How can the contemporary ecogeographical short story facilitate reflections on our relationship with the nonhuman world, and move us towards practices of care?

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Abstract

If the literary-focused practice of ecocriticism can be considered a critical pedagogical tool for educating people on the issues of environmental degradation, whilst also promoting sustainable practices for future relationships between the human and the nonhuman world, then it is a practice that promotes care. This paper uses the critical framework of ecogeographical place as a chronotope, developing upon Mikhail M. Bakhtin's conceptualisation to propose that literature and criticism can bring human communities back to ecologically sustainable and nurturing relationships with the local landscape through promoting ideas on co-dependent enmeshment between the human and the nonhuman world. Developing one's knowledge of human relationships with the past, present and possible futures of an ecogeographical landscape fosters stronger ecological awareness, as readers become invested in the landscapes in which they live. This paper regards this movement as the development of readers' environmental consciousness. This ultimately leads to practices of greater environmental care.

Contemporary writers develop readers' environmental consciousness through stories based in ecogeographical locations. The short stories analysed in this paper include Mark Haddon's 'The Weir' set in the London suburbs, and Lucy Wood's 'Countless Stones', set in a coastal village in Cornwall. Both stories explore human relationships with the nonhuman world and highlight ecological concerns raised by conceptualising human and nonhuman relationships through anthropocentric modes of theorisation. Both stories oppose anthropocentric modes of thinking and present ecocentric relationships between the human and nonhuman world. This paper argues that the danger of the anthropocentric modes of theorisation opposed by Haddon and Wood is the engendering of greater alienation between the human and the nonhuman world. The power of the stories selected for this paper lies in their promotion of greater care towards the natural world by enabling readers to reconceptualise the environment from the perspective of the nonhuman, thus allowing them to engage empathetically with the nonhuman world.

Keywords: short story, nonhuman worlds, ecogeographical, entanglement, ecocentrism.

Introduction

This paper considers how the study of contemporary, ecogeographical short stories encourages readers to reflect on the importance of practices of care between the human and the nonhuman world in the early 2020s, a time of mass environmental degradation and crisis. In this paper, I argue that the twenty-first century marks the initiation of mainstream social awareness of ecological issues: western societies show enhanced awareness of endangered species and their extinction, environmental degradation, and the need for greater biodiversity. The American ecocritic, Glen Love, has labelled the twenty-first century the 'century of the environment' (2003, p.15), marking an important, ideological turning point from the denial of climate change ideologies in the 1980s and 1990s to the growing conscience and acceptance in the 2000s of the human impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems, thus leading to the eco-activism of the 2010s. In the year 2000 atmospheric scientists, Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stormer, proposed the concept of the 'Anthropocene', which has since been adopted by mainstream commentators and used across academic disciplines. In 'The "Anthropocene"' (2006), Crutzen defines the epoch as the catastrophic harm that 'the expansion of mankind' has caused to the planet through the exploitation of earth's resources:

> More than half of all accessible fresh water is used by mankind. Fisheries remove more than 25% of the primary production of the oceans […]. In a few generations mankind is exhausting the fossil fuels that were generated over several hundred million years (Crutzen, 2006, p.14).

Crutzen argues that the term Anthropocene is important in developing what I identify as the environmental consciousness; it exposes the 'role that humans have played' in environmental degradation and climate change.

It is important to take Kathryn Yusoff's criticism into consideration when discussing the Anthropocene: she highlights the danger of the universal 'we' (2018, p.xxi) of the epoch. The Anthropocene imbues climate change with mainstream significance in the global north, but this is less true in places that have already been bearing the brunt of climate crisis. Yusoff makes readers aware that the universal 'we' (2018, p.xxi) enables the continuation of 'ecological racism' and 'racial-blindness' (2018, p.xii), which privileges Eurocentric and western philosophies and bodies. It simultaneously reproduces old colonial hierarchies resulting in the same black and brown bodies — 'the ghosts of Geology's epistemic and material modes of categorization' — 'tak[ing] up the violence of the earth' (2018, p.xii) by bearing the impact of climate disasters: the blowback of climate change. My criticism of short stories, practices of care and ecology in this paper focuses on climate change and its conversion to a mainstream ideology in the consciousness of the global north. In making reference to the reader, I refer to an Anglocentric reader in the global north.

This paper uses the concept of ecogeography (or the ecogeographical) as relating to both ecological and geographical aspects of the environment and applies it to Mikhail M. Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope. Bakhtin defines a chronotope as 'time space', which allows literary

critics to analyse how the 'intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships' is 'artistically represented in literature' (1981, p.84). Bakhtin goes on to state that in a chronotope, 'time […] thickens […and] becomes artistically visible', and space becomes 'charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (1981, p.84). By adding ecology and geography to time and space, this paper aims to demonstrate how applying an ecogeographical, ecocritical lens to literary texts can help readers conceptualise and visualise the impact that human behaviour has had on past, present and possible futures of a landscape. My close readings of the ecogeographical short stories 'The Weir' by Mark Haddon and 'Countless Stones' by Lucy Wood propose an ecocriticism that calls for the development of a widespread environmental consciousness here intended as an emotional response to a text that moves individual or larger audiences to re-examine their relationship with the natural world and begin to recognise the need for co-dependence between the human and the nonhuman world — sometimes even at the expense of giving up anthropocentric desires. I suggest that these aforementioned writers achieve this goal in their writing by exploring the dynamic on which such relationships of co-dependence are based.

One of the methods deployed by Haddon in 'The Weir' and Wood in 'Countless Stones' consists in envisaging ecocentrical thought as a conceptualisation of the feelings and emotions of the natural world, thus inciting debate and discussion on how the nonhuman and the human world function as a co-partnership. This idea is epitomised in the following two quotes from 'The Weir', where the protagonist Ian is being challenged by Kelly — the girl he rescued from drowning — to reconnect with and listen to the nonhuman world: 'Everything talks […] trees, walls […] this wood' (Haddon, 2016, p.337); 'Stones just repeat themselves […] I'm a stone … It's raining, it's raining', (Haddon, 2016, p.337). In confronting Ian on his disconnection from the nonhuman world, Kelly obliges him to rethink and reconceptualise his permeance on the earth; once Ian accepts that human life is ephemeral, he can assimilate the damaging relationship he has with his son and start to move on.

Simon Estok in his article 'Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia' casually dismisses the complexities of human and nonhuman relationships; he believes these relationships privilege anthropocentric modes of thinking (2009, p.203). However, he fails to present readers with what ecocentric thinking or philosophy would entail. On the contrary, the power of Haddon and Wood's short stories is their ability to allow readers to experience — on an empathetic level — a view of the nonhuman world. This empathetic experience provides readers with a greater understanding of the nonhuman world and can challenge personal, prejudiced modes of thought. This development of the readers' environmental consciousness addresses what Estok proposes as a lack of 'an aesthetics of contact' in ecocriticism (2009, p.203). Both Haddon and Wood perform a movement of entanglement and enmeshment by positioning readers in the consciousness of the nonhuman world.

It is this exposure with the natural world that challenges the reader's anthropocentric modes of thought. I use exposure (to the nonhuman world) as a critical concept in this paper, as it is both a recurrent motif and a central axis to my theorisation of the environmental consciousness. I define the nonhuman world in this essay as the landscape, fauna and flora belonging to the local

environment in which the short stories are set. The development of an environmental consciousness is the 'radical', activist ecocriticism that Estok (2009, p.203) calls for; however, Estok and other like-minded, ecophobic critics consider this to be unrevolutionary and unradical. I would contest that the radical potential of developing an environmental consciousness is that it deters people from always privileging human needs and desires. It is only through founding a philosophy of co-dependence and care, where human needs are balanced against those of the nonhuman world, that we can implement ethics of care, placing social justice at the centre of political and social frameworks of the future.

Co-dependence: Theories of Care

This movement towards co-dependency by Wood and Haddon is important for readers and literary critics so that they can envisage the significance of balancing the needs of the nonhuman world and the human world in future political frameworks of care, expanding their consideration from solely focusing on anthropocentric needs to the incorporation and inclusion of the needs and rights of the nonhuman world as well. Adopting new thoughts on care for the nonhuman world is vital if humans are to begin to tackle the consequences of environmental degradation, contemporary climate apathy, and climate change. This paper argues that it is only through developing this philosophy of co-dependence, which I identify in Wood and Haddon's stories, that humans can begin to implement ethics of care (by putting social justice at the heart of future political, economic, and social agendas). Henceforth, humans can start to address and solve these environmental matters.

My concept of co-dependence — where the needs of humans, animals and natural landscapes are balanced in an entangled, enmeshed equilibrium — is a different movement from that proposed by deep ecology, based on Aldo Leopold's concept of 'land ethics' (2020, p.70) in his book *A Sand Country Almanac* (1949). This "deep ecology" creates dualistic hierarchies, where wild animals are privileged over domestic animals and the community is privileged over the individual. In my conceptualisation of co-dependence, everything exists in a balanced equilibrium — one set of needs is not privileged over another. This paper's theorisation of co-dependence between the human and the nonhuman world stems from Carol J. Adams & Josephine Donovan's theorisation of a feminine ethics for the care of animals in their book *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics: A Reader* (2007). Adams & Donovan's theorisation states that 'humans have a moral obligation' to care for animals and that we need to pay 'attention' to the 'individual suffering of animals', whilst also paying equal 'attention' to the 'political' and 'economic systems behind the suffering' (2007, p.2-3).

Adams & Donovan's ethics of care for animals is in turn based upon Carol Gilligan's concept of the feminine 'morality of responsibility' presented in her book *In a Different Voice* (1983). Gilligan's feminine 'morality of responsibility'claims that female ethics is 'concerned with the activity of care' and promoting ideas of taking 'responsibility', whilst developing positive 'relationships' in the world (1989, p.59). These positive relationships are conceptualised by Gilligan as sustaining a 'web of connections' to keep positive 'relationships intact' (1989, p.59). Gilligan's theorisation is the basis for my conceptualisation of the theoretical ideas of

entanglement and enmeshment. I build upon such ideas and suggest that instead of 'sustaining' the 'web' (1989, p.59) that keeps the human and the nonhuman world separate, we should move towards co-dependent entanglement and enmeshment — where the human world becomes a living part of the web and is as responsible for maintaining the nonhuman world as the nonhuman world is for maintaining the human world. It is only then that ethics of care can embody the concept of symbiosis between the human and the nonhuman and highlight the importance of the co-dependency that exists between the human and the nonhuman world. It is worth highlighting once again in the early 2020s — a time of environmental crisis — that the human and nonhuman world cannot exist or survive independently. This paper's theorisation of co-dependent entanglement and enmeshment also extends beyond Adams & Donovan's animal ethics of care by stating that humans have a moral obligation (2007, p.2-3) not only to animals, but to the entirety of the nonhuman world. I develop Adams & Donovan's concept of 'attention' (2007, p.2-3), integrating it with the idea of humans being entangled and enmeshed in the nonhuman world. It is only when humans recognise themselves as a living part of the natural world (with the same equal rights as the nonhuman world) that more people will reflect on the environmental destructiveness of anthropocentric behaviour that has privileged humans over the nonhuman world in political, social, and economic frameworks.

This paper argues that the strength of Haddon and Wood's short stories to bring about political change lies in their capacity to allow readers to empathetically experience the view of the nonhuman world. This empathetic experience elicits a greater understanding amongst its readers and often challenges their own prejudiced modes of anthropocentric thought; in turn, they undergo a change in their environmental consciousness, as they briefly experience the human world through the lived experience of the nonhuman world.

Post-Pastoral Enmeshment and Entanglement

Wood's short story 'Countless Stones' from her 2012 debut collection Diving Belles, and the short story 'The Weir' by Haddon from his 2016 award-winning collection The Pier Falls both construct a protagonist and a narrative voice that encapsulate contemporary alienation. In 'Countless Stones', readers follow the life of the protagonist: a thirty-something Rita who possesses an integral role within a small, Cornish, coastal community. Wood explores the deep, ecogeographical connection with the landscape in this community as the villagers take part in unexplained metamorphosis; they take turns to become the 'countless stones' that guard the village from danger: 'There were people from the town who had been standing up in the circle for years' (Wood, 2012, p.22).

Rita who is here reflecting on her life:

> […] had the vague feeling that if she got up and opened the curtains, she would see that the world had packed up and moved on without her during the night. (Wood, 2012, p.21)

She is slowly going through the metamorphosis of turning into a countless stone:

> The top layer of skin had started to dry out and soon it would harden like the brittle layer of sand that bakes and hardens on a beach. (Wood, 2012, p.20)

Wood juxtaposes the contemporary alienation Rita feels in her individual life, characterised by individual goals and relationships — 'Eight years was a long time; too long just to stop seeing somebody completely' (2012, p.23) — with her role in a community that cares and takes responsibility for one and another:

> After a while, somebody would let themselves in and turn off your heating […] they would tidy things up and sort out the post. (2012, p.22)

Wood is critiquing contemporary alienation and the disconnection society feels from both the nonhuman world and from its local communities resulting from capitalist power structures of consumerism. This is exemplified through Rita settling for a home that leaves her dissatisfied:

> It wasn't the house she had expected to buy, it was cold and small and didn't let in much light, but it was what had come up. (Wood, 2012, p.25)

Rita purchases the house because she feels the pressure to conform to capitalist, developmental steps of maturity and independence, which are always attached to products (a car; a house; a bigger house when children arrive). Such products essentially increase dependency on capitalist power structures and instead of satisfying people's needs, leaves them dissatisfied. Lauren Berlant labels such capitalist, consumerist ideologies 'cruel optimism', as they attach optimistic 'desire' for a 'cluster of promises' to capitalist-produced and manufactured objects (2011, p.1). The inherent irony in these 'optimistic' desires of capitalism is that they will never be fulfilled (Berlant, 2011, p.1); these products reinforce capitalist power hierarchies that maintain the status quo — the rich and powerful exploiting the poor and the nonhuman world for profitable gain.

This paper contends that through Rita's metamorphosis (the literal personification of my ideas on entanglement and enmeshment of the human and the nonhuman world) into a countless stone, an indispensable part of a circle of stones that ward off evil from the village, Wood presents us with ecocentric modes of existence and counter-capitalist ideas on community. By transitioning from anthropocentric thought and chronology to ecocentric thought and chronology, Rita escapes the entrapment of an anthropocentric, capitalist existence. Her metamorphosis into a countless stone functions as the embodiment of a transition towards ecocentric thought that promotes co-dependency between the human and the nonhuman world: this presents the reader with ecocentric modes of being on the periphery of anthropocentric understanding and conceptualisation. My idea of ecocentric modes of being outside anthropocentric understanding is a post-pastoral movement. Terry Gifford identifies the post-pastoral in his book, *Pastoral: A New Critical Idiom* (1999). He defines the post-pastoral as 'a

mature, environmental aesthetic that recognises that some literature has gone beyond the closed circuit of pastoral and anti-pastoral to achieve a vision of an integrated, natural world that includes the human' (1999, p.148). The post-pastoral is concerned with the 'ecocentric repossession of [the] pastoral' that symbolises a shift from the 'representation of nature as a theatre for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake' (1999, p.148). The post-pastoral 'exemplifies the way this positioning of the self towards nature leads inevitably to a humbling that is a necessary requirement of the shift from the anthropocentric position of the pastoral to the ecocentric view of the post-pastoral' (Gifford, 1999, p.152). In 'Countless Stones', this post-pastoral movement is exemplified in the line: 'Breathing stopped, but there was a different kind of breathing' (Wood, 2012, pp.7). Wood supports Berlant's ideas on cruel optimism, as well as Gifford's ideas on the post-pastoral, by emphasising how Rita's life as a countless stone puts value into unproductive ways of being; thus, it moves away from the capitalist view of nature as something that must be productive and towards an appreciation of nature and humanity as surpassing productivity. Ultimately, Wood presents the reader with a new, post-pastoral ecocentric lens through her use of metamorphosis, the reoccurring motif of the countless stones and the story's ending.

This new, post-pastoral, ecocentric lens achieves two objectives. Firstly, Wood helps to develop her readers' environmental consciousness by promoting co-dependence between the human and the nonhuman world, free from anthropocentric biases. She also anticipates how mutual practices of care between the nonhuman and the human world could operate. The countless stones watch over the village and ward off evil, whilst the villagers oversee the properties and expenses of those villagers who have metamorphosised into the countless stones. This creates a circle of mutual care. Wood envisages this radical principle of mutual care — moving away from Leopold's ideas on 'human stewardship' that places the human as the most important agent in biological hierarchies of sentience (Leopold, 2020, p.71) — as one where the nonhuman world offers the same level of protection and care to the human world as the human world should offer to the nonhuman world. In equilateral principles, the human world would offer high levels of care to the nonhuman world but in reality, the human world often shows indifference to the nonhuman world and stereotypically, in neoliberal ideology, exploits the nonhuman world for commodities and profit.

Similarly, in his short story 'The Weir', Haddon explores contemporary alienation that has led to modern-day isolation and disconnection. The reader follows the life of Ian, a man in his early fifties who is disconnected from his drug addict son, Timothy, '(who) is somewhere nearby, a needle in his arm' (Haddon, 2016, p.325), and has let his marriage of over twenty years to Maria 'slip […] away' (Haddon, 2016, p.324). Ian, like Rita, experiences alienation from contemporary society and is unable to relate to modern, individualistic, capitalist ideologies:

> The world shifting too fast in ways he doesn't understand, values he'd grown up with become vaguely comic: being a gentleman; respecting authority; privacy; stoicism; reticence. (Haddon, 2016, p.324-25)

Again, we observe the entanglement and enmeshment with the nonhuman world through Ian's exposure to the river as he tries to save an unknown girl from drowning in the weir:

> He realises how big the river is now that he is inside it, how strong, how lost the woman must be and how slim his chances are of finding her. (Haddon, 2016, p.328)

I argue that the river acts as a liminal space for Ian to reconnect with the world and to start to deal with the trauma of losing his son and wife. Ian's relationship with Kelly (the girl he saves from drowning) is the first real connection he has had with anyone in a long time: 'She reaches out […] it is the first time anyone has touched him with anything approaching tenderness in years' (Haddon, 2016, p.331). It is Ian's friendship with Kelly, gained through his enmeshment with the nonhuman world, that inspires his epiphanic realisation of the importance of co-dependence:

> He's never thought of it this way, that lives are held in common, that we lose a little something of ourselves with every death. (Haddon, 2016, p.336)

I contend through my ecological reading that both Haddon and Wood create protagonists and narrative voices that symbolise contemporary alienation between the human and the nonhuman world to critique the dangers of contemporary apathy, whilst also illustrating how moving away from anthropocentric thought towards post-pastoral ecocentric thought promotes co-dependence and ideas on mutual care between the human and the nonhuman world.

Both Haddon and Wood use sudden, unexpected interjections of recurring, post-pastoral motifs in their stories as exemplified in this example from 'Countless Stones': 'Suddenly she was up on the cliffs […] watching a buzzard rising and circling on its huge spread of wings' (Wood, 2012, p.22). There is a similar example in 'The Weir': 'Everything is suddenly back to normal, the dandelions, the clouds, the buzzard' (Haddon, 2016, p.327). I argue that these interjected, reoccurring, post-pastoral motifs function in both stories to present us with ecocentric thought in opposition to anthropocentric thought; it is this tense dichotomy that both Haddon and Wood want readers to explore in the development of their environmental consciousness.

Both writers also use the protagonist's exposure to ecogeographical features (the weir and the countless stones) as metaphors for promoting the entanglement of the human world with the nonhuman world. I also propose that Haddon and Wood use the anti-pastoral to present readers with realistic representations of the natural world, and therefore empower them to conceptualise and reconnect with modern landscapes and environmental issues. Gifford defines the anti-pastoral as the aesthetic of the Edenic-pastoral — the Edenic-pastoral being an aesthetic deriving from 16th century classical, literary forms characterised by 'motifs stemming from certain early Greek and Roman poems about country life: the life of the shepherd in particular' (1999, p.1) — that comes under scrutiny from an ecological viewpoint. Gifford gives the example of how an environmental activist might view Edenic-pastoral representations and imbues these representations with anti-pastoral meanings: 'a Greenpeace supporter might use the term as a criticism of the tree poem if it ignored the presence of pollution or the threat to urban trees from

city-developers' (1999, p.3). Gifford develops this idea by suggesting that the 'difference between the literary representation of nature and the material reality would be judged to be intolerable by the criteria of ecological concern' (1999, p.3), leading to the concept of Edenic-pastoral being used in a pejorative sense and the anti-pastoral offering a counter movement through providing realistic descriptions of the nonhuman world. In 'Countless Stones', Wood uses tactile, bodily imagery — 'She didn't want to think about her teeth turning into stones; the awful, dry crumbliness of it' (Wood, 2012, p.20) — as an anti-pastoral movement to ground Rita's metamorphosis in realism instead of magical realism, and also to conceptualise ecocentric co-dependence as a realistic alternative to anthropocentric frameworks. In 'The Weir', Haddon juxtaposes anti-pastoral imagery of birth ('semen') and mortality ('corpses') to challenge anthropocentric ideas on human permanency, reminding readers that they are part of natural cycles that do not privilege the human world over the nonhuman world: 'He can smell the May blossom, the same chemicals in semen and corpses so he read the other day' (Haddon, 2016, p.323).

Wood and Haddon's exploration of the shift from anthropocentric thought to ecocentric thought comes to full fruition in the ambiguous, post-pastoral endings of their short stories, which seek to challenge readers. I claim that this move promotes the enmeshment and entanglement of the nonhuman and human world in an equilibrium of mutual co-dependence of care. I will closely analyse these two endings below. The first passage is from 'Countless Stones':

> She let her thoughts wander and they swooped upwards like birds, so now she thought of a bird flying round a room, now she thought of someone singing, of marbles, of someone laughing in their sleep, of a bird flying round a room, of one lovely eye moving, of the wind, of lichen, a buzzard circling, a single snowflake, thrift, lichen and the wind. (Wood, 2012, p.38.)

Through her use of the zoomorphic simile 'swooped upward like birds', Wood presents the reader with the figurative representation of the shift from anthropocentric thought to ecocentric thought. The verb 'swooped', coupled with the animalistic imagery of the 'birds' (a symbol of the nonhuman world), is arguably Rita escaping the rigid structures of anthropocentric thought, where ideas must be ordered logically. The linearity of anthropocentric thought is shattered both figuratively and structurally as Rita's thoughts are shattered into entangled and enmeshed memories. The fragmented list of memories that constitutes the story's ending escapes anthropocentric logic, as its components cannot be analysed individually; they can only be considered as an enmeshed whole. I propose that this represents a movement towards post-pastoral, ecocentric thought and mutual co-dependence between the human and nonhuman world, as human life is conceptualised as a whole instead of single, linear, developmental portions of biographical time. Wood structurally represents this movement from anthropocentric to ecocentric thought through her use of syntax, which physically captures this movement on the page. The linearity of anthropocentric thought, usually captured in rigid, syntactical structures, is challenged by Wood through her use of the final, long, run-on sentence,

which gradually loses its syntactical sense until all logic is lost. Wood moves away from whole units of anthropocentric thought — 'she thought of a bird flying round a room' — until all that remains at the end of the sentence are single, fragmented words that defy anthropocentric thought: 'thrift', 'lichen', 'wind'. I suggest these single, isolated words are the physical embodiment of the ecocentric thoughts of a countless stone. By tracing Rita's metamorphosis into one of such stones, Wood enables readers to view the world through nonhuman eyes.

Similarly, 'The Weir, Haddon diverts from anthropocentric thought towards post-pastoral, ecocentric thought:

> He still dreams of the river, the thunder of the weir, the currents unfurling downstream. May blossom and cirrus clouds. He is no longer drowning. No one is drowning. Though they will all go down into the dark eventually. Him, Maria, Kelly, Timothy… And the last few minutes will be horrible but that's OK, it really is, because nothing is wasted and the river will keep on flowing and there will be dandelions in spring and the buzzard will still be circling above the wasteland. (Haddon, 2016, p.347)

In my ecological reading, Haddon employs the fatalistic metaphor of the 'dark' followed by the list of personal pronouns and culminating in ellipsis to signify a movement away from anthropocentric thought towards post-pastoral, ecocentric thought, highlighting the symbiosis that exists between the human and nonhuman world. The erasure of all human pronouns after the ellipsis signifies the shortness of the human lifespan compared to ecogeographical time. Through Estok's ecophobic lens, this could be read as an ominous, ecological warning that the natural world will survive after the extinction of humans. However, in my reading of post-pastoral entanglement and enmeshment, I interpreted this erasure as a movement towards idyllic, ecocentric thought, where natural ecosystems function in harmony and, as Haddon states, 'nothing is wasted' (Haddon, 2016, p.347). My reading is reinforced by the triumphant, seasonal imagery of dandelions returning in spring, suggesting that natural ecosystems will function long after our human lives have come to an end. The final animal imagery of the buzzard circling (a symbol of the nonhuman world) is arguably an image of hope, thus suggesting that humans can find redemption in the nonhuman world when willing to exist in harmonious co-dependence. Wood and Haddon, through entangling and enmeshing the human world with the nonhuman world in their short stories, envisage how mutual co-dependence and mutual care between the human and the nonhuman could potentially function in possible future relationships.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, and in my close readings of the contemporary British short stories 'The Weir' and 'Countless Stones', I trace what I identify as a contemporary literary movement away from anthropocentric thinking (positioning the human world above the nonhuman world) and towards ecocentric thinking (promoting mutual co-dependence between the human and the

nonhuman world) and towards ecocentric thinking (promoting mutual co-dependence between the human and the nonhuman world). I expound this movement by investigating how Haddon in 'The Weir' and Wood in 'Countless Stones' envision post-pastoral ecocentric thought to conceptualise the feelings and emotions of the natural world. The strength of their short stories is their ability to allow readers to empathetically experience the view of the nonhuman world and thus develop feelings of care towards the nonhuman world. This empathetic experience, free from anthropocentric prejudices, develops readers' environmental consciousness by allowing them to conceptualise the challenges that climate change and environmental degradation present not only to their futures, but also to the future of the nonhuman world, reinforcing the concept that symbiosis does exist between the human and the nonhuman world.

I hypothesise that the outcome of this modern, literary movement in contemporary British short story is that more writers, readers and critics will begin to move away from harmful, extreme modes of representation and conceptualisation of the nonhuman world, such as ecophobia and the Edenic-pastoral. These harmful representations arguably lead to contemporary relationships of alienation and apathy between the nonhuman and the human world. Through my close readings of exposure, entanglement and enmeshment, I encourage a move towards literary criticism and representations that envisage how mutual co-dependence and ethics of care between the human and the nonhuman world might work in possible future relationships. The value of literature in tackling some of the challenges of climate crisis and environmental degradation is its ability to allow readers to experience the world through other people's eyes and, with respect to the short stories selected for this paper, through the eyes of the natural world. This ability to revisualize and reconceptualise the natural environment from the perspective of the nonhuman world, allows readers to engage empathetically with environmental issues, free from the biases and prejudices of anthropocentric privileging. Through this empathetic reconnection, readers develop what this paper has termed an environmental consciousness, as they emotionally reinvest in possible, positive futures that oblige them to re-examine their relationship with the nonhuman world and hopefully move towards practices of care.

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