'. She spends much of the essay documenting their deep knowledge of their land, which is partly attributed to the attention they bestow upon it: 'I noticed that people notice. […] They noticed the bog cotton and its passing, an influx of owls, that there are bears around. The whole place must be in constant conversation with itself, holding knowledge collectively.' (p. 54) Jamie's own practice of noticing and listening is mirrored in the Yup'ik, whose existence depends on a knowledge of and respect for their land. It is important to note that this knowledge is not fixed, but instead a 'constant conversation' shifting and changing among the community over time. Jamie sets out to experience something of this knowledge simply by lying in the grass and paying attention to her surroundings for an extended period, noticing that her senses are constantly 'clarifying': 'This, after only an hour of attention. What would a year be like, a lifetime, a thousand years? How attuned a person, a whole people, could become.' (p. 68) This is reminiscent of Heidegger's idea of dwelling, as Yup'ik life and culture, and their very senses, are shaped by the land on which they live.

The deep interconnection between the Yup'ik and their land is reflected throughout the essay in their speech and language. Even when they are communicating in English, their way of speaking and storytelling is striking: 'I liked that people talked so readily and unembarrassedly about animals and birds and the land. They didn't give "information", instead they told incidents, anecdotes. Like coming at a subject sideways, not straight on.' (p. 53) This is reminiscent of Jamie's own practice of writing 'toward' a subject instead of 'about'.[261] The issue of the representation and perception of the non-human world through language has always been present in Jamie's work, and it seems that, in Quinhagak, she has found a way of speaking which is cognizant of the enmeshed nature of the relationship between the human and the non-human, one which does not place the former above the latter.

[261] Jamie, *Author Statement*.

Jamie is also keenly interested in the ways in which the Yup'ik language is connected to its environment. For example, she is taught the words for some local birds: '*Qucillgak* and *Qaqatak*, the crane and the loon. Soft and irresistible sounds, like the tundra in summer, all "qs" and "kis" and "ochs".' (p. 84) Jamie revels in the sound and physicality of the language, tying it to the Yup'ik land. There is a clear parallel here with her use of Scots in her poetry, which is not drawn explicitly, but she does mention Scottish Gaelic:

> "He who loses his language loses his world." So wrote the Gaelic poet Iain Crichton Smith/Iain Mac a'Ghobhainn. One wonders if the converse is true. If one loses one's world, one loses one's language. The world of things, of making, of the land and animals and the stories and the hands' work. (pp. 91-92)

Language, environment, craft, and storytelling are tied together here as the foundations of indigenous cultures like the Yup'ik and the Gàidhealtachd. At this point in Jamie's development, the realm of language and the realm of tangible, physical reality are not seen as separate, but mutually dependent, each one informing and sustaining the other. This is demonstrated when she sits in on a meeting where the Yup'ik elders are shown some of the objects from the dig in the hope that 'the objects would reawaken the elders' language'. (p. 93) This hope is realised as the elders handle the objects and explain their uses, which is the first and only time Jamie hears the Yup'ik language spoken sustainedly during her visit: 'I was listening to the language of this landscape, as expressed with the hands and eye.' (p. 94) Language is as key to this moment of renewed 'cultural resilience' (p. 91) as the objects themselves, and both are formed and contextualised by the Yup'ik's non-human surroundings.

'In Quinhagak' is not the only essay in *Surfacing* that takes an archaeological dig as its starting point: there are three 'Links of Noltland' essays that deal with a site back in Scotland, on one of the Orkney Isles. As in Quinhagak, it is climate change that has facilitated this project:

> a dune system which had existed for millennia had recently been obliterated by the wind. A natural cycle had been interrupted. Across a mere fifteen or twenty years the ancient dunes had collapsed, and the vegetation had vanished. […] [W]ith the sand and vegetation scoured away, a ground surface had been exposed which had been recognised as an extensive Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement. (p. 110)

Climate change is in no way viewed as a neutral occurrence here. The words 'obliterated' and 'scoured' are suggestive of violence and damage, an effect which is compounded when Jamie refers to the dig as a site of injury: 'The working site had a raw, slightly wounded look, like skin after you peel off a sticking plaster.' (p. 111) There is a sense of urgency here created by the invocation of 'millennia'; the human race's relatively short presence on Earth is halting 'natural cycles' which have been recurring for a length of time so long it is almost impossible for us to visualise. The wind has not only destroyed the dunes, but also, paradoxically, threatens the ancient structures and artefacts that it has uncovered: 'They wouldn't last, though: having been exposed after their long burial, those remains too were immediately vulnerable to the wind.' (p. 110) There is an irony in the fact that

climate change, caused by humans, puts the remnants of human history at risk here as well as the non-human environment. Jamie also utilises irony when comparing our current age to the Neolithic age, writing, 'You don't have to be an archaeologist to know the oil age won't last half as long as the Neolithic did.' (p. 135) The looming threat of ecological catastrophe is at its height in these essays, and it is paralleled with the threat of the dig coming to a premature end because of funding cuts and the loss of funding opportunities from the EU (pp. 134-135), tying environmental and political issues together.

The contortions of time which are always a feature of Jamie's archaeological essays are made more pressing by the dual threat of time running out for both the dig and the Earth itself. Time is almost a tangible presence in the 'Links of Noltland' essays:

> Being on site often left me freighted with thoughts about time, how it seems to expand and contract. I kept having to remind myself of the ages that passed during what we call the Neolithic or the Bronze Age. How those people's days were as long and vital as ours. (p. 126)

Jamie's use of the active verbs 'expand' and 'contract' suggests a conception of time that is fluid and moving rather than fixed and stable, undermining any sense of linear time and creating yet another state of uncertainty. This effect is furthered by the recurrence of the spiral shape in the artefacts that are unearthed, which Jamie relates back to time: 'Some folk say time is a spiral, that what goes around comes around, that events remote to one other can wheel back into proximity.' (p. 161) Jamie works to evidence this proposition by humanising the ancient peoples who would have populated the site (as she has also done in previous essays). Something of the lives of people long-dead is legible in the structures they left behind, as the archaeologists on-site discover evidence of home redecoration: 'Whatever the time frame, these long-ago alterations and changes – grand restorations or fiddling about – were domestic. What seemed to be emerging from this cluster of dwellings by the seashore were ordinary people's ordinary lives, hundreds of years' worth.' (p. 122) Just as Jamie troubles notions of wildness and wilderness, so too does she disrupt conceptions of Neolithic and Bronze Age people as distant and unknowable to us by emphasising their domesticity and ordinariness here. She demythologises them to show the reader how close we are to them, that we have not advanced so far ahead of them as to render them unrecognisable. Benjamin describes this tendency in Jamie's essays well, writing, 'It is as if Jamie, wherever she goes, functions as a lightning rod, drawing past, present and future together.'[262] As in her previous collections, these grand contortions of time are always drawn from a specific location – paying heed to one small patch of land facilitates an opening up on a larger scale in Jamie's writing – but her command of the contortions of time at this stage in her career has developed immensely from the image of 'leaves of tissue paper' used in *Among Muslims* (p. 62).

[262] Benjamin, 'Kathleen Jamie's *Surfacing*'.

Even as Jamie's handling of politics, ecological threat, and time is becoming more assertive, she is still constantly questioning:

> Does this matter, is the question. Do we want to know how it was to be human, here, five thousand years ago? Do we want to know where we're coming from as we cruise into the future? What we were, or might be again? How we '"engaged", if that's the word, how we configured our relationship with the rest of the natural world, with the planet. (p. 136)

That the question of 'how it was to be human' is intrinsically linked to the question of 'how we configured our relationship with the rest of the natural world' here is significant. The phrasing of 'the rest of' implies that humans are a *part* of the 'natural world', but the 'configuration' of our place in it is evidently something which needs to be actively negotiated. The third 'Links of Noltland' essay goes some way in answering these questions. Written entirely in the second person, in italics, Jamie directly addresses the ancient peoples who lived on the site. She praises their skilfulness in utilising their immediate natural resources: '*You know how to work with fire and stone, clay and skin, grasses and herbs. You know butchery and stitching. You stroll the beach seeking wood and flint and seaweed. Bone – you are experts on bone.*' (p. 172) As in 'In Quinhagak', Jamie is admiring these skills as a way of respecting one's land, in implicit contrast to mass exploitation of natural resources by capitalist regimes. She also praises the simple fact of their intimate knowledge of their environment:

> *You know the stars in the winter dark, the green aurora borealis, the solstice moment of rebirth. Midnight gloamings when you can ramble outdoors at midnight, enjoying the light on the sea. The birds' movements are known to you, swallows and snow buntings, geese you can catch with a net.* (p. 172)

It is this kind of intimate knowledge of place, this paying heed to the non-human world, as well as the craftsmanship it facilitates, that is the answer to Jamie's earlier question of whether the dig matters. The third 'Links of Noltland' essay functions as an alternative site report, one which focuses on the impact of the dig on the human psyche rather than the actual science of archaeology. The importance of archaeological sites like the Links, and Quinhagak, which are being uncovered because of human destruction to the planet, is paradoxically that they are a physical reminder of a different way of dwelling on and with the Earth which is far less destructive.

Following this more meditative essay, the collection moves into a series of shorter essays, some of which do not take immediate encounters with the non-human as their starting point, as most of Jamie's essays do, but instead memories. Alex Preston notes that it is the concept of surfacing, of uncovering, which binds the collection together, whether that be through archaeological digging into the Earth or reminiscently digging into memory: 'It's this deeper logic that connects the 12 essays in the collection, so that meaning is passed like a baton from one to the next, with each essay planting

the seed of the one that follows.'[263] This movement could be seen as another kind of spiral, cycling down and around towards the centre, which in this case is the writer's psyche. The titular essay is concerned with the fading memories of Jamie's matrilineal family line: 'You're losing their voices. When did that happen? You're forgetting the sound of your mother's voice, and your grandmother's.' (p. 179) Jamie uses the second person throughout the essay, which conveys the universality of the experience of forgetting even as she reveals parts of her personal family history – something which she has been wary of for most of her career. There is an irony in the fact that it is their voices that Jamie is forgetting, given that she has foregrounded the importance of listening and soundscapes to her ecopoetic method.

However, the process of actively attempting to recall and reflect eventually brings memories to the surface. At first, 'Something remains, […] the cadence' (pp. 179-180), and then the memory of voice is fully recovered: 'Nana's voice is coming back, it was just mislaid.' (p. 180) Memory is seen as a kind of archaeological site here, where an extended process of careful attention can reveal long-buried, precious artefacts. This process of remembering is paralleled both with the story of Jamie's great-grandfather, a miner, 'being brought to the surface after a blast below ground' (p. 179) and with her grandmother's episode of depression, which Jamie remembers herself: 'She had ECT, to shock her to the surface of her own mind. She was to be hauled through tunnels up and out of that place, for a while at least.' (p. 181) Jamie draws connections between all three instances of surfacing, creating another kind of multi-layered palimpsest out of her own mind.

Towards the end of the essay, she writes about the attempts to rectify the damage done to the land by the mining industry:

> Some efforts are being made to heal the wounded land by planting trees, and blocking drains to restore the moors, so the curlews might return. Bings and old railway beds are grassing over. The open-cast scars are deep gouges that might one day become lochs, maybe. Sometime deep in the future. (pp. 181-182)

By using the terms 'wounded' and 'open-cast scars', Jamie figures the land as a site of injury, mapping the human body onto landscape in a way reminiscent of *Frissure*. Because of the earlier parallels drawn between land and the human psyche, the hoped-for 'healing' and regrowth of the land is also, implicitly, a hoped-for healing of the psyche and growth of renewed possibilities. Jamie does not prioritise one process over the other, but instead binds the two together, and therefore deftly avoids any potential critiques of anthropocentrism. She turns the phrase 'deep in the past' on its head, envisioning the future as a realm as full of rich and various possibilities as the past is full of rich and various objects and stories.

[263] Alex Preston, '*Surfacing* by Kathleen Jamie review – profound reflections', *The Guardian* (17 September 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/17/surfacing-kathleen-jamie-review> [accessed 15 June 2020].

Jamie also revisits her early Asian travels for the first time since the publication of *Among Muslims* in two essays, 'A Tibetan Dog' and 'The Wind Horse'. The former deals with the incident which prompts the act of remembering, while the latter delves into the memory itself. During her brush with breast cancer, Jamie dreams of being bitten by a dog in Xiahe:

> I woke relieved and strangely reassured that I wouldn't die of this cancer, not this time, not now. I was being nipped, and would be released. […] How funny, to think my subconscious must have waited till I'd fallen asleep, then gone rummaging through a million long-lost memories to find an image it could craft into a message I would wake from and understand. (pp. 189-190)

As in *Frissure*, the state of risk and tension and awareness of mortality caused by illness prompts Jamie to look inward. The dream is yet another instance of surfacing, this time involuntarily enacted by the subconscious. Jamie then applies her signature process of tenacious querying to her memories of this time in her life, which are manifested in her journals: 'I rummaged down through the layers of my own life, as stored in the notebooks.' (p. 191) The comparison between the human psyche and the archaeological site in 'Surfacing' is furthered here; there is a sense that Jamie's training in archaeological looking has enabled her to apply the same kind of looking to her own life and mind, or 'soul'. Typically, no definite conclusions are reached by this process – 'What emerged were questions, to which I still have no answer' (p. 193) – but 'The Wind Horse' follows nonetheless.

In 'The Wind Horse', we see yet another space of risk and tension as Jamie recalls being unable to travel to Tibet because of mass pro-independence protests and state violence, resulting in an extended stay in Xiahe, which, while located in China, is 'ethnically and culturally Tibetan.' (p. 198) The threat of losing indigenous culture, which in this case is being actively suppressed, links back to 'In Quinhagak' and the 'Links of Noltland' trio, tying the essays together on a level other than the concept of surfacing. The questions Jamie refers to are to do with this cultural anxiety, but even more so with the moral and ethical implications of travelling and her position as a young tourist. She criticises her past self:

> I could look and smile, but what did I learn of their lives, the prostrating Tibetan pilgrims, the stallholder deftly working an abacus, the ice-cream girl with her barrow, who sat with her chin in her hands when business was slack? Nothing at all. (p. 212)

This essay lays bare the development of Jamie's travel writing over the years, showing that her ever-evolving practice of noticing and listening was underdeveloped at the time of her Asian travels. There is a sense that her younger self was looking *at* rather than *toward* her surroundings. However, the mature writer can see the beginnings of her current ethos in her past: 'There were moments of connection, too' (p. 211) with the native villagers, visiting Chinese art students, and other European tourists. If her senses were not yet finely tuned, there were at least attempts to make cross-cultural connections, the act of which is key to her ecopoetic practice. This essay is yet another example of Jamie's commitment to constant reengagement and reworking, this time of her own early work.

The final essay in *Surfacing*, 'Voice of the Wood', is the most impressionistic essay in Jamie's oeuvre. Written entirely in second-person present tense, it is set in another zone of risk, as the persona is disoriented: 'So you've really gone and done it this time you are lost in the wood how did that happen?' (p. 243) The lack of punctuation in this opening sentence creates a tone of panicked breathlessness, and the use of the second person makes this panic more immediate and visceral for the reader. The rhetorical question unroots and destabilises the reader to create a liminal, dreamlike space like that in poems such as 'The Wishing Tree' and 'Fragment 1'. Even the concept of being lost is questioned as the persona asks, 'How lost is lost?' (p. 243), which is a question that is in and of itself virtually impossible to navigate. Magic is hinted at in this essay too as the persona sees a moth fly by: 'If this was a fairy tale she might want you to follow her' (p. 244). The possibility of being led over the border to fairyland by the non-human animal is suggested but is not taken up; there is always a sense of limitation present in Jamie's writing, of getting close to boundaries but never fully crossing them.

The desire to become lost, to run away to fairyland, is explained when the persona gives her reason for coming to the wood:

> You wanted to think about all the horror. The everyday news – the guns, the wars, the children's tears down ashy faces, the chainsaws, the sea creatures tangled in plastic…
>
> No, not to think about it exactly but consider what to do with the weight of it all, the knowing… (p. 244)

These images of violence wrought by humans, both against the non-human and other humans, are the results of global capitalism, industrialism and colonialism, and it is mass media which is responsible for their dissemination – the terrible 'weight' of 'knowing' is, in other words, caused by what Heidegger called 'technology'.[264] To 'shut up shop and go let the wood embrace you' (p. 244) is a knee-jerk reaction against the forces of technology, as the wood is its psychic opposite: it is natural, connective, rooted, and, if one becomes lost, seemingly boundless. And yet, it is not shutting off or disconnecting which provides consolation in this essay. Instead, it is noticing, or paying heed. The persona's senses 'sharpen' (p. 244) and she instructs herself to 'Concentrate' (p. 245), which enables her to perceive specifics: 'Green ferns in the groin of an oak. Green moss cloaking a stone. Voice of a crow. Voice of a chiding wren. A smirr of rain too soft to possess a voice.' (p. 245) It is in noticing these small components that the persona can hear the 'Voice of the forest' (p. 245) and become unlost. As Emily Rhodes notes, Jamie 'demonstrates that in seeing the detail we can understand the whole: only by seeing the trees can we see the wood and find our way out'.[265]

[264] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 213-238.
[265] Emily Rhodes, 'Kathleen Jamie's luminous new essays brim with sense and sensibility', *The Spectator* (2 November 2019), <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/kathleen-jamie-s-luminous-new-essays-brim-with-sense-and-sensibility> [accessed 15 June 2020].

In many ways, 'Voice of the Wood' enacts Jamie's developed ecopoetic practice in miniature. Spaces or moments of risk and tension, or *unheimlich*,[266] are prioritised as scenes of negotiation; boundaries between the human and the non-human are tested but a sense of limitation is maintained; the desire to escape the everyday is expressed but not indulged in; and, perhaps most importantly, paying heed to small, intimate details through active sensory perception is what leads to more meaningful unconcealments.[267] In her most recent collections, Jamie shows that ecopoetry and nature writing need not be divorced from the personal or the socio-political, but are in fact strengthened by their inclusion. Clark outlines the critiques often levelled at the field of nature writing for its frequent avoidance of socio-political engagement: 'The issue is whether radical social change can ever really result from targeting *personal* attitudes, as opposed to directly addressing the specific political and economic institutions – capitalism, patriarchy, neocolonialism – that determine how people live and think.'[268] In her later output, Jamie perfects the balance between both, continuing to challenge the damaging dominant narratives of nature through the application of close, reverent attention to the non-human world while also deftly engaging with a broad range of socio-political issues including nationhood, colonialism, and the global climate crisis. All of these things play out against a growing awareness of her own mortality which prompts her precise gaze to turn inward, adding yet another layer to the complex mesh she builds upon with each collection. Typically, though, there is no sense that this process is finished, as *Surfacing* ends with an opening out: 'You are not lost, just melodramatic. The path is at your feet, see? Now carry on.' (p. 245)

[266] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 228-235.
[267] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 83-140.
[268] Clark, p. 24.

Conclusion

As this thesis has shown, Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility has developed and evolved through many different phases as she has grown both as a writer and in her personal life. Jamie's experience of displacement when travelling in politically fraught areas of Asia as a young, single woman first enables a sharpened mode of perception that this thesis aligns with Heideggerian unconcealment, causing the beginnings of several key interests that will run throughout her work including spirituality, folklore and myth, the Scots language, and the relations between time, place, and people. Jamie's sharpened perception is then turned to Scotland in the context of the 1997 devolution referendum as she uses plural poetic voices to assert the unstable collective of the nation and question the position of the woman in that collective in *The Queen of Sheba* (1994) and *Jizzen* (1999), as giving birth to her children adds another dimension to her treatment of gender in her writing. This thesis argues that the intersection of the non-human with these socio-political issues is an important element of these collections that has been overlooked by critics. Jamie's interest in the non-human world is then prioritised in *The Tree House* (2004) and *Findings* (2005), as she rigorously questions what it means to mediate between the human and the non-human and the role of language in this often-uneasy process, all while raising her children and being tied to the domestic realm. This paper proposes that *Sightlines* (2012) and *The Overhaul* (2012) form a 'midlife turn' into openness and uncertainty,[269] as Jamie's attention turns to even more uneasy points of connection between the human and non-human, and her awareness of mortality sharpens with the death of her mother and the growth of her children. This awareness of mortality is furthered by her experience with breast cancer, which is portrayed in *Frissure* (2013), prompting a reengagement with issues of gender and the female body that is incorporated into her ecopoetic practice. The tension and energy surrounding the 2014 Scottish independence referendum causes a similar enfolding of national politics into this practice in *The Bonniest Companie* (2015), while *Surfacing* (2019) brings together the personal, the political, and the non-human in what this thesis argues is an ecopoetic practice that is fully realised, if not completely comfortable.

These developments are the result of a commitment to constant reengagement and reworking, as Jamie returns to similar sites of interest – her Asian travels, gender and national politics, archaeological digs, and, most importantly, points of interconnection between the human and the non-human – using different approaches to draw out as many meanings as possible. As Jamie has said, 'It's no bad thing to keep imagining and testing one's ideas'.[270] This diversity of approach has caused critics to align her work with different philosophers and ecocritical thinkers (such as Heidegger,

[269] Falconer, 'Midlife Music', pp. 156-157.
[270] Kathleen Jamie, 'Kathleen Jamie' in *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence*, ed. by Scott Hames, pp. 115-117.

Levinas, and Bate) as well as different literary traditions and groupings of writers (such as the Romantics, Objectivists, Gaelic poets, late twentieth-century Scottish women writers, and contemporary ecopoets). While Jamie does utilise elements from all these lines of thought in various poems and essays, her writing overall cannot be categorised; as Falconer notes, 'Jamie's writing is like no-one else's.'[271]

The development of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility is far from over, as the final lines of *Surfacing* imply. In a 2014 essay for *Archipelago*, she wrote, 'I'm not sure if conclusions and judgements are the proper end of thought. Maybe a constant deer-like uncertainty carries the day.'[272] This thesis is by no means a closed account of Jamie's work, and there will certainly be further research to be done as she continues to write. However, some conclusions may be drawn about the development of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility so far. Firstly, an active attentiveness to one's surroundings and a prioritisation of the sensory encounter with the non-human are perceived of as crucial to the process of negotiating how we live on and with the Earth – as Jamie has said, 'Dare we propose that in heedless times, simply paying heed becomes part of the alternative?'[273] Jamie is keenly aware of the role language plays in the mediation between the human and the non-human, and she self-consciously refers to the paradox inherent in expressing the non-human through the decisively human realm of language throughout her writing as she rigorously questions the taxonomies, binaries and categorizations we use in our day-to-day speech. She affords the non-human subjects of her writing respect, acknowledging their difference and otherness even while striving for collectivity; boundaries are pushed up against, but not entirely broken through, maintaining an important sense of limitation. Various negotiations are carried out (for example, between nature and culture, the inner and the outer, the domestic and the wild, safety and risk), often in spaces of risk and tension, and they do not necessarily result in fixed conclusions, instead opening out into further questions. Socio-political and personal negotiations are also included in this process, sitting in tension with ecological concerns in Jamie's earlier work but later becoming incorporated into her developed ecopoetic practice.

Morton's idea of the ecological mesh provides a visual metaphor that can encompass all these elements of Jamie's ecopoetic sensibility, as it emphasises interconnection between all things while allowing for points of difference in the gaps of the mesh and acknowledging its uneasiness and ambivalence: 'Interconnectedness isn't snug and cozy. There is intimacy […] but not predictable, warm fuzziness.'[274] This thesis proposes that the idea of the mesh is also useful when viewing Jamie's

[271] Falconer, introduction to *Kathleen Jamie: Essays and Poems on Her Work*, p. 2.
[272] Kathleen Jamie, 'Well Doubtful', *Archipelago* 9 (Winter 2014), 1-7 (p. 7).
[273] Kathleen Jamie, @KathleenJamie, 'Dare we propose that in heedless times, simply paying heed becomes part of the alternative?' (tweet) (27 November 2019), <https://twitter.com/byleaveswelive/status/1201870725159763969> [accessed 27 November 2019].
[274] Morton, p. 31.

body of work entire, allowing her evolving attitudes towards language (particularly Scots), travel, national and gender politics, and her various moments of confidence and hesitation to sit together in one complex, uneasy entanglement of continuities, developments, and contradictions. Ultimately, this thesis has aimed to demonstrate that reading Jamie's work in a manner that prioritises interconnection, negotiation, tension, and open-endedness instead of attempting to categorise or impose a rigid argument upon it results in a far more nuanced overview of her output, one which reveals an ecopoetic sensibility that works to target personal attitudes *and* address political institutions. For Jamie, they are a part of the same process: 'when we do that – step outdoors, and look up – we're not little cogs in the capitalist machine. It's the simplest act of resistance and renewal. This isn't new, of course, but alas it's still necessary. Never more so.'[275]

[275] Jamie, *A Life in Writing*.

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