Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight: A Creative and Critical Exploration of Lesser-Known Narratives and Cumbria's Alternative Poetry

by

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led creative critical thesis consists of my poetry collection, *Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight,* a critical commentary and a study of the marginalised Cumbrian women poets who anticipate my own creative approach.

Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight explores the ancient woodland wetland, White Moss Common, situated between Rydal and Grasmere in Cumbria. This thesis aims to contemporise a poetic depiction of a landscape imbued with a rich literary heritage. My creative writing method uses walking, observation and interdisciplinary scientific research. The perception of the Lake District as a static, picturesque landscape is rejuvenated by poetry which moves through a dynamic, interconnected and ever-changing ecosystem. By 'narratives' I refer to the stories of the landscape; from often-overlooked species, such as lichens and fungi, to underrepresented working-class histories. My poetic nature-narrative emerges from these stories to create an immersive, fragmentary and sensory experience of the ecosystem. I experiment with poetic form, using blank space and shape to translate the acoustics of the ecosystem into poetry. This experimentation combines with the lack of a human narrator to create poetry which immerses the reader in my exploratory, observational walks. Background research identifies walking as a territorial orbit facilitated by a fixed, central home in the dominant Cumbrian canon; as illuminated by close readings of William Wordsworth, Norman Nicholson and Alfred Wainwright. I engage with, and progress, the scholarship of Karl Kroeber, Jonathan Bate and Timothy Morton.

The re-admittance of marginalised Cumbrian writers and poets diversifies the region's poetic interaction with place and acknowledges the foundations of my creative practice. I study and explore the works of Susanna Blamire, Dorothy Wordsworth and the scientific studies of Beatrix Potter. Their engagement with the Cumbrian landscape is united by a study of minutiae informed by physical, creative and scientific exploration of the land. The contemporary Cumbrian inheritors are Autumn Richardson and Richard Skelton, Harriet Fraser and Rob Fraser and Nathan Walker. This study of alternative Cumbrian poetics establishes a creative precedent for my own immersive poetry, which explores this dynamic ecosystem through walking, observation and ecological study.

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INTRODUCTION

This Masters by Research is a creative-critical poetry thesis informed by a tradition of writers, mostly women, who respond to landscape, walking and environmental issues. Both the creative and critical outputs of the thesis illuminate the lesser-known aspects of the land and its literature. The poetry explores the themes of symbiosis and parasitism within a Cumbrian habitat, uncovering the connections between the microscopic and visible species of an ecosystem. The ancient woodland wetland habitat of White Moss Common is the setting for my poetry collection, *Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight,* generated by meandering weekly walks in this area of common land. The picturesque perception of the Lake District as an unchanging, heritage landscape is replaced by a dynamic, interconnected ecosystem which is both intricate and fragile. Theoretical research into the mainstream Cumbrian poetics of place examines the role of walking and movement in the dominant historical poets, such as William Wordsworth and Norman Nicholson. The foundation for my creative writing is established with a study of historic, lesser-known Cumbrian poets whose work is united by an engagement with place generated through walking, observational study and a focus on the minutiae of the natural world. These poets range from Dorothy Wordsworth whom until recently was overshadowed by her brother's reputation, to the underappreciated Romantic poet Susanna Blamire. The timeline continues with contemporary experimental poets who have yet to achieve canonical status. This theoretical foundation anticipates the role of my contemporary poetic practice in revising interaction with this iconic land. There is a concurrent readmittance of marginalised literary contributions together with less celebrated species which ultimately diversifies poetic representation of this Cumbrian ecosystem.

White Moss Common is a liminal place situated between the lakes of Rydal and Grasmere. White Moss is located at the centre of "Wordsworthshire"; a term used by the Wordsworth Trust (based in Grasmere) to describe the valley synonymous with Cumbria's rich literary heritage. Walking, observing and writing within the landscape framed my resultant poetry in the "off-season" between autumn and spring. The structure subverts the expectations of the seasons; seen conventionally as a period of dormancy, winter is depicted as an active period of regeneration. Setting the poetry during the "off-season" of a much-visited landscape attributes recognition to a lesser-known time period and the species which

populate it. White Moss Common is a place in a continual state of flux, as the River Rothay shapes and re-shapes the common with the overflowing and retraction of its waters. This land resists containment in a county defined by a complex matrix of boundaries: the three ancient counties of Cumberland, Westmorland and North Lancashire became the united county of Cumbria in 1974 at the centre of which lies the Lake District National Park. In this thesis the differential use of the names Cumbria and Lake District is purposeful. The Lake District is used when addressing the landscape as an imaginative, cultural construction informed by the rich and diverse writings it has inspired. The role of the Lakes as a distinctive region is historically influenced by William Wordsworth's delineation of 'the district [as] a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy' ("Topographical Description" 681). The idea of the Lakes as a separate district anticipates the creation of the National Park in 1951. In this way, the Lake District refers to an isolated, cultural and poetic region reinforced by its role as a protected, geo-political space. This distinction is further sustained by the presence of tourism industries. Within this thesis, the references to Cumbria and Cumbrian poetics attempts to unify historic and contemporary narratives of the county both inside and outside the National Park boundary. As a contemporary poet my motivation is to deconstruct the image of the Lake District as an unchanging heritage landscape, by creating poetry which explores the interconnected and diverse species of a single ecosystem.

My poetry explores the themes of symbiosis and parasitism to uncover the lesser-known narratives of the natural world. By 'narratives' I am referring to the minute life stories of often overlooked organisms, like lichens and fungi, as well as White Moss Common's frequently untold histories of industry and working-class lives. These non-textual stories inform my poetic narrative, although these are often open-ended, fragmentary and incomplete. They are not as structured as the narrative forms usually associated with prose, my poetic nature-narratives are shaped by ecological interconnection and the changes in the landscape from autumn to spring. Symbiosis is defined as the:

> Association of two different organisms (usually two plants, or an animal and a plant) which live attached to each other, or one as a tenant of the other, and contribute to each other's support. Also more widely, any intimate association of two or more different organisms, whether mutually beneficial or not. ("Symbiosis. n" [Oxford English Dictionary])

The complexity of symbiosis is further expanded in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* definition which acknowledges the inclusion of parasitism within the remit of this process of attachment ("Symbiosis: Biology"). This theme provides the scope to explore the relationships between microscopic and visible organisms, depicting a habitat of delicate and complex connections illuminates the landscape's fragility. Metaphorically, symbiosis informs my poetic exploration of time within this historic landscape; remains of an underacknowledged industrial history exist as part of this diverse and ever-changing ecosystem. At White Moss Common, the land's resources have been exploited in both past and present; from the quarrying of slate to the tread of mass tourism. Hence, parasitism becomes a metaphor for the human relationship with the land: 'one that obtains nutrients at the expense of the host organism, which it may directly or indirectly harm' ("Parasite. n"). These 'nutrients' are both literal and metaphorical: the physical extraction of raw materials during the Industrial Revolution and the rich literary culture the Lake District inspires. The resultant poetry collection aims to contemporise a poetic exploration of a Cumbrian habitat, using the theme of symbiosis to re-situate humans as part of, rather than rulers of, an interconnected ecosystem.

My thematic focus, creative practice and interdisciplinary research resonates with contemporary exponents of ecocriticism. In *The Ecological Thought* Timothy Morton explores the concept of interconnection:

> Ecology shows us that all beings are connected. *The ecological thought* is the thinking of interconnectedness. The ecological thought is a thought about ecology, but it's also a thinking that is ecological. Thinking the ecological thought is part of an ecological project. The ecological thought doesn't just occur "in the mind". It's a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings – animal, vegetable, or mineral. (7)

This interweaving of the human and non-human, organic and inorganic matter resonates with my own creative and critical work: *Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight* is underpinned by a literal and metaphorical exploration of symbiosis. The ecosystem of White Moss Common is a web of microscopic and visible life, symbionts and parasites, industrial past and literary heritage.

The methodological approach is based on walking and writing within a specified landscape. Weekly walks of White Moss Common facilitate the observational writing which is integral

to my poetic writing process; my notebook is a collage of the sounds, sights, textures and experiences encountered during these walks. The direction of each walk unfolded with the process of observation as opposed to a predetermined route. The definition of meandering encapsulates my approach to walking and writing within landscape: 'to wander aimlessly; to follow a circuitous course' ("Meander. v"). This approach applies Harriet Tarlo and Judith Tucker's collaborative practice of 'writing away from the self and into the field' (110) by replacing goal-orientation with slow, unplanned wanders through White Moss. These walks differed in route, length and duration in order that the resultant poetry explores the diversity of this interconnected ecosystem. My notetaking is accumulative, the poetic insight is gradually gathered by these immersive experiences in the natural world. The generation of primary poetic material at the location fulfils the underlying concept; the immediacy of the walking-writing process enlivens this Cumbrian habitat.

My creative-writing practice has also been informed by ecological research. The precedent for a fieldwork approach was established by nature poets Alice Oswald and David Morley. Oswald identifies a synergy between the process of a naturalist and a poet, as the former is 'out since dawn/ dripping into her notebook' (*Dart* 5) in the opening of her long river poem, *Dart.* Morley cites the influence of his earlier work 'as a field ecologist, probing the magic of invisible kingdoms' as 'language drawn from ecology' (Morley) directly informs his writing process. This thesis assimilates this fieldwork precedent with the aforementioned walking-writing approach to create poetry which explores the lesser-known narratives of the land. Conducting research with Plantlife's Lake District initiative, Looking Out for the Small Things (LOST), provided specialist insight into the overlooked Atlantic woodland species, lichens and bryophytes. As a result, I further developed my observations by using a hand lens to magnify these symbiotic species. This research informed a sequence of poems within the collection, 'Lichens: Magnified'. The inclusion of collaborative research 'destabilises the single sovereign speaker in poetry' (Tarlo, "Women Ecopoetics" 18) by replacing Romanticism's lyric 'I' with an accumulation of different specialisms. The amalgam of insights reflects the interconnected web of the ecosystem, the interdisciplinary research transports symbiosis from theme to practice.

The critical commentary analyses predecessor poets, the successes and challenges of the writing process and the resultant poems. I evaluate the impact of the walking methodology

on the experimental use of shape, space and form to depict a three-dimensional ecosystem. The poetry collection will be assessed for its continuation and expansion of the alternative Cumbrian poetics identified in my critical and theoretical reading. The thesis concludes with a reflection on my poetic development, encompassing my performance at poetry readings, publication opportunities and my collaborative public engagement event with Plantlife.

Walking is an integral element of my poetic writing practice. It is the method for generating an immersive experience of place in which the intricacies of this diverse ecosystem are observed. My background research identifies the role of walking in both the mainstream and marginalised poets of Cumbria's past. As a contemporary practitioner, it is crucial to explore the poetries which have created the literary and cultural landscape of the Lake District. The mainstream narrative begins with canonical poet William Wordsworth and is inherited by modern Cumbrian poet, Norman Nicholson. Finally, the well-known and popular walking guides of Alfred Wainwright contribute to this territorial interaction with the Cumbrian landscape. This foundational research identifies this timeline of writers engaging with the land: from Wordsworth's canonical pedestal to Wainwright's famous and intricate documentation of the fells. The parity between these two writers is further solidified by their continuing legacy in contemporary literature. The Wainwright Prize is seminal in identifying impactful contemporary nature writing whilst the Wordsworth Trust's renowned poetry residencies offer important recognition to emerging poets. These prominent writers define the landscape writing most commonly associated with the Lake District, both in the endurance of their published works and their subsequent role in contemporary tourism. Within the dominant historical Cumbrian canon walking is an assertion of territory, as examined via the theoretical analysis of Karl Kroeber, Jonathan Bate and David Cooper. Further exploration of the poetry of Wordsworth and Nicholson reveals the role of centrism in their experience of landscape; both poets move in repetitive orbits around the fixed, central nexus of home. The housing of the national archives of major Romantic authors at the Wordsworth Trust's Jerwood Centre (located at the site of Dove Cottage) indicates the role of heritage tourism in fixing Wordsworth's exploration of the natural world to a centred, idyllic home. This domesticated experience of place is addressed in this analysis of the dominant Cumbrian canon and challenged within my own contemporary poetry. Exploration of Cumbria's mainstream poetic discourse establishes a

foundation from which to explore the county's alternative poetics of place in both overlooked historical literatures and experimental contemporary poetry.

The exploration of lesser-known poetic narratives and stories of the minute lives of organisms underpins the creative and theoretical research; the overlooked species of the ecosystem are explored in conjunction with the marginalised literary voices of Cumbria's past. The works of Dorothy Wordsworth, Susanna Blamire and the lesser-known mycological studies of Beatrix Potter are united by their engagement with the minutiae of the natural world; their work indicates an exploration of place founded on walking, observation and scientific study. These female writers provide an alternative timeline of nature writing to the established, masculine voices which dominate the prominent Cumbrian canon. The poet as nature-conqueror is subverted, replaced with an exploratory stance which removes the human from an elevated position of absolute knowledge and control. In this way, the lineage of my own poetic approach is examined. The thesis then identifies the contemporary Cumbrian poetry which engages with this approach and evaluates the extent to which these works continue to be outliers in the rich Cumbrian poetic tradition.

As a contemporary poet directly engaging with a Cumbrian habitat, the challenge is to rejuvenate a poetics of place in a landscape so uniquely bound to its literary heritage. The legacy of the Wordsworths is unavoidable when generating work within the valley of Grasmere; hence the inclusion of the poetry and prose of both William and Dorothy Wordsworth in this thesis. Contemporary critics and poets continue to engage with their work, for example Eleanore Widger's 2017 article 'Walking Women: Embodied Perception in Romantic and Contemporary Radical Landscape Poetry'. The ongoing programme of exhibitions and lectures delivered by the Wordsworth Trust maintains the influence of these historic poets in a current experience of this landscape; one such exhibition being the 2018 "This Girl Did: Dorothy Wordsworth and Women Mountaineers". The Wordsworths poetic legacy thus endures through contemporary critical discussion and the heritage tourism industry. White Moss Common is situated in between the Wordsworths' iconic homes at Dove Cottage and Rydal Mount. This common land is underpinned by the moving currents of the River Rothay and the busy A road. My poetry re-visits "Wordsworthshire" using movement to re-energise the land from picturesque heritage landscape to dynamic, interconnected ecosystem.

FORENSIC TRACES OF FALLING SUNLIGHT

Common Land

air dwellers caught in cobwebs

a raindrop irradiates
the route, a labyrinth
of threads

a lure to walk
in the company of traces

fall
for the illusion of discovery,
let your feet detect the path

beyond gravel chunks
these green-blue beads
imposed on soil. Find
them dislodged:
grit islands where beck meets river

water moves like a root
forking a stone

become the lateral
immersed in soil
feeling the path to water
in the tunnel tailored by a worm

sense the needle pointing
North. Way making
with the scattering of leaves

rain-thick beck

beat of White Moss

gaining marsh

drives a swan-cloud

downriver

glut of water, fall of fell
spray
surfing over cornices
suggestion of stones
tension
as wave meets under-wave
clash
of white spray

green reeds lean
against the throttle
of the Rothay

autumnal percussion
amplifies the gurgle and drain,
rattling leaves ricochet

trees v water
bore into soil
        river overwhelms
slate glassels

resist

the pull

of gravity

or water?

fibres of cloud descend clog the spaces between trees, mizzling haze gusts horizontally blend edges of trunk, branch, path mulches the ground, saturated mud squelch bog emanates dank, drain rot fumes of stagnant pools filling filling filling rivers inflate and cover inflate and cover fibres of cloud descend, clog the spaces between trees, mizzling haze gusts horizontally blend edges of trunk, branch, path mulches the ground, saturated mud squelch bog emanates dank, drain rot fumes of stagnant pools filling filling filling rivers inflate and cover inflate and cover fibres of cloud descend, clog the spaces between trees mizzling haze gusts branch, path mulches ground, saturated drain rot fumes filling filling filling rivers inflate and cover fibres of cloud clog trees mizzling gusts blend saturate

Mushrooms

Fugitives of the wood un-pause
and the fruit of the second equinox ripens
emerging from crevices
whorls in tree bark
puce oysters ascend trunks like
stingrays
combs of gills pullulate
waxed medallions spilling, leak along black roots
betray the pipework of the woods

camouflaged in dying leaves

wood blewit
wood hedgehog
charcoal burner

and this
one purple amethyst

a submerged kingdom
manifests

network

radiates

part-animal, part-plant
multiplies, hyphae attach to hyphae
tentacles wind into mycelium
organ of soil, seeking substrate hair strands float

wisp in clods of earth

light as dust, fragile

brush
of a feather-weight

attach to leaf-litter,
harvest carbon nitrogen phosphorus

fungi ingest their nest,
like all occupiers: invade, appropriate.

Decay is a retrieval
an unthreading of cells:
the harvest of the underground.

Ferns

green icicles

falling

into fossils. Bracken burns outside-in

a leaf unlatches

Lichens: Magnified

A thousand times smaller

than the smallest human measure

Fungus projects filament attaches to alga

micro-architect meets photobiont

body umbrella

feeds like an animal photosynthesises

external sourcing internal generation

carbon sugar

symbiosis

coalition

I

A microscopic kingdom. The lichen-code

records past, future:

to see is to listen

II

in the knuckle of a wall

an elfin cup emerges

– brittle china petals –

a fleck of red against tessellated slate

one ***Cladonia*** **pixie-cup lichen**

green stalks uplift, encase

scarlet orbs

splayed against stones

curtaining the river, wet

Peltigera collina **floury dog lichen**

is a lead-black ruff, collaring pebbles

the blue-grey margins of its lobes

fringe baying water

III

In White Moss Woods

on a jettisoned branch

pale grey lobes float

as though underwater

Hypotrachyna laevigata **the smooth loop-lichen**

revolving the bark

anchored by rhizines minute bristles on the underside

a forensic trace of falling sunlight

Usnea subfloridana **beard lichen**

seems to levitate, orbiting the extremities of branches

anchored at the elbows of brittle twigs

aquatic sprigs buoyed by wind

smooth hazel

written with ***Graphis scripta*** **script lichen**

blotched white crust a cloud on the bark

a page of an organism fruiting in black squiggles

like hieroglyphics

Stenocybe septata non-lichenous fungus – potential outsider –

dignifies the lone stand

of veteran holly, bracing the incline

this medal of time, fractional as dust

perforates the trunk, a microscopic recognition

of age, endurance. This

squat elder grips

a foothold on the slope

distinct

from its neighbours

youthfully sprinting

to the sky

IV

rare. **Tree lung wort**

Lobaria pulmonaria

is exhaling its dark tissues

ascending the oak

breath becomes inscription

a species is re-written, re-cords itself

on the trunk: the diary of land

a revival after depletion

when low winds carried

coal fumes from the West

the churning industry

buffering the sea

the lichen re-spawns,

climbing the ancient column

alone

at the periphery

accumulates air like time

spores radiate

in the private woods

beyond the wall

V

On a section of silver birch, found next to the river path

Brown furze tinged green, sprawled
on the detached husk of the tree.
Clump of moss sharpens

reveals

a fine mesh of bronze stems
tier upon tier
of toothed leaves,
lime fringes populate
a saturated sheet of bark.
Like a reef, water fills the
space between leaf and stem –
each fine hair
crystallised by dew:

Isothecium holtii.

Its leaf catches on a scroll
sepia lobes fraying, rolling into dry crests
against new growth. Marine green sprawl of

the tail-looped lichen ***Hypotrachyna taylorensis***

an aquatic woodland
flourishes in miniature

VI

Rockface on an incline

recessed in caverns: fragile webs flutter,
the overhang contours
a hollow. Gives way
to slate, purple-shadowed
plates, scaffold
a micro-world:
emerald, lime, red, bronze
culture in clefts.
Water
– summoned from within rock –
washes glacial stone teeth,
a dribble
along the jawline
reflects
in the violet water
splicing and tumbling, metres below

a smell of wet, infused
in clods of moss, lichen, liverworts

swathes of
Polytrichum formosum **Bank haircap**
cloak the anchors of the oak
miniature bottle brush spires
colonise the bark: extrapolate the sun

an emerald blanket

softening winter, colouring the cold

below,

where root meets rock

Jubula hutchinsiae **Hutchins' holywort**

saturates in shade

a dark mass peaked with yellow

blue-green wefts frame

descending the fascia

like water

exposed slate, flat as a page blemished with tattooed patches

Mycoblastus sanguinarius **Bloody-heart lichen** a Parmelion white crust

fruiting with black convex spots:

cut

to the quick of the lichen

bleeding

Rhytidiadelphus loreus **little shaggy-moss**

stems of burnt sienna

intersect

expanding like a coiled antenna

pleating leaves

Saccogyna viticulosa **straggling pouchwort**

spills into light

out of the rock-shadow

captures the sun in its sepia leaves

untoothed, conjoined

liverwort of company

flourishes with the colony

at the cusp of the path

VII

Between white chalk fissures
inner bark blackens, becomes a ravine
sluice leaking through crevices.
A droplet ignites on the isidia –

dark-cored capsule
orange embers on stalks
protrude
from the lichen cushion.
A capsule of spores
poised

the germ of lichen, waits

in the seconds before
it germinates

VIII

The main path through Penny Rock

Woods. Parched bark defrosts
in winter sun. Orderly
trees with even spaces
accommodate
the unfettered route
to Rydal Water. Only

a beech, lodging in a hollow
    - footprint of a fallen tree –
disquiets

        a jury of oaks, waiting
for time   and lichens.
Circling seasons: canopy to ground
leaf, acorn, root.
        Saplings shoot in the spaces
muscling in, disrupting formation
        the juvenile wood summons a generation

accruing skins on fossil skeletons

            born to be ancient

fungus meets algae
kernel of a forest

lichen/tree
fragile/absolute

Sediments

Architectural trees frame
the skeletal canopy.

Fell water fills leaf wells
in itself and of itself
a trickle down the woodland slope
revives summer-dusted stones:
a waterfall in a hollow.

Sparrow answers
its echo, tethered

faecal sacks
in wishbones, shoved in crooks
black plastic tied to branches:
piles and piles, of defecated parcels
dumped
in indivisible clumps

tree to tree
this network of polymers

corrugated becks run dry
resist
plastic channels.

White Moss compresses
secretions become sediment

Millenia from now:

plastic fossils in a silent forest

Hibernate

The recall to ground begins

with a leaf, sugar returns to the trunk
ice crystal expands
in the last vein
crack, thaw dislocates

trees fold inwards
leaving coat hangers
and barbed wire brambles.

The setting sun
gathers leaves in the clouds.

Frost

Ice captures the elemental
liquid becoming tangible
a shape-shifter called water,
solidifies

crust of frost sharpens the world:
a lobe of lichen, a leaf of moss,
the drupelet of a blackberry.
Ice gloves
suspend the stem
in a globe
of imperfect smoothness.

Sun hits the steel river
vapours illuminate
as reels, lines of moisture
erupt into haze

this hyper-resolution is fleeting,
the piercing of winter-sun
announces the thaw.

Rydal Caves. Shafts. Silence

an absence, just

this clam-crater

refracting distant traffic

Canada geese, wings

reverberate

a morning of echoes, in stone and feather

Shale mound: displaced innards of the fell. Uncertain tread on uncertain ground. Imitation crag roofed with grasses. Herdwick grazes, indiscriminately. Winter exposes

Caves or *Quarry?*

Memorial plaque projects into the clouds

Orange algae c rust

microbes reclaim rock

upwards

a second cave, smaller

holds waveless water

dark and reflectionless

here, behind the firs

these aborted entrances

to the fell’s interior

rain resuscitates the wetland, floods
unpeople the common. Arachnid trees,
held hostage in the marsh
dormant water
retained by grass, ruction of

cormorant, with a gullet-full of fish
flies the water line towards Grasmere
the lake of long grass
startles the ducks refugees in shallows under branches

clatter of arterial beck, vascular current
throttled between slate, mini-explosions
of spray, through gaps in stone
break of brambles
after-shocks of a night-storm
cascading falls over the wall
blocking the road
from the common below
wind darns waves
bloodlines of the river
entrench
haemorrhage the banks

scallops of water subsume
the grassland
making lime-green puddles
quake in the breeze

a picnic bench lists fading like a shipwreck

the path retracts

as dumbfounded walkers join their dogs

at the edges, howling for entry

bloating water slows

– as quiet as drowning –

a gradual overwhelming

of space

white flash

dipper

on scree

dunks

camouflaged

spotted above waves

exposed

by volts of water hitting rock

igniting in spray

plucks pupae:

embryonic mayflies.

Invisible bird whistles

a low-lulling rhyme

Dipper blends

notes falling

into the swathe of

moving water

Stonehenges

I

Future grafted to past:

new bridge harnessed on

a skeleton. Stone steps lie in its

shade, untrodden.

Slate pillars grow from water

iron rivets oxidise

Rothay evolves into rock

river-spit smacks

underside, now

seamless

the new bridge flatlines

resists the swell, uncompromised

by flood.

II

gates erased

slats hacked from sawn off

hinges

confusion gatelessness intrusion

alders anchor in water

planks wash up downriver

a week later, a sign: VANDALISM IS A CRIME

PLAIN CLOTHES POLICE OPERATE IN THIS AREA

III

The fourth wall of the Bothy

melts into grass, stones scatter like loose change

its tenant is juvenile

a young hazel alight with catkins

roofless – it lets the sun in

ferns are like flames

long grass licks interior walls

blue plastic mesh, knotted into branches

the VANDALISM warning

lies torn at the perimeter

the abandoned finds a resident

IV

Suspended in marsh, deep in trees

the tomb-stone gatepost

lowers like a shadow

V

The whereabouts of the Cascade Hotel

a. Stone chunk steps, promise a destination
b. uneven, jarring deep to shallow
e. like the hull of a ship, a stone cornice
i. land, in a concave impression

d. within sight of the cascade, water tapping from the quarry from which it takes its name
h. Bramble and scrub-

c. steep gradient
j. bowled

f. emerging from the parameter of the road-wall, that

k. a bench bears

g. incises the common.
l. an inscription

m. no further clues or
n. proof

VI

Navigators

> A young woman begged at the door – she had come from Manchester on Sunday morn with two shillings & a slip of paper which she supposed a Bank note – it was a cheat. She had buried her husband & three children within a year & a half – All in one grave – burying very dear – paupers all put in one place – 20 shillings paid for as much ground as will bury a man
>
> Dorothy Wordsworth

The people who catch the ear are

walking, in the white space of her journal, orbiting

margins

from Cockermouth, Coniston, Keswick, Manchester

they trudge the line of the road

some with an ass, others alone. Followed

in time, by

Lang, Shaw, Massey, Hyne, Barn, Huddleston, Donelly, Barums, Davies, Robert, Roberts, Watt, Watkins, King, McNeal and Brown

no trace found

of the workers' camp:

the quarry cascades on a car park,

its water kettled by wires

the people of the common: charcoal burners,

manager, blacksmith, clerk, miner, miner, labourer, miner, miner, storekeeper, hut keeper, labourer, blacksmith, labourer, labourer, labourer, engine fitter

silent after dynamite, erased

by trees that people the common

their *Rock of Names*

written deep in the vein,

growling with water

lured by gravity

through the submerged aqueduct

under our feet

Jetsam

Rothay umbilical's Grasmere to Rydal, carries

fell-blood into rushes. Flotsam

beaches as the river widens slows releases

fragments:

a cormorant's wing tapered to bone

a boulder, that seems to pulse with waves

lolling rocking a stone's throw

from the shore-path. This rock, though,

bloats and breathes

expands with brush re-brush of river-current

a red mark pixelates on its side

unspooling

strands of fleece

float detached and weightless

away from the haze and scramble of flies

the Herdwick

silently unstitches:

fleece

skin

bone

Via a tributary path

Penny Rock

lowers

into a hollow

sculpt of echo-fill

leafless canopy roofed by calls
ticticticticțic

whistlelowwhistle

over Nab Scar

distant stammerstammerstammer

carpcarpcarp geese carve far-off water

beech-root braids rock insulates with liquorice entrails

swallow

under thick moss, stumps

morph into rock

sun rising out of Loughrigg skims this basin

silhouettes the birches, sprinting to skylines

one lies – like a pole of scaffolding – uprooted

uncolonised

here, half-light is mauve

archive leaves

are purpling back to slate

bryophytes reclaim

lichen prefers the fell, fallen

shreds, tears of moss pepper the floor

dropped in the flight

of nest builders

Notes on Architects

Gold lambs' tails on hazel break the pause

anticipate the Equinox

dipper flies, a white spark over Rothay
lands at the curve, pilfers
a swatch of moss, returns
up-river. North

a pair of grey wagtails, dart
yellow switch of flight, hurdle
over wire fence, descend
onto chains of mole-prints
ferret that dark, rich earth
parcelled with worms

anonymous, silhouettes of soil
tossed to the surface
delivered
displaced from tunnels
their bodies sculpt
below

shreds of utterings
traversing the axis
of the ground

Seiche

The river is giving way to trees
the wetland – that contested ground –
recoils to shallows
water becomes an under-drum

sprawling over river-rock,

lolling back to banks

pausing its power with the coming of the sun

the woodland seiche re-balances

season of recession revelation
begins

Equinox

I

strokes of flesh-thick green wild garlic cover root and mulch hold white starbursts
gestating in pods sponge-pad primrose leaf light-yellow flower narcissus take hold of a root
(mutter of bluebells) lime green needles on waist-high trees between holly and birches
mushrooms bracket bark cryptic attachment paddles of leaves wild garlic
flesh-thick green, plasters root and mulch

deep in stone-wall, crevices are key-holes: germinating in the dark
a mollusc hatches, births through clefts of stone, gelatine bodies shimmy over moss

eyes radiate on threads

feel the path to light

II

green climbs the hill like flames

flowers ignite on the woodland floor, miss the mo

ment green buds break twigs

return, find a goat willow

constellated with yellow globes, colonies of

sorrel cover the gravel, blurr

ing pathways. Canopy largely

leafless still, sap-light

uplights from the ground as

evening sun draws shadows

III

Catkin of the Goat Willow

circulating wind

deployed it here – on the grit of the route –

others lie like tissue:

collateral of feet.

This one catkin, is

gold against grey

defiantly round

odds against growth,

statistically unlikely to take

a pod with a feather-pelt

and combs of dust-yellow pollen

inception is small

Minutiae

Queens find fortresses
scour the grass, another
darts from a hole
in the mossed slate wall
of the path which cliffs the Rothay

perforations
into caverns: the building of the hive,
a feudalism

deep in slate

arboreal time

accretes in lignin

a harnessing of sun

makes the year

only a second

whilst the epoch of insect
scatters like the dust-
light of mayflies, populating
the space between Rothay and sky
momentary lifetimes
evaporate
with wings

Bluebells ignite like gaslights,

flame-flowers pre-empt

bracken

a coalition

of ancient and exile

meets on the slopes of Loughrigg

colour the common blue

against auburn, bracken

die-back feeds the new

to hold the dormant seeds, bracken

becomes a canopy

incubates the bluebell

released from woodland

Evening sun

X-Rays the bracken

spinal stems unfurl

like fins upswell of a sea

illuminate the copper

of a spider's thread

that light-touch trapeze

between leaves

a glow worm suspended on a strand as though

floating in air

swim of fireflies, electrified

a frenzied orbit in the last of the daytime

all these flames ignite remnants of fire

on the flame-tipped wings

of a moth

leaving

gauge the exit

whilst sap-fuel fires the canopy

meadows anticipate

the throttle of feet

closing the common with

that fragile ozone: red clover buttercups oxeye daises

cover shield camouflage, the paths

sinking in ferns

make shadows with skin weightless as a leaf

lose the wagtail

somewhere between water and gravel

fly to the fringes where the common blurs

tangle of trees, bramble, reeds

low-lying spindle, knots

lose sight somewhere between water and gravel

leave some ways untrodden

wait, for winter

let the fossils incubate

in seeds

BACKGROUND: ORBITING TERRITORIES

> Ecopoetics asks in what respects a poem may be a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling-place – the prefix eco- is derived from Greek *oikos,* 'the home or place of dwelling'. (Bate, *Song* 75)
>
> it could be that *poiesis* in the sense of verse-making is language's most direct path of return to the *oikos,* the place of dwelling, because metre itself – a quiet but persistent music, a recurring cycle, a heartbeat – is an answering to nature's own rhythms, an echoing of the song of the earth itself. (Bate, *Song* 76)

There are few places so indelibly connected to a literary past; in which landscape has come to be defined by the poetic ideas of a group of writers. William Wordsworth and the Lake Poets begin a tradition of writing centred on the relationship between "man" and the natural world. Seminal ecocritic Jonathan Bate defines 'Romanticism and its afterlife … as the exploration of the relationship between external environment and ecology of mind' (Bate, *Song* 252). The suggestion of the mind as an ecological habitat frames the external, physical world with human concepts and constructions. It is an establishment of a territory. This chapter explores the role of territory and centrism in the dominant canon of Cumbrian landscape writing focusing on the two leading poetic contributors, William Wordsworth and Norman Nicholson. Building on the theories of Karl Kroeber, Jonathan Bate and David Cooper I analyse the role of movement within this dominant Cumbrian narrative as a reinforcement of territory. This background research identifies the prominent masculine voices creating a poetics of place which orbits a fixed, central nexus: home. However, this thesis reveals that such territorial concepts of dwelling by male theorists are not only restrictive to women, but highly human-centred. The closing of the chapter focuses on the gendered implications of an experience of place facilitated by home. The restrictive reality of Bate's concept of dwelling is unearthed via Harriet Tarlo's contemporary meditations on place, walking and women.

A connection between walking, movement and writing underlies the contributors to the dominant canon of Cumbrian writing. Karl Kroeber's paper, 'Home at Grasmere: Ecological Holiness', explores the role of walking in Wordsworth's interaction with the landscape surrounding his home:

> "Home" for Wordsworth is a limited territory, adopted deliberately as a self-sufficing physical environment. He is indifferent to rootedness. He does not feel tied to an owned piece of property. The attractiveness of Grasmere to him is that it provides

territory in which to roam, in which he can actively realize that which is most vital in his being. (134)

Kroeber's criticism pre-dates Bate and separates the concept of territory from fixedness, addressing the role of movement in Wordsworth's life and creative process. In *Wanderlust,* contemporary critic and feminist Rebecca Solnit examines Wordsworth's formative and radical walking experiences. In his youth, Wordsworth's walking tour across France towards the Alps saw the poet 'joining the flood of radicals converging on Paris' (Solnit 107). This confluence anticipates the convergence of Dorothy and William on Grasmere in 1799. Judith W Page observes that 'William's wandering, his flight from the personal and political turmoil he experienced in revolutionary France, coincided with Dorothy's desperate desire for a home' ("Gender Domesticity" 127). Grasmere becomes a stable territory, the security of this contained valley negates the uncertainty and dangers of his 'homelessness, wandering, and alienation' (Page, "Gender Domesticity" 133) in revolutionary France. For Wordsworth place functions as a focal point, a grounded centre for his physical and poetic wanderings. This centrist approach is re-imagined in my own poetic practice, walking becomes a method of observing lesser-known species as opposed to an affirmation of personal territories. Wordsworth's centrism is evident in the long poem, *Home at Grasmere,* in which he demonstrates the parity between the pair of swans who settle 'Conspicuous at the centre of the Lake, / Their safe retreat' (59) with himself and Dorothy. The central role of the valley is reinforced in the following extracts:

From high to low, from low to high, yet still
Within the bound of this huge *Concave*; here
Must be his Home, this Valley be his World. (41, my emphasis)

A termination and a last retreat,
A *Centre*, come from wheresoe'er you will,
A *Whole* without dependence or defect,
Made for itself and happy in itself,
Perfect Contentment, *Unity* Entire. (49, my emphasis)

This encircling image represents containment as security, boundedness as freedom. Arguably, Wordsworth's depiction of Grasmere is feminised by the enwombing connotations of this protective enclosure. I will return to the tension between gender, centrism and movement later in the chapter. Kroeber's reference to Wordsworth's limited territory is ambiguous, it can be interpreted as a reference to the imagery of boundedness

created in Wordsworth's imagining of a contained, enclosed vale. Alternatively, the limitation is a recognition of the poet's mortality and incomplete ownership. Kroeber refers to Wordsworth as not being 'tied to an owned piece of property' (134), alluding to the multiple moves the family made within Grasmere: Dove Cottage, Allan Bank, the Rectory and finally, Rydal Mount. Wordsworth's position as a tenant destabilises any conclusion that he was rooted to an individual property within Grasmere; throughout his life the physical home moves within the small valley. The subsequent image of fixedness is arguably a result of the dominant heritage tourism industry; the role of Dove Cottage as the 'home' of the Wordsworth Trust often attaches Wordsworth's Cumbrian poetry to this singular location. In actuality, it is the family's final home at Rydal Mount which becomes the 'domestic anchor' (Page, "Gender Domesticity" 133). Wordsworth resides in this larger, more expansive property from 1813 until his death in 1850. The successive shorter tenancies are followed by this thirty-seven-year residency, an indication that rootedness increases throughout Wordsworth's life. The radical wandering poet of revolutionary France becomes the stately Poet Laureate, fixed in a domestic life of relative affluence and comfort. The formation of the poet's territory indicates a movement in place which orbits the nexus of home.

The centrism displayed in *Home at Grasmere* and the role of place as territory is reinforced in the poet's prose piece, *Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes in the North of England.* In this topographical exploration of the county, the mountains of Cumbria unfurl from the highest peak, Scafell Pike:

> let us suppose our station to be a cloud hanging midway between these two mountains, at not more than half a mile's distance from the summit of each, and not many yards above their highest elevation; we shall then see stretched at our feet a number of valleys, not fewer than nine, diverging from the point, on which we are supposed to stand, like spokes from the nave of a wheel. (Wordsworth, "Topographical Description" 655)

The wheel imagery epitomises the role of movement in Wordsworth's creative relationship with landscape; it is an orbital movement, a rotation around a central point. In his article, "The Poetics of Place and Space: Wordsworth, Norman Nicholson and the Lake District", cultural geographer David Cooper explores the presence of centrism in Wordsworth's poetic and prose writing: 'Wordsworth's configuration of space remains

dominated by the overpowering idea of the centre … which, concurrently, marginalises those sites which lie at its periphery, on the rim of the wheel' (813). This famous image of the wheel is later readdressed in the walking guides of Alfred Wainwright. In his *Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells* the fell-walker and writer embarked on a writing and walking challenge which documented ascents of dominant peaks across the county through seven volumes. In his description of Scafell Pike, Wainwright addresses the wheel imagery: 'It does not stand at the head of any valley, but between valleys; it is not the hub of a wheel from which watercourses radiate; it is one of the spokes' (ch.25). It can therefore be argued that Wainwright challenges Wordsworth's suggestion of a single, geographical centre-point of the Lakes. However, by identifying Scafell Pike as 'one of the spokes' he does not discard the concept entirely. Furthermore, Wainwright's reference to the 'magnificent territory for the fellwalker' (Introduction) echoes the connection between walking and territory displayed in Wordsworth. This continuity between two prominent Cumbrian figures establishes the role of territory in the relationship between writer and place in the county's literature. The legacy of Wainwright's walking guides encapsulates the centrism and elevation of Wordsworth's poetic identity in *Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes* and *Home at Grasmere*; the fells explored in Wainwright's work are colloquially known as "the Wainwrights". The tone of possession connects Kroeber's examination of Wordsworth as territorial to a modern, popular Lakeland writer. The sustained establishment of a territory, based on an orbital movement around a fixed central point, defines this as a key depiction of the human relationship with this landscape. I will later explore the relevance of White Moss Common as a setting for my contemporary poetry; the elevated stasis of the mountain is replaced by the lower-level woodland wetland in continual flux. The prominence of this territorial experience of place has the potential to influence contemporary attitudes towards the Lake District. Wordsworth and Wainwright are integral to the heritage and adventure tourism industries which have a significant impact on the management of this protected land. It is a relationship established on a power balance: walker and writer dominate a demarked natural world.

The concept of place functioning as territory is sustained by another well-known poet in the dominant literature, Norman Nicholson. Nicholson lived and wrote from his birthplace and lifelong home in Millom, western Cumbria. Cooper examines Nicholson's revision of the

boundaries of the Lake District created in the prose and poetry of William Wordsworth. Nicholson responds to his Romantic predecessor by revisiting the setting of Wordsworth's final collection in the poem, 'To the River Duddon'. Nicholson establishes a complicity between the speaker and the river:

> Watching the wagtails. Wordsworth wrote:
> 'Remote from every taint of sordid industry'.
> *But you and I know better, Duddon lass.*
> For I, who've lived for nearly thirty years
> Upon your shore, have seen the slagbanks slant
> Like screes sheer into the sand, and seen the tide
> Purple with ore back up the muddy gullies
> And wiped the sinter dust from the farmyard damsons.
> A hundred years of flood and rain and wind
> Have washed your rocks clear of his words again
>
> (*Collected Poems* 25, my emphasis).

The intimacy of Nicholson's address combines with his industrial images of 'slagbanks', 'ore', 'scree' and 'sinter' in a deconstruction of Wordsworth's elevated observations. The acknowledgement of Cumbria's mining heritage re-adjusts the poetic exploration of the county; Nicholson moves from a lofty, philosophical plane to a grounded, earthy one. These class undertones, as highlighted, embed Nicholson in his surroundings and implicitly promote the validity of his poetic narrative of place. Cooper describes Nicholson's poetry as a 'spatial remodelling, built on telluric unity rather than surface topography, [which] collapses the post-Romantic hierarchization of regional space' (816). Cooper's essay examines Nicholson's redress of the marginalisation created by Wordsworth's wheel imagery; which expelled his own hometown outside of the Lake District boundary. The limitation of this reappraisal lies in the continued reliance on images of boundaries, Cooper concludes that 'his own reconfiguration continues to draw upon concepts of boundary and boundedness … he remains preoccupied with the ideas of identity and belonging made available by a geographically defined sense of region' (816-817). In this way, Nicholson maintains the exploration of place as territory albeit from a different area of Cumbria; a bucolic Grasmere is replaced by industrial and post-industrial Millom. The Wordsworth family home and unit, although in changing material locations, is the centre-point of Wordsworth's writing about the Cumbrian landscape. The elemental, earthy verse of Nicholson transforms this centre-point into the very rock on which his home, work and

subsequent identity is founded; the 'Thirty thousand feet of solid Cumberland' (Nicholson, *Collected Poems* 26). Downwards motion is a recurrent image, in 'Beck' the poet describes the movement of water from upland mountain springs to the lakes of the valley floor. However, water is not the only element in motion; Nicholson imagines the microscopic movement of the fell into the valley as the beck carries small stones down from the summit. In this way, gravity is the pivotal movement of Nicholson's verse. Wordsworth's repetitive walks of Grasmere and the surrounding fells are replaced by a movement of invisible, elemental force:

> Enters the endless
> *Chain* of water,
> The *pull* of earth's centre –
> An *irresistible* momentum,
> *Never* to be reversed,
> Never to be halted,
> Till the tallest fell
> Runs level with the lowland,
> And scree lies flat as shingle,
> And every valley is exalted,
> Every mountain and hill
> Flows slow. (Nicholson, *Collected Poems* 320, my emphasis)

The implicit presence of restriction is evident in the lexis of restraint as the tone of inevitability limits the freedom of movement within the poem. The unavoidable gravitational pull to the earth's core anchors even the highest peaks to the ground. In this way, Nicholson's verse reimagines but ultimately continues the centrist relation to the land evident in Wordsworth; both poets orbit a fixed central point.

The orbiting of territory in both Nicholson and Wordsworth arguably creates an experience of place based on a 'dialectic of inside and outside space' (Cooper: 817). Cooper argues the bounded exploration of Cumbria is originated by Wordsworth and inherited by Nicholson. In the introduction to Nicholson's *Collected Poems* Neil Curry observes that 'Nicholson himself has his feet on the ground. He lives there. He knows the place at first hand. He knows the local history' (xvii – xviii). The reiteration of knowledge implies that residency is integral to Nicholson's poetic validity; his poetic authenticity seemingly derived from his identity as a local. The image of the poet with his 'feet on the ground' exemplifies the gravitational anchoring to the earth's centre. The alignment of grounding and centrism with knowledge shows the parity between movement and landscape in Nicholson's poetry with Kroeber's

theory of territorialism in Wordsworth. The attachment of both poets to demarked creative and personal territories depicts an experience of the natural world within a limited sphere. These limited and bounded spheres combine with the singular perspective of the lyric 'I' to create an experience of place, which prioritises the poet's designated territory and imposes anthropocentrism on the land. Later, I will explore how my own work challenges this assertion of authenticity and authority through collaboration. The singular authority of the lyric 'I' is replaced by interdisciplinary research with an ecological organisation. These multiple perspectives acknowledge the limitations of my own knowledge, making my poetry a shared exploration of place as opposed to an isolated territory.

There is also evidence that territorial space founded on local knowledge continues to be significant in asserting poetic authenticity within a contemporary Cumbrian context. *This Place I Know: A New Anthology of Cumbrian Poetry,* published in October 2018, is the first attempt at anthologising the region's contemporary poetics in twenty-seven years (William Scammell's *The New Lake Poets* was published in 1991). The titular lyric 'I' is indicative of a solipsistic experience of the land, in which the natural world is constructed within the bounds of the poet's awareness and experience. Arguably, it is an anthropocentric experience of the natural world as elucidated by Jonathan Bate 'land-scape means land as shaped, as arranged, by a viewer. The point of view is that of the observer, not the land itself' (*Song* 132). The declaration of knowledge defines the region as a setting for a communion with nature based on personal emotion and experience. Consequently, this recent anthology continues the territorial experience of place predicated by the dominant Cumbrian canon; it is a collection of personal, emotive territories. The implication of this approach is sustaining the poet, and thus the human, as the authority over the land. The attachment of local knowledge to an authentic poetic experience reinforces the centrism of the dominant Cumbrian literatures. The insider/outsider dichotomy is particularly pertinent in the context of the Lake District, as explored by David Cooper in the work of Wordsworth and Nicholson. The assertion of validity based on insider status serves to alienate those placed at the geographical and literary margins. This is problematic in the implicit suggestion that only those fixed and rooted to the land have an authentic insight. This contains poetry within a limited sphere, movement is negatively associated with tourism, and by extension, incomplete awareness. The insider-ship of Nicholson and Wordsworth's poetry creates a

centred experience of place. Movement in the works of these two poets is an orbit of the territory of home. My own contemporary practices challenge this bounded and territorial poetics, using walking and movement to observe the stories of the small organisms of White Moss Common. The recurrence of migratory species, such as Canada geese, symbolises the validity of an experience of place based on movement; poetic attention and authenticity is attributed to those species, and by extension, people who experience many different 'homes'.

Home functions as a place of security and solidity in the dominant Cumbrian canon's exploration of landscape through movement. Jonathan Bate's integral ecocritical text *The Song of the Earth*, defines 'Romanticism as an 'ecopoetic', a *poiesis* (Greek 'making') of the *oikos* (Greek 'home' or 'dwelling-place')' (245). This definition is reinforced by Jonathan Skinner, who describes ecopoetics as 'a house making' (7). The concept of dwelling, which Bate unites with Romanticism and ecopoetry, is an intrinsically gendered image with domestic connotations. The context of Wordsworth's work differs significantly to that of contemporary poetry in relation to the role of women in society. Bate's focus on the Romantics applies their standards of domesticity to the current day. On the other hand, poet Harriet Tarlo writes within a context of greater physical and social freedom for women: greater mobility (cars, planes) and opportunities for education and employment. Tarlo highlights the male-centrism of Bate and Skinner's early ecocriticism in her article, "Women and Ecopoetics: an introduction in context":

> the home-making analogy is still uncomfortably domestic in its connotations, suggesting the human's residence on earth as the centre of the universe. By metaphoric extension, the human ecopoetical product (poem or critical work) is also seen as the all-encompassing centre. (5)

Tarlo thus connects a centrist approach to the land with gender. The prominence of the 'home-making analogy' restricts women to the domestic sphere. I will build upon this critical discussion in my study of Cumbria's marginalised women poets, and the exploratory approach to landscape writing this alternative poetics expounds. The writings of the Wordsworths originate the image of Dove Cottage as a nucleus of their physical and creative lives; it is important to acknowledge the contribution of Dorothy Wordsworth to this domesticated image of home. The subsequent chapter of the thesis explores her role in the alternative female Cumbrian canon; however, many critical evaluations explore Dorothy's

contribution to her brother's conception of place. The industry of heritage tourism deepens this attachment of Dorothy to a central home by the inclusion of her *Grasmere Journals* in the Wordsworthian narrative. Dorothy Wordsworth's poem, "Grasmere – A Fragment", exemplifies the central role of home:

> Peaceful our valley, fair and green,
> And beautiful her cottages,
> Each in its nook, its sheltered hold,
> Or underneath its tuft of trees.
>
> Many and beautiful they are;
> But there is *one* that I love best,
> A lowly shed, in truth, it is,
> A brother of the rest.
>
> Yet when I sit on rock or hill,
> Down looking on the valley fair,
> That Cottage with its clustering trees
> Summons my heart; it settles there. (246)
>
> – I love that house because it is
> The very Mountains' child. (247)

The imagery of sheltered containment combines with the familial semantics to create an impression of a nurturing landscape; the settlement within 'clustering' trees is evocative of a nest. The maternal link between the house and the mountain supports Bate's connection of Romanticism and dwelling. Dorothy Wordsworth's familial imagery resonates with the protective enclosure William Wordsworth depicts in *Home at Grasmere*, as identified earlier in the chapter. The sheltering image of the 'Concave' (Wordsworth, *Home at Grasmere* 41) valley is paralleled by Dorothy's familial lexis, *Home at Grasmere* situates Wordsworth 'Within' (41) the land: 'here/ Must be his Home, this Valley be his World' (41). His description of Grasmere is implicitly enwombing, a gendering suggested by the assertion of 'his home', 'his world'. The gestation here is the gestation of Wordsworth's poetic identity; the land is a metaphoric nest. The heavily gendered, female landscape is reinforced by Dorothy's role in his creative process; in 'The Sparrow's Nest', Wordsworth declares 'She gave me eyes, she gave me ears' (*Selected Poems* 162). This portrayal of Dorothy as a translator or intermediary suggests her intrinsic connection to the natural world. The feminising of the land is reiterated by Nicholson's reference to 'Duddon lass' in 'To the River

Duddon' (*Collected Poems,* 25). Kroeber asserts that the 'shape and character of the valley mirror the form of a creative mind – self-contained, self-sufficient, profoundly at ease' (Kroeber 137). In this way, *Home at Grasmere* and 'Grasmere – A Fragment' denote William and Dorothy Wordsworth's physical and creative dwelling within the compact, contained vale of Grasmere. Kroeber's identified connection between the shape of the land and the shape of the poetic mind anticipates Bate's ecopoetic analysis of the Romantics. The vale provides the contained space from which Wordsworth extends his broader, universal reflections. The semantics of nourishment support the maternal depiction of the natural world, it is an enwombing image of place.

The feminised landscape establishes the concept of power and masculine domination in Wordsworth's interaction with the natural world. The image of Wordsworth as a self-confessed nature despoiler is encapsulated in 'Nutting'. In this poem, the poet intrudes on the 'virgin scene' (Wordsworth, *Selected Poems* 89):

> And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash
> And merciless ravage; and the shady nook
> Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower
> Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
> Their quiet being (90).

The masculine poet is portrayed as a desecrator; the 'merciless ravage' is suggestive of rape. The sexual undertones of Wordsworth's 'forced' (89) intrusion shows this to be an exploitative interaction between man and nature. The poem's two female presences – the landscape and the 'dearest Maiden' (90) in his company – are 'quiet' (90) and voiceless. Agency is thus assigned to the male. The act of consumption leaves the male speaker 'rich beyond the wealth of kings'. However, Wordsworth addresses the expense of his intrusion in the confessional closing lines: 'I felt a sense of pain' (90). This admission of regret acknowledges his own culpability in despoiling this landscape. It could be argued that, to some extent, the guilt of human interaction with place remains pivotal in environmental art insomuch as the natural world becomes a subject. The implications of power and gender will be further explored later in the thesis.

An expanding body of contemporary criticism and creative work focuses on female interaction with landscape, beyond the domestication of early ecocriticism by Bate and Wordsworth and Nicholson's feminised natural world. This will be the critical focus of the

subsequent chapter which explores the connection between women, walking and landscape within the lesser-known historic and contemporary poetry of Cumbria. As a contemporary poet, situating my own collection of poems within this iconic landscape is a deliberate and direct address to the dominant narratives, both literary and cultural, synonymous with the valley and the Lake District as a whole. It has therefore been essential to address the exploration of the land in these popular historic narratives. The thesis will now diversify this historic foundation by exploring the marginalised poets and writers of the region. The background research has identified the experience of landscape demonstrated in the works of the two prominent Cumbrian poets, canonical Wordsworth and his modern inheritor, Nicholson. It is an experience of place predicated on the formation and exploration of contained territories. Tension between the works of these two writers has thus far served to re-draw the territories in which they moved, wrote and composed rather than challenging them. The centrism which is integral to the physical and creative wandering of these poets establishes home as a nexus. For Wordsworth this centre-point is the valley of Grasmere, for Nicholson it is Millom and the 'living rock' (Nicholson, *Collected Poems* 26) of Cumbria on which it sits. This poetic narrative is echoed in Wainwright's popular walking guides; arguably contributing to the movement of the poetic narrative into the wider cultural experience of the Lake District. Centrism and territory advocate a concept of place which is overwhelmingly masculine, the fixed centre-point of home marginalises women by creating an experience of men's wandering and walking facilitated by a static, stable home. This thesis seeks to identify an alternative experience of the Cumbrian landscape, founded on direct, physical encounters with the land. The lesser-known narratives, which are predominantly but not exclusively by women, form the critical foundation for my own contemporary depiction of this iconic landscape. My poetry employs walking as a method to uncover the hidden, symbiotic connections between species, transforming the poetic experience of the Lake District from unchanging, picturesque landscape to a dynamic, interconnected ecosystem.

ALTERNATIVE CUMBRIAN POETICS

Contemporary collaborators, poet Harriet Tarlo and artist Judith Tucker, describe themselves as 'women artists walking away from the domestic home' (123). The act of walking becomes a counteraction, an alternative to a restrictive image of domesticity. If the dominant literature of Cumbrian landscape writing is centred on an orbit of home, the lesser-known women's poetry of the region is unified by a movement through place which is exploratory without seeking to dominate the territory. This chapter identifies the lesser-known poets and writers who contribute to this alternative experience of landscape. These works are underpinned by a focus on the minutiae of the natural world, walking as a method of observation, scientific study and collaborative practice. Exploring the overlooked literatures of the past establishes a critical foundation for my own poetry and observes the origins of an immersive, ecological approach to writing about the land. The chapter will then explore the contemporary poets who continue this poetic exploration, observing the extent to which experimentation with form, structure and rhythm influences those texts which become a part of this counter-canon.

Historical Context

The works of Susanna Blamire, Dorothy Wordsworth and popular children's author Beatrix Potter contribute to my poetics of place created by direct physical, scientific and artistic encounters with the land. Eighteenth century Cumbrian poet, Susanna Blamire, begins this historical timeline. Formally unpublished in her lifetime, Blamire's manuscripts were circulated amongst her social circle; her poems were also displayed on the trees outside her Cumbrian home. This unconventional approach resonates with contemporary experimental practice and my own located writing. Blamire's intimate and empathetic observations of the natural world anticipate the canonical Romantic poets who succeeded her. The next contributor to this grouping of marginalised voices is Dorothy Wordsworth. Until recently, her literary work was largely overshadowed by her brother's eminent reputation. Through close reading of her prose and poetry, I acknowledge Dorothy Wordsworth as an independent creative practitioner and consider her as a predecessor of my own poetry. The routine walking captured in her journals creates a narrative-in-motion, interspersed with intimate poetic observations of the minute species of the natural world. The repetitive walking facilitates the author's characteristically acute perception. In this way, a Dorothean

approach mirrors the minute and sensory observations of *Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight.* The exploration of the minutiae of the natural world resonates in the underappreciated scientific work of Beatrix Potter. The archives of the Armitt Museum and Library contain an extensive collection of Potter's microscopic drawings and paintings of fungi and algae; these formative scientific studies predate her famous children's stories. Potter's studies of the natural world were thus inspired by a combination of literature, science and art thereby anticipating my own interdisciplinary practice. In these lesser-known writers, the ancestry of my walking-writing observational approach is identified: Blamire, D. Wordsworth and Potter are unified by a poetic and artistic experience of place founded on walking, observation and scientific study.

The ecological theme of interconnection permeates the poetry and practice of Susanna Blamire. Her emotive rendering of encounters between humans and the minutiae of the natural world resonates with my poetic depiction of White Moss Common as a symbiotic, interconnected ecosystem. Contemporary critic Judith Page identifies Blamire as a foreshadower of ecopoetry in her paper "Susanna Blamire's Ecological Imagination: *Stoklewath* or *The Cumbrian Village*" based on the presence of interconnection in her work:

> Blamire's poem participates in this kind of home-making because it posits not only the harmony of village life with natural processes, but the fundamental interrelatedness of the human and natural realms … *More interested in a web of connections than in hierarchies,* Blamire anticipates the subversive quality of modern ecological thought … In *Stoklewath,* therefore, Blamire not only introduces an ecological thematics but also composes the poem on ecological principles. (387, my emphasis)

There is an evident synergy between Blamire's 'web of connections' and Timothy Morton's contemporary definition of the ecosystem as a 'vast mesh of interconnection' (38) in *The Ecological Thought*. It can be argued that under-acknowledged women's poetry thereby anticipates the interconnectivity modern and contemporary criticism has attributed to canonical Romantic poets. The inclusion of Blamire in the ecopoetic timeline reappraises Jonathan Bate's location of William Wordsworth at the forefront of ecopoetry in *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*; her work predates that of Wordsworth by twenty years (Maycock 20). The theme of interconnection is reflected in Blamire's unconventional approach to disseminating her work as 'She pinned scraps of verse

to oak trees in the plantation in front of Thackwood, where passers-by could view this strange and elegant flowering' (Maycock 10). This connection of poet, place and reader translates her ecological themes into her poetic practice; the poems are re-integrated into the landscape. This embedding of poetry within a public setting displaces the elevated station of the poet, as the work is removed from the confines of a published text. Blamire's textual community of people, nature and places is reflected in this shared, accessible display of her work. In this way, this historical poet anticipates current ecopoetic practice; contemporary poet Harriet Tarlo advocates a collaborative walking approach to deconstruct the 'single sovereign speaker' ("Women Ecopoetics" 18) of landscape poetry. The integration of place and poetry resonates with current Cumbrian poetics; including my own use of writing within the specified landscape. Harriet Fraser's experimental installations places her poems on walking routes on the Cumbrian fells, in an echo of Blamire's early ecological practice. As a contemporary poet, it is imperative to establish my own creative practice against an accurate historical context which acknowledges the contribution of under-represented poets as well as the canonical mainstream.

A focus on the minutiae of the natural world underpins the works of Susanna Blamire, Dorothy Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter. Susanna Blamire establishes empathy for the natural world by paying poetic attention to small, fragile species. This depiction of minutiae exposes human exploitation of the natural world; references to hunting in Blamire's poems seemingly suggest this 'interrelatedness' (Page, "Susanna Blamire's Ecological Imagination" 387) includes predation and harm. In 'Elegy Upon the Death of a Plover' Blamire juxtaposes the 'Tyrannic man with iron hand'[1] to the delicate water-bird, as man violates nature:

> Low bend thy head than waving spray
> Soft drop the dew that falls on thee
> That still the early rising Day
> a tear on every leaf may see[2].

The exploitation contrasts with Wordsworth as a self-confessed nature despoiler in 'Nutting'. The elegiac form attributes significance to the loss of this individual bird; the emotive 'tear on every leaf' is an intimate depiction of grief. This is anthropomorphic in that it establishes an intimacy between poet and natural subject, much in the manner of

[1] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 1998.60.6. Manuscript. 'Elegy Upon the Death of a Plover'.
[2] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 1998.60.6. Manuscript. 'Elegy Upon the Death of a Plover'.

Nicholson's reference to 'Duddon, lass' (*Collected Poems* 25). It could be argued that this compassionate connection between poet and natural subject is maintained in 'The fish that lately left this stream'. The poem refers to anglers with a lexicon of deceit: 'bait a Hook, then betray!' and 'Here drops [sic] no barbed Hooks that kill'[3]. However, Christopher Maycock provides discussion of this poem in an accompaniment to Jonathan Wordsworth's 1994 lecture, "Susanna Blamire, Poet of Friendship"; in this publication the poem is entitled 'From Miss Susanna Blamire to her Dearest Friend Elizabeth Beckwith Fisher' (J Wordsworth 15). Maycock suggests that the poem focuses on this friendship: the 'letter/poem makes play of Elizabeth's names; Beckwith – beck meaning a stream and Fisher – a fish' (Maycock 9). However, the introductory note seemingly acknowledges the duality of these references, as 'friendship's stream that flows round S.B's heart – also the pebbly rill that tinkles near Thackwood' (J Wordsworth 14); the stream is at once symbolic and real, observed landscape. The references to 'this stream' and 'this silent brook'[4] locate the narrative on the banks of the river cutting through her home garden. This alternative interpretation is potentially echoed by the labelling of the 'Elegy Upon the Death of a Plover' entry on the Wordsworth Trust's online archive catalogue, which states 'The verse seems to be addressed to Miss Bird' ("1998.60.6 Susanna Blamire"). Under these readings, the natural subjects of Blamire's verse are attached to her personal friendships. In my opinion, Jonathan Wordsworth's suggestion that 'loving relationship colours Susanna's thinking, shapes her poetry, on *every* level' (7, my emphasis) undermines the physical presence of the natural world in Blamire's poems. Judith Page's aforementioned research broadens the critical discussion of Blamire by observing the role of community and interconnection in her poetry. The interweaving of observation, the natural world and personal friendship extends empathy and compassion to small, vulnerable species like the fish and the plover. It could be argued that Blamire's entreaty to 'glide back then, glide to this safe rill'[5] invites both her friend's return and the movement of the fish to the sanctuary of Thackwood's river. The interspersing of human friendships and the natural world aligns with Morton's mesh theory, in which 'No man is an island' (4) and 'all beings are connected' (7). Blamire anticipates

[3] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 1998.60.11. Manuscript. 'the fish that lately left this stream'.
[4] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 1998.60.11. Manuscript. 'the fish that lately left this stream'.
[5] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 1998.60.11. Manuscript. 'the fish that lately left this stream'.

contemporary ecopoetry in her depiction of an inter-species community in which human, animal and landscape are indelibly entwined.

To some extent, the prominence of emotion and empathy in Blamire's depiction of minutiae reinforces anthropocentrism, as defined by Jonathan Bate: 'The world *around us*: anthropocentrism, the valuation of nature only in so far as it radiates out from humankind, remains a given' (*Song* 138). The portrayal of a predated natural world assigns the poet the role of guide or protector. Arguably, Blamire's emotive invocation of pain re-frames non-human species via the lens of the human mind encapsulating the territories of dominant Cumbrian poets, William Wordsworth and Norman Nicholson. The concept of poet as conservator unites mainstream and marginal Cumbrian literature. William Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter were active conservationists, their legacies inspired the formation of the Lake District National Park and National Trust respectively. At the time, land management was a progressive approach. However, my work responds to more contemporary ideas of ecological interconnection rather than human-centred conservation projects. The presence of guardianship undermines the 'vast mesh of interconnection' (Morton 38) by re-introducing hierarchy in the ecosystem; conservation becomes another form of human control. In my own poetry, the Romantic lyric 'I' is replaced with an unknown speaker to challenge an anthropocentric approach to the natural world and the imposition of human territories. On balance, Blamire's use of empathy elevates minute creatures into poetic subjects thus encouraging the recognition of overlooked and exploited species. The 'Tyrannic man with iron hand'[6] embodies the imbalance of power in these examples of hunting and violation. Blamire invalidates an exploitative approach, condemning the male's abuse of his physical dominance: he 'seem'd to think the will of fate/ Was but to make the weak obey'[7]. The juxtaposition of the 'iron' weapon to the delicacy of the natural world, 'soft drop'[8], illuminates the inequity in this interaction between human and non-human species.

In a contemporary reading, Susanna Blamire's imagery of the 'Tyrannic man' potentially reinforces gender conventions. The contrasting association of man with iron, stature and

[6] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 1998.60.6. Manuscript. 'Elegy Upon the Death of a Plover'.
[7] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 1998.60.6. Manuscript. 'Elegy Upon the Death of a Plover'.
[8] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 1998.60.6. Manuscript. 'Elegy Upon the Death of a Plover'.

power and the female poet with sensibility, emotion and nature appears to reinforce conventional gender roles – men and culture, women and nature. It is essential to recognise these gender conventions within Blamire's historical context, especially in the re-reading of these texts under the developing genre of ecopoetry. Blamire predates modern and contemporary feminist poetry and criticism which seeks to overturn the yoking of female identity with feminised, inert and exploitable nature. Harriet Tarlo states that 'many feminist critics are suspicious of ecofeminism's reclamation of the very link between women and nature that many feminists have spent years debunking' ("Women Ecopoetics" 11). An intrinsic link between women and nature is alluded to by early ecocritic Jonathan Bate in his discussion of masculine dwelling via Heidegger's 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking':

> Not mastery, then, but sisterhood; not the arrogance of enlightenment, but the humility of dwelling. Wordsworth proposes that it is women who are wise in matters ecological … the attuned and nurturing woman, Wordsworth suggests, is a dweller, an 'inmate' who *feels with* nature. (Bate, *Song* 150)

The reductive juxtaposition of 'arrogance' and 'humility' contains female identity within an inferior natural world. Dwelling for women is thus confined to the domestic sphere. This domestication is reaffirmed by Jonathan Skinner's reference to ecopoetics as 'a house making' (7). The image is further evident in the presence of 'home-making' (Page, "Susanna Blamire's Ecological Imagination" 387) in Susanna Blamire's interconnected landscape. The connection between Blamire's female speaker and the exploited natural world, however, is founded on their mutually limited positions of power rather than Bate's maternalistic image of the 'nurturing', 'attuned' woman. It is the male in the physical and social position of authority in 'Elegy Upon the Death of a Plover'[9], he is the only subject provided with agency. Contextually, as an unmarried woman, Blamire was working and writing from a limited position of power in comparison to her male counterparts; the same can also be argued in the case of Dorothy Wordsworth. As a farmer's daughter and an orphan, Blamire was not a member of the aristocracy. She was afforded privilege through her access to education; the literacy of both of these historic women enabled them significantly greater freedoms. The relative privilege of both Blamire and D. Wordsworth enabled them to live outside the bounds of the social and economic restrictions which

[9] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 1998.60.6. Manuscript. 'Elegy Upon the Death of a Plover'.

limited poorer women's independence and freedom of movement. Within my contemporary poetry I advocate the removal of gender imagery in the exploration of power balance within the landscape. This contributes to the subversion of conventional gender roles in contemporary ecopoetics. The early male ecocriticism of Jonathan Bate and Jonathan Skinner inadvertently reinforced gender roles in their ecopoetic scholarship, as identified by Harriet Tarlo. Blamire's empathy with the smallest species of the natural world is seemingly established on their mutually limited positions of power; the autonomous male has physical power over the predated bird and societal dominance over the actionless female speaker.

The study of the minutiae of the natural world is sustained in the work of Dorothy Wordsworth, the next link in this developing timeline of women writers responding to the Cumbrian landscape. Her acute depiction of nature is encapsulated by Eleanore Widger's reference to the 'Dorothean' writing approach in her 2017 article, "Walking Women: Embodied Perception in Romantic and Contemporary Radical Landscape Poetry". Dorothean nature writing progresses Blamire's precise observations, as in 'An Address to Goodhumour' 'and sweet content shall to be there/ To *notice* every opening flower[10] (my emphasis). The semantic difference between noticing and seeing distinguishes alternative Cumbrian poetics of place from the dominant literatures. 'To see' ascribes agency to the person, it is an act of discovery or revelation made by the human eye. In this reading, sight becomes an act of possessing the land, the natural world is only relevant once consumed by our vision. In contrast, 'noticing' is suggestive of gaining awareness, a recognition of processes and species already in existence. The flower of Blamire's poem is a moving, living organism independent of the poet, and reader's, line of sight. Widger defines the distinction between these two modes of observation as enactive perception and aesthetic seeing. Enactive perception is an experiential and sensory recognition of the natural world which is purposeful and active. In contrast, aesthetic seeing removes the poet from the subject; it is an act of construction (Widger 9-12). The territorial orbits of the dominant male voices are thus replaced with immersive, sensory observations; the alternative poetics is one of experience rather than capture.

[10] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 2017.1.1.2. Manuscript. 'An Address to Goodhumour'.

Dorothy Wordsworth's acute observations of the natural world are illustrative of a sensory awareness of the landscape and its minute life forms. In *Lakeland: A Prose Anthology,* Norman Nicholson explores the famously intricate perception evident in her journals:

> It was a matter not of revelation but of intuition and the senses, of physical perception and sympathetic insight intensified and heightened, but not changed, not different in kind from that of ordinary people. Her view, therefore, is one which we can all share, but only fitfully, only in momentary flashes. (337)

Nicholson suggests that Dorothy's 'sympathetic insight' abolishes the subliminal hierarchy between writer and reader. The creation of parity directly opposes the conception of the Romantic poet as 'a person of peculiar – quasi-magical, quasi-divine – power' (Bate, *Song* 68-69). The Dorothean perception of places replaces 'The Romantic poet [who] conjures something out of nothing through the sheer force of his imagination' (Bate, *Song* 68-69) with acute observation; wonder is found in intricacy not fabrication. The clarity of Dorothy's observations undermines the mystical image of the male poet and in so doing challenges the implicit suggestion that the poet is intrinsically superior to the reader. Widger identifies the contemporary radical landscape poets Harriet Tarlo, Helen MacDonald and Frances Presley as inheritors of a Dorothean method of perception; these poets all contribute to *The Ground Aslant* anthology. In these current practitioners, Widger cites that observation deconstructs the elevated Romantic poet and thereby achieves 'equality with the objects of perception' (4). Later in the thesis I will explore observational writing as a route to re-situating humans as a part of, rather than rulers of, a complex ecosystem. The negation of hierarchy echoes the ecological writing of Susanna Blamire, whose exploration of ecological balance is 'somewhat akin to the mingling of honeysuckle and beans that Dorothy Wordsworth describes in her Grasmere journals' (Page, "Susanna Blamire's Ecological Imagination" 389). It could be argued that the absence of an elevated speaker is the product of the journal-writing form rather than a poetic choice. Dorothy's *Grasmere Journal* was motivated by her resolve to 'write a journal of the time till W [William] & J [John] return' (D. Wordsworth 1). To some extent this explains the intimacy of the narrative which contributes to the accessibility of Dorothy Wordsworth's nature writing. Nevertheless, it is the economic and impactful descriptions which create the 'great downpour of impressions' (Nicholson, *Lakeland Prose Anthology* 342) which distinguish

Dorothean nature writing from her prominent male counterparts. The poised and pared down observations are exemplified in the following *Grasmere Journal* extracts:

> The hail stones looked clean & pretty upon the dry clean Road (77)
>
> The pile wort spread out on the grass a thousand shining stars, the primroses were there & the remains of a few Daffodils (89)
>
> A Bird at the top of the crags was flying round & round & looked in thinness & transparency, shape & motion, like a moth (95)
>
> Walked on the White Moss. Glow-worms (189)

These momentary glances afford attention to minute species. The delicate images create a lightness of touch that acknowledges each individual creature yet refrains from capturing it. Dorothy's gaze, and thus the reader's, alights but continues to move, it is a narrative of 'fractions, not whole compositions' (Woof xix). The fragmentation is created by continuous movement, the gaze of the eye is directed by the physical and real movement of the writer. Pamela Woof describes that the 'Journal conveys directly the unpremeditated rhythms' (iv), the undirected immediacy of the journal-form creates an experience of the land which is unbounded and unconstrained. By comparison, Blamire's study of minutiae is shaped into philosophical discussions of the relationship between man and nature. This connection of land, emotion and stewardship foreshadows the poetry of William Wordsworth. Dorothy Wordsworth's mobile perception is therefore a closer forbearer of my own creative practice; her observations are left intact and the natural world retains its agency. This presents an alternative to the orbiting territories of the dominant canon; it is an immersive experience of land in which movement facilitates an acute observation of the minutiae of the natural world. In my own creative practice, this is escalated as my walking-writing method observes the minute, lesser-known species of the natural world.

The minutiae of the natural world are further explored in the lesser-known works of Beatrix Potter. Potter's scientific insight extends a Dorothean focus on minutiae into the broader cultural experience of the Lake District. Her famous children's books illustrate animal characters hidden from sight in warrens, dens and hollow trees. The creation of these small worlds develops from the mycological studies which predated her fictional writing. The archives at the Armitt Museum and Library date Potter's earliest fungi drawing as October 1887. The Museum's vast collection of her mycological drawings and paintings includes a

lesser-studied body of work in which Potter draws observations of specimens from under a microscope. The pencilled annotations reveal detailed records of the germination and development of spores. One such annotated drawing is labelled 'Yellow fungus from Putney', 'New Yellow on an elm log' and includes drawings magnified by x100 (labelled set Dec 10th '96) and x600 (Dec 15th '96)[11]. Potter's scientific insight escalates the acute perception of Dorothean writing with the use of binomials heightening the precision of her observations. This is illustrated in the following journal entry, of 18th August 1894:

> Went again to the wood near Hatchednize suspecting funguses from the climate, and was rewarded, what should be an ideal heavenly dream of the toadstool eaters.
>
> The wood is insignificant on to the road, a few yards of beeches and old brush, but spreads at the back of the fields into an undreamed wilderness full of black firs … The fungus starred the ground apparently in thousands, a dozen sorts in sight at once, and such specimens, which I have noted before in this neighbourhood. I found upwards of twenty sorts in a few minutes, *Cortinarius* and the handsome *Lactarius deliciosus* being conspicuous, and joy of joys, the spiky *Gomphidius glutinosus*, a round, slimy, purple head among the moss, which I took up carefully with my old cheese-knife, and turning over saw the slimy veil (Potter 331)

This account demonstrates the pursuit of scientific knowledge, she is in possession of equipment to identify and take specimen samples, combined with an appreciation of the myths and fairytales of the woodland. The reference to 'an ideal heavenly dream' embraces the poetic resonance of the micro-life she observes and investigates. This unification of science and myth is acknowledged by Potter in a letter to Bertha Mahoney Miller, dated 25th November 1940:

> I do not remember a time when I did not try to invent pictures and make for myself a fairyland amongst the wild flowers, the animals, fungi, mosses, woods and streams, all the thousand objects of the countryside; that pleasant, unchanging world of realism and romance, which in our northern climate is stiffened by hard weather, a tough ancestry, and the strength that comes from the hills. (Judy Taylor 422-3)

The connection between romance and realism illustrates an exploration of landscape informed by literature, poetry and art as well as science. This culturally ecological approach therefore negates any hierarchy between these disciplines by exploring their combined influence. My own poetry is informed by scientific research into the micro-life of the

[11] Armitt Museum and Library Archives Beatrix Potter papers. Unmounted and unbound pencil drawings of fungi specimens viewed under a microscope. Box [271]. 'Yellow Fungus from Putney'.

woodland. The acquisition of specialist insight has enabled me to depict these life-forms with an accuracy which exposes their fragile yet foundational role in the ecosystem. The poetic challenge of this interdisciplinary approach echoes that of traditional botanical drawing and painting faced by Potter: the 'difficulty lies in combining accuracy with beauty; balancing the requirements of art and science' (Battrick 5). The pursuit of balance is integral in work which seeks to re-situate the poet as a part of the ecosystem, rather than its ruler. Within my own poetry I inherit and update the use of scientific insight in a poetic exploration of a Cumbrian ecosystem. The landscape of these lesser-represented writers is an accumulation of life-forms explored through intimate encounters with place rather than an elevated navigation of territory.

My own method uses weekly walking to generate acute, sensory and dynamic observations of the interconnected ecosystem of White Moss Common. Movement has a central role in re-enlivening a poetic depiction of a Cumbrian habitat as the static, picturesque image of the Lake District is replaced by a complex, ever-changing ecosystem. It is, therefore, integral to identify the role of walking in this timeline of lesser-known Cumbrian poets. There is an evident synergy between the practices of Blamire, D Wordsworth and Potter and contemporary studies of the relationship between women, walking and landscape. In *Wanderlust,* Rebecca Solnit determines the distinction between walking as a method and as a poetical subject matter she states that 'there is no well-defined border between the literature of walking and nature writing, but nature writers tend to make the walking implicit at best, a means for the encounters with nature which they describe, but seldom a subject' (127). The omission of direct references to walking within historical women's creative output is arguably a product of historical societal conventions which limited women's ability to walk freely and unaccompanied. Blamire's poem 'Song' complies with societal codes of female behaviour:

> When the sun-beam of joy gilds the morn of our Days
> and the soft heart is warmed both with hope & with praise
> New pleasures new prospects still burst on the view
> and the phantom of bliss in our walks we pursue[12].

[12] Wordsworth Trust Susanna Blamire papers, 2017.1.3.1. Manuscript. 'Song'.

The act of companioned walking is implicit and facilitates Blamire's observations of the natural world; by Solnit's definition she is a nature poet. However, it could be argued that the companionable approach to walking is more indicative of Blamire's reputation as 'the Poet of Friendship' (J Wordsworth 4), as discussed by critic Jonathan Wordsworth, than social limitation. Judith Page connects companionship with the ecological themes of Blamire's work, she recognises that 'for Blamire isolation in nature leads not to sublime transcendence but to despair' ("Susanna Blamire Ecological Imagination" 396). The poet promotes a communal experience of the land over and above a solitary one. This contradicts Jonathan Bate's conclusion that 'Reverie, solitude, walking' (*Song* 42) defines Romantic ecopoetics, an argument founded on Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker.* The replacement of a 'single sovereign speaker' (Tarlo, "Women Ecopoetics" 18) with a collective approach foreshadows the collaborative practice of contemporary practitioners, including Harriet Tarlo and Judith Tucker and poets, artists and musicians Autumn Richardson and Richard Skelton. Bate's emphasis on solitary practice conflicts with his depiction of ecology as the 'interconnectedness of all things' (Bate, *Song* 28). Blamire is an early example of interconnectivity as both a subject and method of practice, inherited by current female poets and expanded within my own poetry. The contemporary inheritors of Blamire, D Wordsworth and Potter will be further explored later in the chapter; paving the way for critical analysis of my own poetry and its contribution to the alternative Cumbrian poetics.

Dorothean landscape writing is characterised by momentary flashes of acute perception, the gaze of the reader is facilitated and shaped by the movement of the poet's feet. Dorothy Wordsworth's creative process was informed by the routine walks which are both the subject of her writing and a method of attuning to her natural surroundings. The presence of walking in the *Grasmere Journals* takes the form of both companioned and solitary wanderings. The following extract, from 2nd June 1802, details a shared experience of a walk in White Moss Common:

> We went to look at Rydale. There was an alpine fire-like red upon the tops of the mountains. This was gone when we came in view of the Lake. But we saw the Lake in a new & most beautiful point of view between two little rocks, & behind a small ridge that had concealed it from us. – This White Moss, a place made for all kinds of

beautiful works of art and nature, woods and valleys, fairy valleys and fairy tarns, miniature mountains, alps above alps. (D. Wordsworth 104)

The perception and sight is companioned, there is a mutual appreciation of scale; the observations of the small, precise details illuminate the vastness of the landscape. Significantly, White Moss Common recurs in the journal as a meeting point, with Dorothy and her companions often converging on this location, partway between Rydal and Grasmere. The repetition of 'we' reinforces the importance of creative collaboration to the Wordsworths' inner circle; at this time comprising of William, Dorothy and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This interconnected writing relationship could be considered as a metaphoric symbiosis; albeit an unequal one, due to the disparity in their professional statuses. However, the concurrent presence of solitary walking in Dorothy's work is an example of the role of 'Reverie, solitude, walking' (Bate, *Song* 42) in her writing process. In the following extract from 'Grasmere – A Fragment' the departure from companioned walking is deliberate and significant:

A Stranger, Grasmere, in thy Vale,
All faces then to me unknown,
I left my sole companion-friend
To wander out alone.

Lured by a little winding path,
I quitted soon the public road,
A smooth and tempting path it was,
By sheep and shepherds trod. (D Wordsworth 247)

The isolation of the poetic experience from the public sphere is emblemised by the contrast of the winding alternative path to the unchallenging, smooth route ahead; unlike Blamire, the poet deliberately chooses solitude over company. The directional lexis of the poem meanders, the twisting curve of the path is suggestive of a walk without definitive objective. The sensory, intuitive selection of a route away from the conventional path mirrors my own writing practice. In my weekly walks of White Moss Common the route was not premeditated thus enabling poetic observations to be shaped by the land and its species, rather than a conceptual goal. The tension between the poet/walker and the path is a metaphor for the conflict between private and public in human encounters with the landscape. The path is the image of convention: a mainstream route outlined by public authorities and reinforced by the tread of its users. The choice of an alternative pathway

exemplifies the 'liberating sense of independence' identified by Joanna Taylor (n.p) in Dorothy's walking narrative. In this way walking and motion become an alternative experience to the domesticated image of dwelling. This is epitomised in Dorothy's exultant entry which reads 'I was obliged to run all the way to the foot of the White Moss' (D. Wordsworth, *Grasmere Journal* 120). In their collaborative 2017 paper, "Off-Path, Counter-Path: Contemporary Walking Collaborations in Landscape, Art and Poetry", poet Harriet Tarlo and artist Judith Tucker advocate a fieldwork approach to walking and writing in which they 'wander off the established path through a series of negotiations and diversions' (105). The transgression of pathways becomes a metaphor for their negation of gender conventions as 'women artists walking away from the domestic home' (123). These contemporary female practitioners 'walk, look and listen, with notebooks, pencils and cameras to hand' (110); an introspective approach to the land is replaced by an outward looking, exploratory one. The influence of this fieldwork approach on my own practice will be explored in the subsequent chapter. Pamela Woof highlights the connection between the physical liberation of walking and the flexibility of the journal genre: 'There are no rules and structures for diary writing, as there are not for living: we take the fast and slow of it as it comes' (iv). In this way, solitary walking in Dorothean literature presents an alternative to the restricted orbiting of a limited sphere. Her uninhibited walks encapsulate movement as a release from the boundaries of domesticity. It is this experience of movement which this thesis continues, walking creates my mobile poetics of place; the moving speaker is a visitor travelling through the land, rather than occupying it. Transitional movement opposes the domesticised implications of an experience of place facilitated by a fixed, central home.

Dorothy Wordsworth's selection of an alternative pathway is a counter-cultural act in that the female poet diverts from the designated route. Rebecca Solnit identifies that the societal restrictions placed on women's walking epitomised the limitation of their creative, political and social lives: 'If walking is a primary cultural act and a crucial way of being in the world, those who have been unable to walk out as far as their feet would take them have been denied not merely exercise or recreation but a vast proportion of their humanity' (245). This statement argues that in historical contexts women did not have the societal freedom to wander as freely as their male counterparts. In many respects, this conclusion is not without foundation: men are perceived as less vulnerable and therefore have greater

personal security. This is compounded by financial security and autonomy to make travel and movement more available to men without the risk of societal repercussions. This in part explains the dominance of masculinity in the prominent Cumbrian narrative of place. Simon Bainbridge, in his lecture at the Wordsworth Trust, "Active Climbers of the Hills: Women in the Mountains, 1787-1829" identified examples of women using walking to transgress from historical social codes. Bainbridge's study reveals that whilst Dorothy Wordsworth is an epitomal representative of solitary female walking, she is not a lone example. His broad-ranging references, including Lancashire governess Ellen Weeton, observe a timeline of women practising against convention. In the closing of his lecture Bainbridge named Agnes, the maid who accompanied Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Barker on their famous ascent of Scafell Pike in October 1818. The inclusion of working women expands Solnit's analysis of the role of walking in women's literature and culture by addressing the further impact of social class. It is essential to recognise the role of class as well as gender in determining which poetic, literary and cultural narratives have fallen outside of the regional mainstream. Pamela Woof acknowledges that Dorothy 'lived in a more spacious freedom than most of us. There were few external constraints on her life' (iv) unlike those of the working-class women identified by Bainbridge; this is equally pertinent in the cases of Blamire and Potter. Whilst these historic narratives convey a transgression from social expectation and provide an insight into an alternative Cumbrian experience of land, there are other stories which have been forgotten in the county's writing: namely the narratives of the rural working classes. My own poetry here wanders into new territory: re-threading the unwritten and overlooked industrial heritage of White Moss Common back into a contemporary experience of the land.

The historic works of Susanna Blamire, Dorothy Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter originate an alternative poetic approach to the Cumbrian landscape. These alternative writers challenge the masculine mainstream in which a superior poet orbits his territory. In contrast, these lesser-known writers focus on the minutiae of the natural world generating observations with physical, scientific and artistic exploration of the land. This study has revealed the ancestry of my own poetic practice: Blamire's unconventional installation of her work; D Wordsworth's use of walking to facilitate acute observation and Potter's yoking of science and poetics in her exploration of the natural world. As a contemporary practitioner it is

essential to acknowledge the historic origins of creative processes, especially when those historic narratives are under-represented. To achieve a re-balancing of the position of the poet within the ecosystem, the literature of ecopoetics must be similarly balanced by re-admitting lost perspectives into the canon.

Contemporary Inheritors

My research into the historic narratives identifies the marginalised practitioners who anticipate features of my own poetic approach: the observation of microscopic, often overlooked species via an immersive walking practice. This section identifies the following practitioners as inheritors of Cumbria's alternative poetics of place: collaborative poets and multimedia artists Autumn Richardson and Richard Skelton; Harriet Fraser and Rob Fraser and experimental poet Nathan Walker. These poets, to varying degrees, continue the study of the minutiae of the natural world through walking and scientific study. This study situates my work within the current context of the region's rich poetic culture.

The focus on the minutiae of the natural world is continued by Autumn Richardson and Richard Skelton and Harriet Fraser. Richardson and Skelton's science-inspired poetry records the 'vital testimony of the land itself; they are voices in an infinite polyphony – *a singing of minutiae'* (*Memorious Earth*: xiii). The collaborators' precise observations echo Dorothean perception, as in 'Wolf Notes':

> The rowan seed, cased
> in cold soils, stirs; a tiny
> fist unfurls – muscles
> upwards – piercing crust.
> A translucent filament seeks
> the sun. Sips from melting drifts. (*Memorious Earth* 20)

The micro-world is magnified by precise and economic description. The exactitude is compounded by scientific terminology which characterises Richardson and Skelton's poetry. In *Memorious Earth: A Longitudinal Study,* the isolated landscapes of Ulpha Fell and Devoke Water in Western Cumbria are evoked with poems which list the landscape's upland floral species. This reveals the diversity of the ecosystem whilst memorialising the loss of extinct species. Similarly, the naming of species is echoed in Harriet Fraser's pamphlet *meadow.*

Fraser visited and inhabited a Cumbrian upland meadow, this year-long project enabled the poet to 'submerge … in an alternative world' (Fraser, *meadow* Introduction):

> I don't count how many times
> I walk in the meadow stop to gaze
> ragged robins, oxeye daisies, rattle
> globe flower with a burden of flies
> grasses silked by wind (*meadow* 2).

The adherence to the tradition of nature-litanies echoes Michael Longley's use of names. My own poetry rejuvenates this approach, the Latin names in 'Lichens: Magnified' compound the other-worldly appearance of the lichens, creating a distinctive oral and textual identity for these unique species. My poetry thus addresses the conflict of naming, identified by Richardson and Skelton:

> the act of naming is a form of recognition, but taxonomy can also obfuscate, drawing attention away from *things* to *concepts*. Moreover, words themselves can be a means of control – the facility of language to *define* can lead to a form of possession, of *capture*. (*Memorious Earth* xiv)

The taxonomising effect of listing is subverted in my poem sequence 'Lichens: Magnified' by using the names' onomatopoeic qualities to create a three-dimensional impression of these dynamic organisms. My work is, therefore, a progressive contribution to the study of minutiae in contemporary Cumbrian poetics of place. My combination of observational writing and ecological research with Plantlife has enabled me to depict the unique physical, sensory qualities of these lesser-known species, beyond the two-dimensional nature-litany. The principal motivation was to poetically animate – not taxonomise – the natural world thus depicting the Lake District as an active, changing ecosystem as opposed to a picturesque landscape frozen in time. The creative practices of Richardson and Skelton and Fraser indicate that the conflict between recognition and capture underlies contemporary Cumbrian poetry.

The distinction between the works of Richardson and Skelton and Fraser is the absence and presence of Romanticism's lyric 'I'. Richardson and Skelton employ an objective narrative voice to investigate the layers and traces of life inscribed on the land. The emotional, personal experience of the poet is replaced by a science-inspired study of the ecosystem; an approach which resonates with the fieldwork method of Tarlo and Tucker. The concept that

the 'landscape recorded our effect upon it' (Richardson and Skelton, *Memorious Earth* xi) attributes agency to the ecosystem and re-addresses the hierarchical nature of the human relationship with the land. In contrast, Fraser's lyric 'I' acknowledges the role of the human body in the physical act of perceiving and observing the ecosystem:

> I am in again I am deepest in I am lying in
> I am looking up I am mesmerised again
> by wind by sound by grasses filaments
> by harebell's jig by rattle browned (*meadow* 22).

The body is a mediator between her poetic identity and the experienced environment; it is a tool of observation. My own work shares a commonality with Fraser in the use of the walking to facilitate an embodied, sensory perception of place. However, the presence of the personal pronouns attaches this immersive experience of land to Fraser's poetic identity; to some extent, re-affirming the Romantic image of the poet as nature-conqueror. For this reason, the voice in my poetry is one of an unknown speaker whose acute observations and explorations engage the reader in a shared walk through White Moss Common. The imposed poet-reader hierarchy is thus abolished; this act of levelling demonstrates the depiction of the human as a part of a connected ecosystem not its owner.

The specialist research within my own creative practice deconstructs the singular perspective of the lyric 'I'. This multi-perspective approach is equally evident in the experimental work of Nathan Walker. During his tenure as Poet in Residence at the Armitt Museum and Library, Walker composed *Condensations.* In this collection, Walker created erasure poems from a variety of textual sources: Cumbrian dialect; Westmorland mythology and rituals; industrial heritage and the history of rock climbing in the Lake District. These found poems were super-imposed onto Walker's own writing and excerpts of interviews with his grandfather which focused on his life in the mountains. This collage approach echoes ecopoetical writing practices as the 'recycling of texts is about … acknowledgement of a world beyond the self, somewhat akin to the collaborative process' (Tarlo, "Women Ecopoetics" 19). The interconnections which underpin my own poetics are visually realised by Walker's enmeshed erasure poems. This formally experimental approach re-imagines the solitary experience of the poet in the landscape by deconstructing the formation of the lines and stanzas themselves. The differentiation between Walker's approach and my own is that I employ the use of blank space and shape to depict the rhythms and sounds of the

ecosystem. The correlation between blank space and pause is developed to create a three-dimensional, sensory experience of White Moss Common which immerses the reader in the landscape. The resultant sonic landscapes imagine the natural world beyond the bounds of text, a human construction.

Walking and writing within the landscape are principal features of my creative methodology. Observing the presence of these methods in the collaborations of Autumn Richardson and Richard Skelton and Harriet Fraser and Rob Fraser locates my poetic practice within this contemporary context. Richardson and Skelton's 'several months' immersion in the landscape' (Richardson and Skelton, *Memorious Earth* viii-ix) was facilitated by their temporary residence close to the tarn which is the subject of their poetic observations and musical recordings; there is a direct and integral connection between the location and the resultant poetry. Similarly, poet Harriet Fraser and photographer Rob Fraser create their collaborative work *The Long View: two years with seven remarkably ordinary trees* on location at the sites of the seven titular trees. Walking has a greater prominence in their creative process than for Richardson and Skelton:

> With walking, there is a kind of noticing and remembering that takes place in the body as well as in the mind, and an interweaving of spaces that beforehand have been known only in isolation of one another. We wanted to connect the trees, by walking, and, perhaps, in the process, feel more connected with the land that is their home. (Fraser and Fraser 92)
>
> Our minds were focused on what was around and in front of us. We noticed trees. We knelt in the earth to get close to small bugs, the variety of grasses, the flowers. (Fraser and Fraser 92)

The act of walking underpins this collaborative poetic and photographic work. Fraser and Fraser completed a continuous journey between seven historic Cumbrian trees. In this instance, walking is a method of reaching fixed points of observation and reflection. Harriet Fraser describes that it is pivotal in 'putting distance between myself and the built environment … with the intention of observing, tuning in, and writing' (Fraser and Fraser 166). The 'putting [of] distance' thereby defines walking as a tool rather than a subject matter. The resultant poems are in fact static, as in 'Flying Rowan' in which 'We sat and shared your view/ breathed in the musty scent/ of fox and trodden earth' (*Long View* 29). The communion with the natural world is achieved through stillness as opposed to

movement. Fraser uses walking to attune to her environment, she becomes an embedded 'Inmate' (D. Wordsworth, "Grasmere – A Fragment" 248) in an echo of Dorothy Wordsworth. My own poetic practice departs from this use of walking as only a tool, a method of transport from a perceived human world into a bucolic natural one. To some extent, Fraser's lexicon of detachment contains pastoral undertones. This differentiation is addressed within my own poetry, in 'Rydal Caves' the 'clam crater/refracting distant traffic' unites the mechanised imagery of urban life with the concavity of the abandoned quarry. This multi-layered image acknowledges the complexity of the interplay between human construction and the "natural" landscape. The dual currents of the River Rothay and the busy A road both cut through White Moss Common and underpin the sonic landscape created in my poetry collection. Arguably, the pastoral distinction between modernity and idyllic natural beauty enforces a pictorial stasis on areas such as the Lake District, with the insinuation that they are isolated spaces distinct from human development. My poetry disrupts this conception, my walks through White Moss illuminate human life intertwined with the ecosystem in both the land's past and present.

The examination of the contemporary inheritors of the alternative Cumbrian poetics of place has indicated that key concepts, such as the focus on minutiae, are sustained in the collaborative and experimental works of these poets. The singular perspective of the lyric 'I' is replaced by multiple viewpoints, both in the collaborative outputs of Richardson and Skelton and Fraser and Fraser and the experimental overlaying of texts by Nathan Walker. The interconnections of the landscape are transported into the creative process of Richardson and Skelton whose multimedia work combines poetry, music and organic specimens. The interdisciplinary practice of both Richardson and Skelton and Fraser and Fraser may have, in part, informed the self-publication of their works; Xylem Press and some-where no-where respectively. Independent publication separates these poets from mainstream literature, the autonomous approach indicates a commitment to broader creative projects and endeavours. There is a parity between this artisanal practice and Harriet Tarlo and Judith Tucker's collaboration. Tarlo and Tucker establish their interdisciplinary walking as an environmental practice in opposition to 'resource-greedy' (105) capitalism; a slow, shared and immersed experience of the land becomes countercultural in the fast-paced consumerism of the modern world.

This contextual research identifies the areas in which my own work is a progressive addition to this body of alternative Cumbrian poetry. To some extent, the concept of territories and the corresponding experience of dwelling are evident in the methodological practice of these poets. Walker was a resident poet at the Armitt Museum and Library. Fraser camped in the meadow in the composition of her *meadow* pamphlet; she also camped at the locations of the seven trees in *The Long View,* in collaboration with Rob Fraser. Richardson and Skelton resided close to the locations of *Wolf Notes.* This recurrence of fixing or localising to set places suggests that some degree of dwelling, however temporary, is required to gain authentic poetic insight. In my own practice and poetry, movement is a resistance of territorial possession. I never reside at White Moss; I am only ever a visitor. The final poem of the collection, 'leaving', is indicative of an experience of the land which is immersive, sensory and insightful but also finite. As 'some ways are untrodden' the mystery of the woodland is preserved, my knowledge and that of the reader is incomplete. The presence and acknowledgement of incompletion is an important ecological undertone; to leave being to recognise the limitations of the human experience and avoid exploitation of the habitat.

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

My poetry collection, *Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight,* explores the stories of the landscape: from often overlooked species, such as lichens and fungi, to under-represented working-class histories. My poetic nature-narrative emerges from these non-textual stories although it is one of fragmentations, incompletion and open-endedness. They are not as structured as the narrative forms usually associated with prose, my poetry is shaped by ecological interconnection and the changes in the landscape from autumn to spring. My walking-writing methodology redresses the walking heritage of the dominant Cumbrian canon, as I replace an orbit of territory with an immersive study of the ecosystem. I employ walking to facilitate an insight into the minute life stories of White Moss Common. My creative work responds to the tradition of underacknowledged female writers and poets exploring the natural world through walking, scientific and artistic enquiry. This critical commentary evaluates my writing practice of walking, observation and interdisciplinary research. Close reading of my poems analyses the themes of symbiosis and parasitism. I examine my use of formal experimentation with blank space and shape to translate the acoustics of the ecosystem into poetry. The combination of observation and scientific insight contributes to my poetic study of this interconnected ecosystem; from the symbiotic associations between microscopic and visible organisms to the complex interplay between human life and the land. *Forensic Traces* is an incantation of the forgotten contributions to this iconic landscape and the intricate connections which unite past, present and future.

My poetry evolved from observational writing facilitated by my weekly, meandering walks at White Moss Common. The direction of these walks, and the resultant poems, was informed by the sights, sounds and observations made onsite. This responsive approach attempted to avoid the imposition of personal goals and objectives which define walking as an internalised, emotional experience as opposed to a physical, exploratory one. The "tools" of my fieldwork approach were a notebook and a hand lens; the intricacies of the habitat are investigated rather than imagined. The use of the hand lens was inspired by my interdisciplinary scientific research, which will be further explored later in the chapter. This act of 'writing away from the self and into the field' (Tarlo and Tucker 110) updates the poetic experience of a Cumbrian landscape by replacing orbital territories with intuitive, exploratory encounters. The personal journeys of the Wordsworths are replaced by an

immersive poetic walk through place. Without a human narrator or guide the experience of the landscape is inclusive and shared; it is not confined to the identity of one poetic speaker, as in Fraser's *meadow* poems. My use of the present tense creates an immediacy to *Forensic Traces* which embeds the reader in this ongoing, unfolding insight. Furthermore, it encapsulates my process of observing, walking and writing at White Moss. The opening poem, 'Common Land', invites the reader to 'let your feet detect the path/ beyond gravel chunks/ these green-blue beads/ imposed on soil'. The non-human species share in this collective movement as the tree roots are 'feeling the path to water/ in the tunnel tailored by a worm'. These acts of 'way making' encapsulate my poetry's ethos: walking as a wandering, responsive and exploratory encounter as opposed to a goal-orientated quest for summits.

In this creative work, walking is used to facilitate acute observations of the minute life forms of White Moss Common. The opening poem, 'Common Land', begins to reveal the intricacies of the habitat: 'air dwellers caught in cobwebs'. I use precise, textured vocabulary to depict these minute observations such as 'slate glassels' in the second poem, 'rain-thick beck'. A glassel is defined by Douglas Adams and John Lloyd in *The Meaning of Liff* as 'A seaside pebble which was shiny and interesting when wet, and which is now a lump of rock' (qtd. in Macfarlane, *Landmarks* 7-8). This word is multi-layered within the context of the poem; it has an onomatopoeic resonance and is descriptive of the slate immersed in the fast-flowing river. The clarity of this specialist, non-standard term creates a focused and unique observation of a momentary encounter. The final poem, 'leaving', reverses this experience, as 'closing the common' substitutes clarity and insight for uncertainty and imprecision:

> lose sight somewhere between water and gravel

The blurring of vision is an act of distancing and symbolises the physical and creative exit from White Moss; where the opening poems magnify, the closing poem recedes. To 'lose' is an ambiguous imperative, it is both a melancholic loss and an active release. The intimate and acute insight of my poetic nature-narrative is relinquished, this withdrawal aims to resist the possession and ownership implied by completion. My temporary role as a visitor is maintained and the ecosystem retains its agency.

The fieldwork approach enabled me to generate sensory observations directly shaped by the land which is both setting and subject. The observational writing process translates physical movement into kinetic poetry; the poems encapsulate the rapid pace of change. The Cumbrian landscape is thus enlivened and transformed from picturesque scene to dynamic, evolving ecosystem. The species of the natural world are active participants as opposed to observed subjects. In the following poem, 'fibres of cloud descend', rain is embodied by sensory observations:

fibres of cloud descend clog the spaces between trees, mizzling haze gusts horizontally

blends edges of trunk, branch, path mulches the ground, saturated mud squelch bog emanates

dank, drain rot fumes of stagnant pools filling filling filling rivers inflate and cover inflate

and cover fibres of cloud descend, clog the spaces between trees, mizzling haze

The weather is experienced rather than described, as the repeated lines echo the persistence of the autumnal downpour. Blank space deconstructs the syntax of the repeated lines, reflecting the rain's blurry haze in the poem's form. Formal experimentation combines with sensory observation to immerse the reader in the experience of walking. The 'quasi-magical, quasi-divine' (Bate, *Song* 68-69) role of the Romantic speaker is substituted for my practice of an immersive, explorative encounter with the ecosystem.

The commonality between reader, poet and ecosystem is situated within a woodland wetland with a long history as a communal place of work and leisure. The tension between public land and private ownership underlies the collection, in 'IV' of the sequence 'Lichens: Magnified' spores spread 'in the private woods/ beyond the wall'. The collective act of walking is a resistance of possession, the deviation from the path transgresses the boundaries enforced by authority. *Forensic Traces* explores multiple pathways to avoid the enforcement of territory. The mainstream is matched with its lesser-known alternative, as 'The main path through Penny Rock' is later followed by 'Via a tributary path'. These deviations attempt to negate the creation, albeit implicit, of a singular, dominant experience of the land. I replace the lyric 'I' (of Nicholson, Wordsworth, et al) with a companionable, observing speaker. The lexicon of investigation substitutes the elevated stance of an

omniscient guide with a shared, exploratory encounter. My poetic voice is thus aligned with the reader, reinforced by the second person address of 'you' in the first and final poems. The division between reader and my poetic speaker is absolved, enabling the re-situation of the human as part of the ecosystem.

I translated the soundscapes of White Moss into textual poems by exercising an experimental approach to onsite observations. Noting these sounds in a verbatim style aimed to capture the sonic landscape authentically and accurately. I located the sounds on the page according to their proximity to one another, the most distant of sounds were recorded on the peripheries; blank space indicated varying periods of silence. The following poem, 'Via a tributary path' is the result of this experimentation:

sculpt of echo-fill

leafless canopy roofed by calls
ticticticticic

whistlelowwhistle

over Nab Scar

distant stammerstammerstammer

carpcarpcarp geese   carve far-off water

The phonetic recording of the sounds depicts the call of the different birds without the framing of human names or identifications; to some degree, their calls are transcribed into the poems, rather than translated into human classifications. This equalises humans with other species, the textual language of the poet is aligned with the sonic communication of the birds. The creative commitment to 'evolving techniques and structures which aim to create a truer reflection of reality itself' (Tarlo, *Ground Aslant* 11-12) aligns my practice with radical landscape poetry, anthologised by Harriet Tarlo in *The Ground Aslant.* The use of varied font sizes indicates the volume of sounds, thereby connecting the on-page spatiality of the poem to the acoustics of White Moss. These textual properties share the immersive experience of walking with the reader and indicate sound, volume and rhythm in the poem's oral delivery.

My experimental use of blank space and free form in *Forensic Traces* embodies the rhythms and soundscapes of the ecosystem. Recorded sounds and formal experimentation combine to create a three-dimensional impression of the ecosystem. In my undergraduate dissertation project, *Mere,* blank space reflected the movement and rhythm of the lake's waters. This correspondence between textual space and sonic landscape has been progressed and developed in this thesis; rather than reflecting a singular body of sound, my walks of White Moss exposed me to an accumulation of intermingling, varied sounds. In the following poem, 'white flash/dipper', the blank space represents the proximity of the unidentified bird call to the observed dipper:

Invisible bird whistles

a low-lulling rhyme

Dipper blends notes falling

into the swathe of

moving water

The individual birds are physically distinguished by the use of blank space. However, when read aloud the 'falling' notes intersect with the movement of the dipper; 'low-lulling rhyme' is followed by 'Dipper blends' and 'notes falling'. The observation of the landscape combines both the seen and unseen as the soundscape enmeshes these two birds. The use of textual space mirrors the reality of walking through the woodland wetland; sound and sight are concurrent experiences. Timothy Morton equates this formal experimentation with ecological poetry in *The Ecological Thought:*

> The shape of the stanzas and the length of the lines determine the way you appreciate the blank paper around them. Reading the poem aloud makes you aware of the shape and size of the space around you … The poem organizes space. Seen like this, all texts – all artworks, indeed – have an irreducibly ecological form. (11)

The intersection of these sounds represents the rich soundscape encountered on the walks of White Moss Common whilst the blank space indicates the 'shape and size of the space' (Morton 11) the organisms inhabit. There is an implicit anthropocentrism in Morton's analysis: he suggests that the sounds are arranged 'around you'. My own use of an unidentified, anonymous speaker attempts to eradicate this centrism. The formal

experimentation was informed by the note-taking made during my walks; I documented the arrangement and proximity of these sounds in relation to one another as opposed to my unacknowledged presence. My poetry's thematic exploration of interconnection and symbiosis is reflected in the use of blank space and shape; the formally experimental textual "landscape" reflects the rhythms and sounds observed at White Moss. In this way, my work further aligns with radical landscape poetry, in which 'the relationship between form and space (place) is symbiotic' (Tarlo, *Ground Aslant* 9). The experimentation with form in the initial composition of the poems, as opposed to the later process of re-drafting, unites the form to the poems' subjects and creates an immersive experience of place.

Symbiosis is a process of interconnection. In *Forensic Traces* micro and macro species intertwine as the poems reveal a web of 'mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism' ("Symbiosis: Biology"). The ancient woodland wetland is reliant on this continual exchange of nutrients, the processes of decay and regeneration are fed by the return of organic matter into the ecosystem. Recurrence, recycling and regeneration underpin the poetry collection. The immersive walk through White Moss is punctuated by symbiotic encounters: from the unseen agents of decay – fungi and algae – to the ferns, mosses and lichens colonising trees. The walking-writing process revealed unexpected associations between heritage and invader species; the mutualistic association between bluebell and bracken becomes a metaphor for dismantling the insider/outsider dichotomy. Robert Macfarlane explores this network of species as a 'Wood Wide Web' and observes that 'a forest might be better imagined as a single superorganism, rather than a grouping of independent, individualistic ones' ("Wood Wide Web"). My poetry is underpinned by an ethical motivation to encourage an appreciation of the ecosystem in its entirety; connectivity is the antidote to a selective valuation of the species of the natural world.

Glimpses of ecological interconnection permeate these poems, as my nature-narrative in motion spontaneously encounters moments of symbiosis. These minute observations provide small, fragmented insights into the links between seen and unseen species, the microscopic organisms and their larger, visible counterparts. In 'I' of the 'Equinox' sequence:

> mushrooms bracket bark cryptic attachment

The parasitic attachment is glanced in this description of an energetic early spring; the 'bracket' embodies the mushroom's envelopment of the tree trunk as the smaller species takes hold of its host. The immediacy of my walking-writing process immerses the reader in these moments of observation and encounter. This lightness of touch resonates with the 'tiny swift impressions' (Woof xix) of Dorothy Wordsworth. *Forensic Traces* is underpinned by fragmentary noticings, such as the 'light touch trapeze/ between leaves' of the absent spider in 'Evening Sun'. These glimpsed observations continue in 'Notes on Architects' as the pair of wagtails scour the molehills, feeding on the worms 'parcelled' in the freshly upturned earth. This interaction takes place across a boundary, the 'shreds of utterings/traversing the axis/of the ground' evoke this connection between under-ground and over-ground species. It is a symbiosis revealed only in part. The subtlety of these symbiotic encounters was resultant of the observational writing process. In the original project planning, I had intended these interactions between seen and unseen worlds to dominate the poetry. However, in practice, this would have involved physical intrusion on habitats or a reliance on theoretical research; ultimately undermining my non-invasive approach. Instead, the instances of interconnection are limited to only those I could witness by walking and observing; the 'perforations/into caverns' are observed but not entered or disturbed. I therefore remain in the role of visitor, not conqueror, and the ecosystem retains its agency. This 'revealing/concealing relationship between the human and non-human worlds' (Tarlo, *Ground Aslant* 14) corresponds with contemporary radical landscape poetry. Within my work, the acts of symbiosis are subtle and momentary; their compact nature alludes to the vastness and diversity of the ecosystem. These fractional glimpses illuminate the significance and multitude of these small, but imperative, moments of interaction.

My reactionary approach to observation revealed unexpected connections between the species of White Moss Common; it is a Cumbrian habitat which continues to evolve, adapt and change. Within the poetry collection, these connections compound my poetic rejuvenation by depicting the continual re-configuration of the ecosystem. In 'Bluebells' an invader species, bracken, supports the unexpected growth of the woodland flower on the open slopes of the fell:

> a coalition
>
> of ancient and exile

meets on the slopes of Loughrigg

The lexis of nurture, as the bracken 'feeds', 'holds' and 'incubates the bluebell/ released from the woodland', challenges the species' identity as an invasive, unwanted plant – managed and contained through bracken clearance schemes. This alliance of an undesirable species with a charismatic, heritage woodland flower challenges a selective valuation of the natural world. Metaphorically, the symbiosis of the bluebell and the bracken addresses the insider/outsider dichotomy which pervades the poetry of the mainstream Cumbrian canon. William Wordsworth and Norman Nicholson validated their poetic depictions of Cumbria through their status as insiders. My poetic depiction of White Moss overturns this division by illustrating the ecosystem's ability to adapt and change; the mesh of species incorporates both ancients and exiles.

The sequential poetry in *Forensic Traces* reflects and reinforces the theme of symbiosis, the poems of 'Lichens: Magnified', 'Stonehenges' and 'Equinox' are interconnected both thematically and structurally. The walks of White Moss Common created a pattern of reappearing themes and ideas across a number of visits. I recognised the presence of repetition when re-reading the observational notes recorded onsite. The use of sequential poetry retained this pattern; isolating these observations into individual poems would have weakened these connections and negated the importance of multiplicity, reproduction and repetition in the ecosystem. This ecological theme celebrates recurrence as the 'poet replaces the great Romantic myth of originality, of the poet as a genius, with a more humble image of the poet as a re-user, a recycler of words, images and ideas' (Tarlo, *Ground Aslant* 15). The role of the poet is thus redefined from creator to discoverer; agency is reassigned to the natural world. My use of found text in 'II' of 'Stonehenges' echoes the poetic themes of regeneration and recycling in the poem's form:

a week later, a sign: VANDALISM IS A CRIME

PLAIN CLOTHES POLICE OPERATE IN THIS AREA

The excerpt originates from a police notice displayed in White Moss Common, the capitalising denotes the inclusion of a separate, authoritarian voice within the poetic narrative. This found text intentionally creates a tonal change, the voice of authority impinges on the voice in my poetry echoing vandalism's intrusion on the safety of the Lake

District as a sheltered, protected space. Form and structure thereby reinforce the theme of symbiosis. The sequences of interconnected poems metaphorically represent the symbiotic links between the micro-life and visible species of the ecosystem.

A parasite 'obtains nutrients at the expense of the host organism, which it may directly or indirectly harm' ("Parasite. n"). In *Forensic Traces,* this imbalanced relationship is the metaphor for human interaction with the ecosystem. On reflection, this original concept encapsulates the current climate of environmental debate; it imagines human connection to the land as wholly detrimental. Robert Macfarlane's 2016 *Guardian* article, "Generation Anthropocene: How humans have altered the planet for ever", expresses his study into the geological impact of human life on ecology and the creative response to this global political issue. Macfarlane explores the ecological footprint as a 'long term signature on the strata record' ("Generation Anthropocene"). The former quarry and agricultural buildings of White Moss allude to this indelible human 'signature'. However, I also encountered instances of human constructions re-forming into ecological habitats. These uncreating buildings illuminate a broader, more nuanced interplay between people and place. The resultant poems depict a mesh of vandalism, construction, land management and regeneration; human interactions span the symbiotic spectrum.

The 'Stonehenges' sequence explores the human interaction with White Moss Common in the landscape's past and present. My walks revealed traces of the human lives worked and lived on the Common and it is these impressions which form the basis of this poetic sequence. The title alludes to the afterlife of man-made structures, the poems capture former buildings in varying states of metamorphosis; as they dilapidate, they adopt new shapes, forms and purposes. The glimpses of architectural relics permeate these poems: the 'tomb-stone gatepost/ lowers like a shadow', the 'new bridge harnessed on/ a skeleton'. The images of 'Future grafted to past' are concise; the observations are economic to reflect the fragmentary and incomplete traces of former structures. The third poem of the sequence captures the Bothy's transition from agricultural shelter to ecological habitat. Degeneration is shown to be a process of regeneration, as the derelict Bothy collapses it adopts a new role in the habitat:

> The fourth wall of the Bothy
> melts into grass, stones scatter like loose change

its tenant is juvenile

a young hazel alight with catkins

roofless – it lets the sun in

The dereliction of the building echoes the ecological process of decay in the earlier autumn poem 'network': 'Decay is a retrieval/ an unthreading of cells/ the harvest of the underground'. I depict this ruin as an evolving habitat, regenerating and supporting new growth. This re-imagines a Romantic trope, evident in Percy Shelley's 'Ozymandias' and Wordsworth's engagement with the ruins of Tintern Abbey. The afterlife of industrial and agricultural structures is further explored in 'Rydal Caves': the 'microbes reclaim rock' as the walls of the former quarry site become a substrate for algae. These poems depict an ecosystem adapting to and enveloping human activity. The buildings are animated, their perceived obsolescence is challenged by their new role as symbiotic habitats. These poems deconstruct a static presentation of the landscape, even the most solid structures are on the move; either in the process of dismantling or via the life forms which populate their surfaces. In this way, the continual adaptation of the habitat challenges Macfarlane's idea of the Anthropocene in his article. The Bothy and quarry emblemise historic, exploitative encounters with the land, as a poet I capture their adaptation into beneficial ecological habitats: the parasite becomes a symbiont.

In 'Sediments', an encounter between human life and the ecosystem projects into the woodland's future. Plastic permeates the landscape of this poem, from the 'faecal sacks' suspended in the trees and 'shoved in crooks' to the polythene tubes concealed under stones and pathways. This underground network is an artificial counterpart to the delicate and symbiotic web of fungi and tree roots explored in the opening autumnal poems. Water is juxtaposed to plastic, in a symbolic tension between organic and inorganic matter. The rhythmic description of water channels a route through stone gullies:

Fell water fills leaf wells

in itself and of itself

a trickle down the woodland slope

revives summer-dusted stones:

a waterfall in a hollow.

In contrast, a faltering rhythm depicts the absence of water from the plastic tubes of the woodland floor:

corrugated becks run dry

resist

plastic channels.

Absence underpins this poem: it is unpeopled, populated only by the litter these anonymous visitors leave in the trees' branches. The solitary sparrow 'answers/ its echo' in a disconcerting depiction of a conventionally communal species. In contrast to the other winter poems, 'Sediments' is an experience of silence and absence which foreshadows the closing lines:

Millenia from now:

plastic fossils in a silent forest

This haunting image departs from the collection's active, sensory and sonic experience of the ecosystem. The seemingly small contributions to litter manifest into ecological risk; the reader is exposed to the vulnerability of a landscape often perceived to be sheltered and protected. Without an end-stop, this image of the future is an inconclusive one as the open-ended closing line leaves an opportunity for change. I focus on the intricacies of the ecosystem, as it is with these fragile organisms that the future of the woodland lies.

I used interdisciplinary research to provide a specialist insight into often overlooked species, this accuracy was essential given my poetic focus on the smallest organisms of an ecosystem. Lichens, mosses and liverworts are species which characterise ancient, Atlantic woodlands in Cumbria. As a poet, my interest in these organisms lies in their complex, symbiotic make-up and the role of lichens as indicators of the health, diversity and variety of the ecosystem. To the untrained eye an entire colony of lichens can appear to be only a colouration on a stone wall, or a leaf-like clump on the twigs and branches of a tree. They

are the cryptic archivists of the ecosystem. I contacted the Senior Project Officer, April Windle, of Plantlife's LOST project in the early stages of my research. April accompanied me on a walk of White Moss to identify species of lichens, mosses and liverworts. This scientific approach enriched my writing by introducing me to the use of a hand lens. These observations inspired the 'Lichens: Magnified' sequence. Magnification enabled me to observe the texture, form and shape of these micro-habitats; this fieldwork method illuminates a lesser-known species. In 'VI' of 'Lichens: Magnified' zooming in on a clump of moss reveals 'miniature bottle brush spires/ colonise the bark: extrapolate the sun'. In this way, my creative process is an evolution of Dorothy Wordsworth's acute and perceptive vision. My interdisciplinary research progresses the precedent established by nature poets Alice Oswald and David Morley. Furthermore, this meshing of disciplines transports the concept of symbiosis from theme to practice, replacing the 'single sovereign speaker' (Tarlo "Women Ecopoetics" 18) with an accumulation of multiple insights. Anna Selby identifies the shared process of 'observation, precision and a desire to communicate their subject vividly' (Selby) in both poetic and scientific studies of the natural world. In the current climate of environmental debate, encouraging wonder and interest in the ecosystem is integral, as a contemporary practitioner my interdisciplinary research fulfils the ethical undertones of my poetry.

The key challenge in the composition of the 'Lichens: Magnified' sequence was to enliven my depiction of this underappreciated group of organisms. In the first draft, the representations of the lichens were largely visual, ultimately flattening these organisms into static, two-dimensional images:

at the spit of the river

the lichen of the water's edge

Peltigera collina floury dog lichen

is the colour of stone,

a deep, rich black

pales to slate grey fringes

bleeds into water

These first drafts lacked dynamism and disrupted the movement which is an integral element of the wider poetry collection. My supervisor referred me to Alice Oswald's *Weeds and Wildflowers*, in which the poet attaches a character to each of the flora and fauna of her poetry collection. Oswald's use of human voices in her depiction of the natural world establishes a continuity between humans and wildlife. However, it could be argued that the use of personification contains the natural world within a human frame thus imposing territories on the ecosystem. In order to situate the human as part of, rather than ruler of, the ecosystem my poetry depicts non-human species as equally important but characteristically distinct. In this way, the natural world retains an independent agency which is potentially contested by framing it through human characterisations. This posed the writing challenge of depicting these active, growing species whilst retaining their distinctive, non-human identity. I returned to my observational notes to re-draft and re-enliven my depiction of the lichens:

splayed against stones

curtaining the river, wet

Peltigera collina **floury dog lichen**

is a lead-black ruff, collaring pebbles

the blue-grey margins of its lobes

fringe baying water

The verbs 'splayed', 'collaring' and 'baying' transform the previously visual image into a textured and embodied description. The onomatopoeic 'ruff' animates the lichen by capturing both its visual appearance on the rocks 'curtaining' the river and echoing the associations of its common name, 'dog lichen'. This re-drafting enabled me to render the other-worldly appearance of these minute, unique life-forms. The combination of experimental free form and textured, three-dimensional descriptions encapsulates these lichenous organisms as an active, essential but distinctive kingdom of species. The inclusion of the Latin names captures this other-worldly quality both orally and textually with their unfamiliar appearance and sound. The names contribute to the unique identity of each organism as I attempt to negate the taxonomising effect of a catalogue of names. Rejuvenating this poetic technique contributes to the depiction of a dynamic ecosystem as opposed to a static list of specimens and species; as previously identified in the work of

Harriet Fraser and Autumn Richardson and Richard Skelton. The 'Lichens: Magnified' sequence enmeshes science-inspired observation with my walking-writing methodology. The symbiotic identity of the organisms is reflected in this interdisciplinary approach: the association of the fungus and an alga is depicted in this intermingling of naturalism and poetry.

In *Forensic Traces,* the lesser-known narratives of White Moss Common encompass the forgotten industrial heritage which has been largely overshadowed by the area's connection to the Wordsworths. In order to gain an insight into this underrepresented history I contacted the Grasmere History Group. Upon their recommendation I was able to access Ian Tyler's book *Thirlmere Mines and the Drowning of the Valley* and Neil Honeyman's *Old Grasmere and Rydal.* This research revealed the presence of a workers' encampment at White Moss. These men constructed the submerged aqueduct which transports water from Thirlmere reservoir to Manchester. This underacknowledged history is the subject of 'Navigators' as the literary and industrial lives of the common collide:

The people who catch the ear are
        walking, in the white space of her journal, orbiting
margins
from Cockermouth, Coniston, Keswick, Manchester
        they trudge the line of the road
some with an ass, others alone. Followed

in time, by
Lang, Shaw, Massey, Hyne, Barn, Huddleston, Donelly, Barums, Davies, Robert, Roberts, Watt, Watkins, King, McNeal and Brown

The poem redresses the representation of rural life in this distinctive region of Cumbria, under-documented working-class narratives are re-integrated into the poetic study of White Moss. The apparitional walkers who open the poem emerge from the pages of Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals.* Rural poverty is a marginal presence in her accounts, these passers-by include the 'bow-bent' (D. Wordsworth, *Grasmere Journal* 64) letter-carrier encountered on a group walk to White Moss in February 1802. The rural poor

of the *Grasmere Journals* are largely voiceless and always on the move. Movement unites these historical apparitions to the industrial workers in 'Navigators'. My poetry identifies the synergy between these travelling figures; walking as a physical and economic necessity as opposed to creative endeavour. The poem seeks to illuminate the contribution of these forgotten lives, the listing of their names – found in Tyler's *Thirlmere Mines and the Drowning of the Valley* – is an act of memorialisation in the poem. The traces of the navigators lie 'written deep in the vein' of rock as the physical counterpart to the textual signature of the Wordsworths, famously inscribed on the '*Rock of Names'*. The poem closes with the continued flow of water 'through the submerged aqueduct/ under our feet' as these lesser-known lives continue to shape the land they lived, worked and travelled through.

The overlooked human histories of White Moss Common are fragmented and incomplete in *Forensic Traces.* In much the same manner as the glimpses of minute symbiotic connections, the partial revelation of these underappreciated narratives attempts to avoid the assumption of an omniscient, authoritative poetic speaker. In the 'Stonehenges' poem, '*The whereabouts of the Cascade Hotel',* the deconstruction of the list form explores this resistance of the territorial, conqueror poetic narrative. Textual research into White Moss' industrial past introduced me to 'The Cascade Hotel': an old photograph of this grandly named refreshment hut, dated 1905, features in Neil Honeyman's *Old Grasmere and Rydal*. The resultant poem explores the overgrown edge of the common, gathering and interrogating the fragmentary 'clues' to the building's existence:

a. Stone chunk steps, promise a destination
b. uneven, jarring deep to shallow
e. like the hull of a ship, a stone cornice
i. land, in a concave impression

d. within sight of the cascade, water tapping from the quarry from which it takes its name
h. Bramble and scrub-

c. steep gradient
j. bowled

f. emerging from the parameter of the road-wall, that
k. a bench bears

g. incises the common.

l. an inscription

m. no further clues or
n. proof

These disjointed observations are fragmented by the list format; in a disruption of the form's conventions, coherency and order is replaced by confusion and ambiguity. The jumbling of the sequence further compounds the tone of uncertainty as the navigational course of the poem is repeatedly disrupted by the increasing blank space and disjointed observations. Furthermore, the deconstruction of a human framework reflects my own resistance of poetic ownership or possession of the land. The trope of the list poem is hereby regenerated through the connection of form and structure to concept. This disorientating poem reflects my own uncertainty as to whether I really was observing the ruins of the Cascade Hotel. This limited insight shares a parity with radical landscape poetry, which is defined as 'a poetry full of questions, uncertainties, self-doubts and self-corrections' (Tarlo, *Ground Aslant* 12). My inclusion of doubt undermines the poetic, and thus human, authority over the land. The poem ends in a failure to find 'further clues or/ n.proof', it is an embodiment of the 'illusion of discovery' mentioned in the collection's opening, 'Common Land'. The ecosystem therefore retains its agency as the building remains elusive; the promise of the poem's assertive title is never realised. This formal experimentation contributes to the creation of doubt and uncertainty; the incomplete insight resists human ownership of the land.

Finally, incomplete and partial insight is mirrored in the structure of *Forensic Traces*, which begins in autumn and ends in spring. The transition between these seasons is indicated by the use of pace and rhythm which acoustically differentiates autumn, winter and spring. The reader is thus embedded in the seasonal transitions, it is a shared experience rather than a narrated description. The opening autumnal poems introduce the dynamic process of regeneration, as in 'Mushrooms', interwoven with the season's turbulent weather. The use of enjambment and alliteration in 'rain-thick beck' initiates these fast-paced poems:

glut of water, fall of fell

spray

surfing over cornices

The lichen sequence slows this fast-paced rhythm, the immersion is achieved through magnified, zoomed in observation rather than the textured soundscapes of autumn. The transition into winter is dominated by longer poems, with an increased use of blank space. These aerated poems occupy a greater space on the page, a textual reflection of the leafless winter canopy. There is metaphorical space for reflection and meditation, undercut with the activity of germinating life-forms. In contrast, spring is encapsulated in a series of compact poems. The density of minute descriptions embodies the acceleration and multiplicity of growth in this second equinox, as demonstrated in 'I' of the 'Equinox' sequence:

strokes of flesh-thick green wild garlic cover root and mulch hold white starbursts gestating in pods sponge-pad primrose leaf light-yellow flower narcissus take hold of a root (mutter of bluebells) lime green needles on waist-high trees between holly and birches

The use of pace translates my multi-sensory observations of White Moss into audible, three-dimensional poems. In this way, pace and rhythm combine with the use of sequential poems and formal experimentation to embody the physicality of the landscape. This ultimately enlivens my poetic depiction of this historically picturesque landscape. On reflection, the refinement of my observational writing process meant that the later poems are more textured and sensory than the opening poems. The differentiation between autumn and winter could be further expressed by a more significant exploration of soundscapes. This could be achieved by returning to the Common this autumn, with the note-gathering skills I have expanded and developed throughout this thesis. There is the creative scope to enmesh observations of the same autumn to spring period with the current body of work. The thematic interweaving of White Moss' past, present and future would thereby be reflected in the composition of the collection itself. The structure and composition of *Forensic Traces* crucially contributes to my study of this interconnected ecosystem. My poetic nature-narrative transports the reader through a dynamic Cumbrian habitat which is actively evolving and continues to change.

POETIC DEVELOPMENT

As this thesis illuminates lesser-known Cumbrian poetics and living organisms, in both the poetic study of White Moss and the critical analysis of marginalised poets, I felt it was important to diversify the approach to sharing my work and creative practice. Whilst pursuing publication within established poetry circles I concurrently sought opportunities to disseminate my work in non-specialist, interdisciplinary settings, thus broadening the reach of my creative research. This included publishing a blog post on the multi-genre Cumbria-based creative online platform, Wild Women Web. This blog post, 'Meandering', shared my walking-writing methodology and explored the role of slow, considered and attuned observation of the natural world. Wild Women's contributors include writers, artists, poets and musicians united by an interest in the Cumbrian landscape. As a writer and researcher, composing work for a public audience challenged me to write outside the academic style I am most practiced in. In this formative stage of my work, explaining my research methodology in an accessible and engaging way aided me in refining my written and creative practice.

Interdisciplinary research with Plantlife informed aspects of my observational writing practice and the resultant poetry collection, *Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight.* This relationship with the LOST project inspired me to arrange a public engagement event in partnership with April Windle, the Senior Project Officer. I delivered two nature poetry workshops at the Lake District National Park Visitor Centre, Windermere alongside the LOST Photography Exhibition which featured three of my poems (from the 'Lichens: Magnified' sequence). The workshops focused on exploring the small, underacknowledged species of the natural world with activities including freewriting; close-up sensory observations (using hand lenses and microscopes); soundscapes in the onsite woodland and a final, longer writing challenge to create a three-dimensional poem. Sharing my own methods was an opportunity to communicate my creative research to a mixed group of participants. As it was a collaborative event, attendees included poets, literature university students, ecologists, conservationists and visitors to the area. I began the session with a group discussion activity which compared and contrasted the work of Dorothy Wordsworth and Harriet Fraser, thereby highlighting two examples of the lesser-known Cumbrian poets my critical research explores. The activities created a positive, collective environment which

encouraged participants to share their own works-in-progress with the group. This collective approach to exploring the natural world through poetry fulfilled my project's ethos: an interconnected, shared experience of a landscape which equalises the poet with the reader and, in turn, the interwoven ecosystem humans are a part of. These group workshops embody the companionable tone of the immersive walking experience in *Forensic Traces.* This public engagement event embodies the ethical undertone of my research, to inspire appreciation and recognition for the overlooked, minute species of a Cumbrian landscape. This exploration of an interconnected ecosystem raises awareness of its fragility. I have developed as a poet and researcher by engaging with a broader audience, outside of university and poetry circles.

My development as a poet has been crucial throughout the course of study, my engagement with professional literary circles has provided me with the opportunity to establish the beginnings of a literary career. In the early stages of the research process, my attendance at local and regional literary festivals – Kendal Mountain Literature Festival, Words by the Water (Keswick) and Lancaster Litfest – familiarised me with this professional platform for sharing work, launching and promoting projects. Networking at these events introduced me to festival organisers and my literary peers within the North West region. These connections will be integral in pursuing opportunities to perform and contribute to these events in the future.

A short performance of a selection of my poems at the launch of the Magma Loss Issue held at the University exposed my work to a mixed audience of lecturers, students and the local poetry community. I was subsequently invited to perform a guest reading at the Damson Poets monthly poetry event in Preston. This reading was placed within the period of writing and drafting, performing these works-in-progress enabled me to experiment with oral delivery; an integral element of these sensory, immersive poems.

A foundational stage in developing my poetic career is achieving publication in poetry magazines. Recognition by these outlets expands my reputation within the poetic community whilst potentially creating a readership for future pamphlet or book publications. Throughout the course of study, I submitted a selection of these poems for consideration by a variety of editors and have successfully achieved publication in: *Ink, Sweat and Tears* (online) and *Magma.* Inclusion in the 'Inspired' feature in *Magma*'s Loss

Issue provided me with the opportunity to disseminate a selection of my poems whilst sharing the concepts, context and ethical motivations underpinning my work; the poems are accompanied by an interview. Sharing my creative research via these platforms has broadened the reach of my work and has initiated the building of my poetic and research profile. The constructive process of selection, submission and feedback has furthered my experience in publication procedures. I have gained additional experience in reflecting and assessing my creative and theoretical work whilst preparing for publication. I aim to submit this collection of poems for consideration in pamphlet competitions such as Mslexia and Primers, which result in publication by Seren and Nine Arches Press respectively. These avenues also provide mentoring, promotion and a programme of readings which will be crucial in my development as an early career poet.

CONCLUSION

Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight is an exploratory walk through an iconic landscape which replaces orbital territories for an immersive, observational encounter with the interconnected species of this dynamic ecosystem. The subversion of territory is reinforced by the structure of the collection, which is framed between autumn and spring. The absence of the summer season is an instance of incompletion. The speaker walks the reader away from White Moss Common, leaving a significant period in the year of the landscape undocumented. The final poem asks the reader to 'wait for winter', to let 'the fossils/incubate in seeds'. The concealment of this final season restricts the speaker and reader's insight into the life of the ecosystem; it is a resistance of human possession of the land. This levels the human with the other species of White Moss by avoiding the completion and totality of a cyclical poetic structure. The ancestry of my poetic approach has been identified in the lesser-known poets of Cumbria's alternative literary past and present. Their focus on minutiae through scientific studies and walking has been progressed with my use of interdisciplinary research and a slow, observational walking practice. My formal experimentation shares the immersive walking experience with the reader; the parity between my own work and radical landscape poetry illustrates my poetic contribution to contemporary Cumbrian poetry. This thesis is a readmittance of lost and underappreciated voices: from the microscopic species whose symbiotic connections sustain the fragile and dynamic ecosystem, to marginalised female poets and the travelling tenants of the land whose lives have left their traces not on paper, but on stone.

This thesis has provided me with the creative and critical scope to explore a Cumbrian habitat beyond the mainstream narrative of heritage tourism. The poetry collection, *Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight,* animates and thus rejuvenates a depiction of this well-trodden land. The past, present and future enmesh with human and non-human interactions. White Moss Common's under-represented industrial history is intertwined with microscopic species and their underappreciated contribution to the ecosystem; it is a symbiosis which is at once literal and metaphorical. My walking-writing practice combines with a science-inspired approach to observation; the hand lens is, to some extent, a creative and contemporary re-imagining of Dorothy Wordsworth's acute perception and Beatrix Potter's artistic and scientific studies of algae and fungi. The poetry collection is in itself,

symbiotic. These individual fragments of sensory observation, walking and reflection constellate into one interconnected web much in the same manner as the ever-changing ecosystem they explore. The re-admittance of lost and underappreciated historic narratives is crucial in an area so defined by its literary heritage; a past which continues to shape how the land is managed, protected and enjoyed today. This thesis contributes to this illumination of forgotten voices whilst recognising that there is still much to do in this field. The extensive archive of dialect poetry held by the Armitt Museum is suggestive of the region's rich and submerged literary heritage. *Forensic Traces of Falling Sunlight* illuminates the depth and diversity of one Cumbrian habitat and its interconnected species; the ecosystem is revealed as both dynamic and delicate. In deconstructing the static, picturesque perception of the Lake District its fragility is also exposed. The poetry magnifies the foundations of the ecosystem, Cumbria's characteristically grand fells and lakes are substituted for an accumulation of minute species.

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