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# **Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley: From Local to Global Ecology**

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## Abstract

This thesis undertakes an ecofeminist analysis of two prominent novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) and Mary Shelley (1797-1851). The six primary texts that I put under an ecofeminist lens are Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797), along with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818, revised 1831) and *The Last Man* (1826). Ecofeminism investigates the dual marginalization and exploitation of women and nature. It seeks to expose the mechanisms whereby nature is feminized and women are naturalized, in order to rationalize the secondary position of women and nature in patriarchal cultures. Radcliffe and Shelley both demonstrate the ways in which binaries of man/woman and nature/culture are constructed. They also reveal the subversive potential that women can exploit to reformulate the gender-biased dualities. Through this analysis, I argue that the footprint of modern environmental philosophy can be detected in these two Romantic writers who argued for developing an eco-identity whose existence is bound with physical nature and the environment. By revisiting these dichotomies, they advocate for a liminal space where old binaries merge dialogically and a new concept of being, a non-hierarchical ontology, is born. This emergent ontology shatters binaries such as human/nonhuman and natural/artificial, reminding us of our interconnectedness with the earth and all its inhabitants. Furthermore, the historical distance between Radcliffe and Shelley marks the transformation of England to a more industrialized and urbanized society which is well-reflected in their conception of nature. Radcliffe's local place-bound environmental ethics shifts to a more cosmopolitan idea of environmentality in Shelley, where issues of pollution and global warming are more explicitly expressed, pointing to the advent of a new geological epoch for the earth called the Anthropocene. This research accentuates the significance of environmentalism as a cultural phenomenon which must be explored and communicated through the stories we tell about our planet.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 A Trajectory of Ecocriticism

The current research project adopts an ecofeminist approach in order to analyse two seminal writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley. Both authors are credited with voicing important issues pertaining to women at the time. Through my research, I will emphasise the connection between feminism and ecological thought, identify mutual ideological territory that they share, then consider how these insights can be applied to contemporary concerns about nature and the environment. The primary texts that I focus on include Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797). Since these works of Radcliffe follow similar structural patterns, I will examine them all in this project but place a greater emphasis on *Udolpho* and *The Italian* as they are her two most prominent novels. I also discuss Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818, revised 1831) and *The Last Man* (1826) as they are especially conversant with environmental issues.

Environmental catastrophes, extreme weather conditions, droughts, perpetual strife over natural resources, and concerns about their depletion have all become staple news in recent years. All such disorders are manifestations of a paradigmatic shift in our relationship with the earth, our habitat. The worldwide scope of climate change and global warming has impacted upon our everyday lives and has visibly altered our consumption habits in multiple ways ranging from the houses we live in to the food we put into our bodies. Likewise, the cultural response to this phenomenon has not been any less visible or significant, especially over the past two decades. A torrent of movies, documentaries, animations, stories, novels and memoirs dealing with environmental issues is an apt testimony to a growing ecological consciousness.

Despite increased public awareness of these critical problems, in 2003 Bill McKibben, the renowned American environmentalist, diagnosed a pathological apathy among literati and artists towards climate change. He lamented a 'failure of imagination' to respond to one of the

most shattering calamities that has befallen humanity, a calamity whose grave consequences are yet to unfold. He expresses grave concern over the insufficient response on the part of writers regarding the phenomenon of climate change, when he mentions that “global warming has still to produce an Orwell or a Huxley, a Verne or a Wells, a *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or a *War of the Worlds*” (qtd. in Strauss 343). McKibben’s claim may appear to be exaggerated, in light of the fact that ecological concerns did, indeed, trigger a reaction from writers which created a subgenre of science fiction which Dan Bloom called ‘climate-fiction’, usually abbreviated as ‘cli-fi’. Among the writers of such eco-fictions are notable names such as Margaret Atwood, Cormac McCarthy, Ian McEwan, Don DeLillo and Jeanette Winterson, who have all written novels classified as ‘cli-fi’. Some trace the origin of cli-fi back to the publication of *The Drowned World* by J. G. Ballard in 1962. Nevertheless, one can find nascent traces of eco-fiction as far back as the eighteenth century, when there was a rising concern about the dislocation of human from nature on account of the changing economic and social structure of society.

The growing gulf between human and nature is the very premise upon which ecocriticism is based. Ecocriticism has been considerably transformed since its early days in the 1990s. In effect, William Rueckert was the first person to use the term ‘ecocriticism’ in 1978 defined as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (107). The most familiar definition, which is now more of a platitude, comes from Cheryll Glotfelty, who defines it as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical world” (xviii). At the core of both these definitions lies a shared agenda to re-engage the written text with the physical world as the theoretical tendencies of poststructuralism and postmodernism created a disconnect between texts and the world, resulting in abstraction.

Some works of ecological writing also sought to reengage their readers with the physical world in a non-abstract language. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 was one such book which delineated the effects of pesticides on landscape. The book merged scientific research

with apocalyptic tropes in order to raise public awareness. The book was hugely successful and left an enduring mark on the environmental movements of the time. Apart from this book, Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973) served as an important precedent in a growing canon of ecocritical works as well. Williams's text addresses the binary of nature and culture by debunking the myth that the country is an untouched and pristine refuge from the city which is marred by modernization. In fact, the intersection between politics, economics, culture and nature is so relevant to the field of environmental studies that Williams is deservedly called the "founder of ecocriticism and ecocultural studies" (Giblet 923), twenty years before ecocriticism was formally established in academia. Apart from a disinclination for theoretical abstraction, ecocriticism also promised a consilience between humanities and science as the application of ecological principles introduced new knowledge and a new form of engagement with science. The discipline of ecocriticism formally emerged in the humanities in the early 1990s with the establishment of its journal known as *ISLE, Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, and the publication of seminal books such as Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) and Cheryll Glotfelty's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996).

Ecocriticism drew the attention of feminists as well, as they identified common ground in their conceptions of environmental issues. Therefore, ecocritical feminism, or 'ecofeminism', as it is called, maintains that the problems of the earth cannot be separated from the struggles, problems and priorities of women. The term 'ecofeminism' was coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne, who believed that environmental problems such as overpopulation and the depletion of natural resources were sanctioned by a male mindset (qtd. in Gates 8) which had similarly dominated and exploited women for centuries. She also aligns women with nature, because women have traditionally been better caregivers and have recently emerged at the forefront of environmental protests (9-10). Maria Mies and Vandana

Shiva also follow the same line of reasoning in associating ecological issues with a patriarchal system. They define ecofeminism as a

. . . woman-identified movement . . . [that sees] the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors, as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our bodies and our own sexuality and which depend on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way (14).

Therefore, the same system of patriarchy that has marginalized women for centuries is the ultimate cause of environmental plights, and women's liberation cannot be truly achieved unless the ideology of domination is addressed and rectified: hence the connection between women and nature.

The association of women and nature has been an integral part of western history for centuries. Carolyn Merchant asserts that the whole idea of an organic nature attuned to humans' needs is rooted in the identification of nature as a "nurturing mother" or "a kindly benevolent female" (*Death* 2). The organic model of the earth paved the way for a holistic concept of the earth wherein all living organisms were interconnected and interdependent. Such a conceptualization justified a sanctification of mother earth, since damage to the earth was construed as afflicting a caring mother. As a consequence, humans adopted a more sustainable and ecologically-centred approach to their living environment. However, the social and economic paradigms of society gradually changed, and with this came a different image of the earth. The maternal discourse which framed the earth as a 'mother' was replaced with a conception of nature as disorderly (2). This change was accompanied by Enlightenment thinking and Mechanistic science, promulgated by Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, which viewed the world as a machine or an instrument which could be utilized for the benefit of humans. In this vein, the organic model which was a "cultural constraint" to humans' environmentally damaging actions was substituted with the mechanical model of "cultural

sanctions” for mastery and domination over nature. Merchant thus describes this transformation:

The process of mechanizing the world picture removed the controls over environmental exploitation that were an inherent part of the organic view that nature was alive, sensitive, and responsive to human action. Mechanism took over from the magical tradition the concept of the manipulation of matter but divested it of life and vital action. The passivity of matter, externality of motion, and the elimination of the female world soul altered the character of cosmology and its associated normative constraints. In the mechanistic philosophy, the manipulation of nature ceased to be a matter of individual efforts and became associated with general collaborative social interests that sanctioned the expansion of commercial capitalism (111).

Divesting the earth of life and sentience while re-positioning it as an inanimate object, expedited the exploitation of its resources. A ruthlessly mechanistic worldview essentially severed the bilateral bond between nature and humans. Instead, nature was remodelled as an atomized, lifeless and passive entity which was subservient and existed only to aid human progress. This view, according to Merchant, functioned as the equivalent of a death warrant to nature (193) as it only served to reinforce the mechanism of power and domination whose deleterious effects on the environment are still tangible as long as this paradigm still prevails.

Another crucial factor that contributed to the collapse of perspectives that advocated for the reciprocity between humans and nature was the introduction of Cartesian ideology, which promoted the duality of mind and body. René Descartes’s central rationale is a clinical separation of the rational mind from the ‘irrational’ body, while simultaneously demarcating humans from ‘mere’ animals. His motto ‘I think, therefore I am’ is a dictum for the separation of rationality from irrationality. As a result, culture was separated from nature; humans were estranged from nonhumans while the cerebral was decreed superior to the corporeal; hence, the inferiority and exploitation of the corporeal world of nature and the nonhuman world. The

“hyperseparation” (Goodbody, “Ecocritical Theory” 71) of the two realms fortified the notion of an inert earth which lay at the disposal of rational and thinking human beings. The same binary underpinned by the same dualistic mode of thinking is, in great part, responsible for our environmentally harmful habits and mode of life.

The Cartesian binary also affords men the power to dominate women as the latter had been symbolically linked to emotion, corporeality and nature. In effect, the superiority of men is sanctioned by a patriarchal conceptual framework. Karen Warren believes that such a framework has five main features. It is a ‘value-hierarchical thinking’ system which assigns value to those on top of the hierarchy; it embraces ‘oppositional value dualisms such as culture/nature or male/female; it is a ‘power-over power’ system which reinforces the power of those on top; it is a ‘privilege’-based system where those who dominate enjoy privilege; finally, it creates a ‘logic of domination’ that subordinates the weak and perpetuates their exploitation and domination (46-47). Warren observes that women have been perpetually consigned to the subordinate side of the patriarchal binary which sanctions and justifies their exploitation. Given the continued conflation of women with nature, it comes as no surprise that patriarchy has instrumentally controlled and manipulated them both. In fact, Warren also argues that women and nature’s inferiority is manifested linguistically as well, whereby nature is feminized and its exploitation is framed in the language of rape and conquest (27) which serves as another index of the patriarchal logic of domination.

Val Plumwood, an Australian ecofeminist, argues along these same lines and points out that the root cause of subordination originates from classical Greek philosophy which assigns rationality to humans and privileges them over nonhumans in a manner that clearly resembles Cartesian duality. However, rationality belonged solely to men, while women were excluded from this psychological preserve. Thus, “the feminine, the emotional, the merely bodily or the merely animal, and the natural world itself” (“Nature, Self” 157) were dispossessed of reason, degraded, then forced to assume an inferior position. Anything that is linked with women and

nature is assumed to be inferior and less desirable than its masculine counterpart. Such constructions influence the socio-cultural fabric of society and are perpetuated to the extent that they are naturalized (Plumwood, *Feminism* 32) and taken for granted to maintain the domination. This hierarchically-loaded narrative is responsible for creating binaries that have erroneously accorded a self-proclaimed sovereignty resulting in humans ruling over nature; it is, indeed, rightly identified as being partly responsible for the degradation of nature.

Ecocriticism also seeks to address the same hierarchical system which is ingrained in the social and cultural collective psyche. Addressing a socio-cultural construct from an ecocritical perspective might be perceived as challenging, since ecocriticism was initially marked with a resistance to abstraction and theory while promising to bring us back to the physical text itself and its representation of the physical world. This is a double-edged source of weakness and strength. The disinclination towards theory has enabled ecocriticism to effectively address environmental issues by examining literary texts in a relatively accessible language. At the same time, its reluctance to deploy theory has hindered ecocriticism from a profound engagement that would create a cultural understanding of the causes and effects of environmental woes. Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) suffers from the distinct lack of a theoretical paradigm. In his later book, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), he addresses the lack of a theoretical foundation in ecocriticism by maintaining that ecocriticism is "more issue-driven than method or paradigm-driven" (*Future* 11), which is to say that environmental humanities mainly address specific topical or regional issues. This argument, however, has been vigorously challenged by Heise's *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* which calls for a global approach to environmental humanities. Buell divides the trajectory of ecocriticism into two periods, which he respectively demarcates into 'wave one' and 'wave two'. The first wave conceives of the environment as the 'natural environment', the very physical nature we live in, hence ecocriticism became synonymous with "the aims of earthcare" (21). First-wave ecocriticism is essentially tied in with an

organicist model which seeks to bring humans closer to the natural environment. The second wave is more inclusive and takes the “built environment” (22) into account and also acknowledges urban spaces. In effect, it constitutes a type of social ecocriticism which focuses on “issues of environmental welfare and equity of . . . the impoverished and socially marginalized” (112). Second-wave ecocriticism has provided a critical intervention which has diversified the discipline and granted it a greater degree of analytical sophistication. The breadth and scope of its range of concerns now include problems such as poverty which are inherently linked to the environment.

Despite ecocriticism’s recent involvement with social issues, its engagement with theory has not been an easy ride. The fuzziness in its approach has drawn significant criticism from its own practitioners. Dana Philips, for example, argues that ecocriticism’s reluctance to use theory treats it “as if it were a noxious weed that must be suppressed before it overwhelms more native and greener forms of speech” (579). Tallmadge and Harrington also believe that ecocriticism is “less a method than an attitude” (x), which echoes with Heise’s belief that ecocriticism is more unified “by virtue of a common political project than on the basis of shared theoretical and methodological assumptions” (“Hitchhiker” 536). In the uncharted waters of ecocritical theory, Simon Estok rightly calls for “more structural and methodological definition, less ambivalence and ambiguity, and more direction” (“Theorizing” 211) in ecocritical theories. One reason for such ambivalence about theory might be that theory will push back ecocriticism to a rigidly textual analysis rather than engaging with the ‘ontology of nature’ (Oppermann, “Discontent” 161). Indeed, most arguments of this nature suffer from one fundamental flaw; namely, there is an assumption that ecocriticism must espouse one rigidly defined theoretical paradigm, but the fact is that ecocriticism “should not be misconstrued as a singular theory but rather a movement with common concerns among its participants” (Murphy, *Ecocritical Explorations* 7). Ecocriticism has been able to broaden its repertoire by embracing diverse methods and paradigms to address a range of issues that relate to the

environment in one way or another. For instance, ecocriticism draws on geology, biology, meteorology, postcolonialism, race and gender theories to address issues such as extinction, animal rights, global warming, gender inequality, poverty and pollution in underdeveloped countries. Ecocriticism's diverse range of concerns and its potential to employ such theories serve to enrich it as a multi-faceted literary movement.

## 1.2 Ecofeminist Discontent: Flight from Nature

One important theory that has substantially contributed to ecocriticism is that of feminism: it is rightly called one of the major “catalysts” (*Future* 11) of ecocriticism by Buell. With all feminism’s diversity and offshoots, ecofeminists agree on one point that patriarchal thinking has entitled men to exploit and marginalize nature as well as women who are traditionally identified with it. Therefore, exposing the ideology that promulgates, perpetuates and justifies this connection has been a core agenda of ecofeminism. For instance, ecofeminists have been critical of one of the main strains of ecocriticism called ‘deep ecology’. The philosophical father of deep ecology, Arne Naess, argues for the acceptance of nature’s intrinsic value regardless of its utility for humans. Deep ecologists also point the finger at anthropocentrism as being responsible for environmental problems, and argue for a reduced and sustainable human population which can be in balance with natural resources of the earth. However, ecofeminists, such as Ariel Salleh, argue otherwise and point out the deficiency in deep ecologist thinking (339). Salleh suggests that it is not anthropocentrism, but androcentricism that is responsible for the degradation of nature. In fact, ecofeminists believe that deep ecology fails to address the patriarchal ‘logic of domination’ that subordinates both women and nature.

The connection between women and nature has also been a contentious one for ecofeminists. On the one hand, there is an essentialist tendency to advocate that there is an inherent relationship between women and nature. Essentialists believe that women’s affinity with nature stems from their physiological bodily functions such as childbirth and menstruation. As a result, the liberation of women is possible by embracing this connection rather than rejecting it. On the other hand, there are constructivists who deem this connection to be a socio-cultural construction with no inherent or natural link between the two categories. They accuse the first group of “biological essentialism” (Hay 76) and instead seek to sever all bonds with nature in order to emancipate women.

Feminists like Simone de Beauvoir stand against women's association with nature and maintain that women's secondary position, second sex, stems from body and biology. Sherry Ortner also delineates the process of women's identification with nature and argues that women have traditionally held an intermediary position higher than nature, but lower than culture. Thus, women can never belong to that superior realm of patriarchal culture and have to maintain their secondary social position (Tong 262-3). Some ecofeminists, however, such as Mary Daly and Susan Griffin, believe that women's association with nature needs to be reaffirmed. They claim that the problem lies in the fact that such a relationship has been neglected and undervalued, but contains liberatory potential, if embraced (265, 267). Both camps have valid arguments in this regard; however, women's identification with nature is partly biological and partly socio-cultural and therefore any solution should draw from both these positions.

Any attempt to either connect or disconnect with nature inevitably leads to the establishment of a dichotomy of nature/culture. Therefore, a better engagement with the issue of women's conflation with nature requires a redefinition of the very concept of nature. It is indeed one of the most difficult terms to define as noted by Raymond Williams. The term is currently an oxymoron as it is used in an oppositional manner in order to evoke something that must be guarded against capitalistic invasion, on the one hand, but is also something that conceals the negative ideological operations of a capitalistic society, on the other. The complication involved in defining nature started with two famous Romantic specialists: Alan Liu and Jonathan Bate. Liu believed that "there is no nature" because it is "the name under which we use the nonhuman to validate human" (38). He believed that nature was merely a political construct with no physical basis. In response Bate rejected Liu's total denial of nature, finding it futile to dismiss the very thing Romanticism is all about. Instead, he proposes that the term be "contested, not rejected" (*Romantic* 56) since humans have always interacted with nature.

The flimsiness of the term has also made many feminists veer away from this very concept as any association with it would lead to an inexorable slide into marginalization. Therefore, the common feminist proclivity was towards a “flight from nature” (Alaimo, *Undomesticated* 4). Indeed, such antipathy towards nature is not constructive since it is based on a fallacious notion that proximity to culture, as a dynamic entity, can lead to emancipation. This attitude misconstrues nature as an unchanging static actor that is at the mercy of external factors. The recent scholarship of ecofeminists such as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Heckman reveals nature to be an agentic actor. They take their lead mainly from Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas in *A Thousand Plateaus* which iconoclastically shatters centuries-old Western dualistic modes of representation by offering an alternative rhizomatic paradigm which ameliorates inequalities through the concept of assemblage. In fact, an assemblage becomes a conglomeration of human and nonhuman actors whose joint action and their distributed agencies effect events. A rhizomatic formulation then bridges the gap between nature/culture and human/nonhuman binaries. This enables ecofeminists to reconcile with nature once more in ways that do not present either women or the natural world as passive objects for patriarchal conquest.

A rhizomatic approach can also pave the way for a better recognition of the principle of holism, the interconnection of all entities in the world which is underlined in a sustainable ecology. In fact, Patrick Murphy argues ecofeminists should postulate that “humans are not only things-in-themselves and things-for-us but also things for others, including the stable evolution of biosphere” (*Ecofeminist Critiques* 22). This idea bears a close affinity with deep ecologists’ ethics of relationality, suggesting that all humans are embedded in their natural environment and they share their identity with nature. Relationality extends sympathy and consciousness to that which has often been positioned as the ‘other’ in hierarchical and dualistic modes of representation. It is, in fact, a recognition of the physicality of the world, the very goal ecocriticism strives towards. Murphy also urges ecofeminists to present an image

of “nature as a speaking subject, . . . as a character within texts with its own existence” (12). He specifically distinguishes between nature as an agentive character in the text and the Romantic idea of nature as a conduit for the poet’s self-expression. This is an important distinction, as other ecocritics like Lawrence Buell have also called for nature to be depicted as a ‘presence’ rather than a background ‘framing device’ (*Imagination* 7). Recent feminists, such as Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Nancy Tuana and Vicki Kirby, have created an “openness to the materiality of the world” (Oerlemans<sup>13</sup>) from which ecofeminists have benefited substantially. Acknowledging the interrelation of the materiality of nature and the human body effectively bridges the gap between essentialist and constructivist ecofeminists. Indeed, the borderline of nature and culture is blurred once the focus is placed on materiality of culture and nature where humans and nonhumans merge dialogically. Ecocriticism joined forces with new materialism to create a transformative ecofeminist politics, as advocated by Karen Warren, to develop a new conception of the nature/culture binary.

New materialism seeks to redefine the very concept of matter and transform it from an inert object to an agentive entity which has the potential to carry out actions that are usually affiliated with a human actor. In the new paradigm, the focus is on the agency of the nonhuman which is a radical shift from the prevalent Western conceptualization of agency and identity. It is, in fact, a reformulation of the Cartesian binary which now accords an interdependent ontology to both sides of the binary which now exist on a non-hierarchical line. New materialism also accentuates the material essence of both humans and nonhumans in an attempt to reveal the congruity and interconnection of the two. In fact, it is the life of things that begins to matter in a world where ‘things’ had traditionally been marked as passive, inert and dead matter. In this regard, the new alliance of ecocriticism with this paradigm, known as eco-materialism, gives a voice to nature which had been consigned the same role as that of a mere dead thing.

Eco-materialism engages with a wide range of disciplines, especially science and biology, to delineate the life and agency of things. It is basically embedded in ‘thing theory’ which demonstrates that objects become things when they exhibit their affect and power on their own terms. The ‘thing power’ or the agency of things calls for a whole different perspective towards objects and, by extension, towards the inferior side of these binaries. Thing power accords an active role to the nonhuman world and it becomes an actor in the processes through which we come to find meaning in the world. A striking example in this regard is a piece of rock beautifully described by Jeffrey Cohen:

A rock jumps. Every hiker has had the experience. The quiet woods or sweep of desert is empty and still when a snake that seemed a twig writhes, a skink that was bark scurries, leaves wriggle with insectile activity. This world coming to animal life reveals the elemental vibrancy already within green pine, arid sand, vagrant mist, and plodding hiker alike. When a toad that seemed a stone leaps into unexpected vivacity, its lively arc hints that rocks and toads share animacy, even if their movements unfold across vastly different temporalities. Just as the flitting hummingbird judges hiker and toad lithic in their stillness, a rock is within its properly geologic duration a wayfarer, a holder of stories of mountains that undulate and continents that journey the sea. The stone-- like toad discloses its intimacy to toad-- like stone. Both are part of a material world that challenges the organic bias of the adjective “alive” (“Foreword” ix).

In this account a vibrant image of nature is depicted where it is alive and its constituents are equally entitled to an ontology of being, an existence regardless of their status as nonhuman things or animals. They are all linked together in a web of interconnection with an emphasis on their materiality regardless of their ontological status. In effect, what revitalizes them is the very same materiality all beings in nature, whether human or nonhuman, share with one another which is the physical substances they are composed of.

Eco-materialism is a resurgence of an agentic nature as a speaking subject, rather than a background object to embellish the narrative. In eco-material terms, nature's vocalism is not a mere vehicle for the realization of the poetic voice of the human subject either. Instead, it replaces the agency of the human subject to reassert the thing power of nature and other nonhuman actors. In this sense, ecofeminism can ally itself with an eco-material conception of nature as nature is no longer a passive and marginalized maternal figure nor a concept solely affiliated with culture. The new concept of nature has its own existence as an entity which is a combination of both nature and culture, but resists rigid classification. In point of fact, its task is to blur all the distinctions and classifications in order to create a rhizomatic assemblage. A rhizomatic and agentic view of nature eradicates the issue of inferiority and superiority of the nature/culture binary and enables the ecofeminists to reconceptualise nature. This has been a feminist demand to bring about a transformative agenda in which nature or the nonhuman assumes the role of an actor which is neither subject nor object, but an actor in the constellation of other actors in the human and nonhuman assemblage. This is indeed a democratic ontology which echoes with the environmental philosophy of holism and interrelation of human and nonhuman entities of the world.

### **1.3 Ecocritical Radcliffe and Shelley: Literature Review**

Ecocriticism has been a favourite analytical tool in the hands of scholars of the Romantic period. The transformation of British society, especially with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, created an ecological awareness which might not have been explicitly identified as such at the time. Nevertheless, concerns over the rapid modernization and urbanization of society shared common ground with contemporary environmentalists. Romanticism is characterized by the search for authentic nature and humans' rapprochement with it. Indeed, Romanticism serves as a reaction against the Enlightenment which alienated humans from nature by undermining the organic vision of nature and replacing it with a mechanical and atomized one. Therefore, the Romantic call for a return to nature and a promise to depict a holistic vision of nature fits well into an ecological agenda. Jonathan Bate was the first scholar to have academically engaged with Romanticism from an ecocritical angle with a focus on poetry and the Heideggerian philosophy of dwelling. Despite devoting a few pages to Romantic novels, Bate's spotlight is mainly on poetry, especially that of William Wordsworth.

Strangely enough, most ecocritical scholarship of the Romantic period seems to be primarily fixated on male authors. Ecocritics like Timothy Morton, Kevin Hutchings, Karl Kroeber, and James McKusick emphasised male Romantic writers such as Coleridge, Blake, John Clare and Percy Shelley. It was the main impetus behind this project to focus on two iconic female novelists of the time in order to demonstrate representations of nature and characters' interaction with it. Ann Radcliffe from the end of the eighteenth century and Mary Shelley in the early nineteenth century present a revealing picture about changing attitudes towards nature in regards to the significant shift in the social fabric of life in England, the transition from an agrarian society to an industrial one. Interestingly enough, the time span between Radcliffe and Shelley approximately matches the time from the invention of James Watt's steam engine in the eighteenth century to the Industrial Revolution in the next century, a period which also made profound changes to the atmospheric patterns of the earth.

Eighteenth-century England was the recipient of the Enlightenment's legacy which fully manifested a highly mechanistic view of nature in industrialised England, during the nineteenth century.

All these profound transformations also affected the collective perception of the environment and its reciprocal relation to humans. Radcliffe and Shelley present two contrasting views of nature, each of which best reflects the socio-cultural milieu of their respective time. On the one hand, Radcliffe's vision of nature represents it as constant, stable while positioning it as a source of inspiration, courage and hope to her heroines. On the other hand, Shelley's configuration of nature is both unpredictable and rebellious. For Shelley, nature is not a unified entity, but becomes a conglomeration of different actors which are aligned with both nature and culture. Carolyn Merchant argues that there are three representations of nature in the Western psyche: original Eve, fallen eve, and mother Eve (*Fate of Nature* 22). The first and the last image pertain to a pristine, nurturing, and loving nature. The fallen Eve is riotous and disorderly, which ties in with Shelley's vision more closely. In spite of these differences, both visions foreshadow ecocritical precepts about the representation of nature, such as Buell's demand for foregrounding nature, and environmental philosophy which stresses the need to acknowledge the intrinsic value of nature and humans' connection with it.

Given the relevance of Radcliffe and Shelley, it is surprising that there has been very little ecocritical study of these two authors. There are passing references to Radcliffe in articles which point to the rich repository of ecocritical texts in the eighteenth century, such as Hitt's "Ecocriticism and the Long Eighteenth Century" (1999), Drew's "Teaching and Learning Guide for Ecocriticism" (2013), or Kröger's "Ecocriticism in the Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel" (2013). Only the last article devotes a few pages to Radcliffe's *Udolpho* to argue that the forest is an understudied space in Radcliffe. The presence of the forest along with Emily's bond with it can reveal an extent of ecological awareness in Radcliffe's time.

However, the essay simply points out that the heroine seeks solace in nature, but does not present a more profound examination of how this bond is indicative of an ecological sensitivity. Suzanne Roberts wrote her ecocritical PhD dissertation in 2008 on three authors, and includes Radcliffe in one chapter where she analyses the pastoral tropes to argue that women were barred from public spaces, including nature, which stymies a meaningful bond with the nonhuman world. Throughout her dissertation, Roberts also uses Annette Kolodny's classic women-and-land trope to reveal ways in which they are both controlled by men in Radcliffe, Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson.

Kathrine Marie McGee's PhD dissertation in 2014, entitled "Responsibility and Responsiveness in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley", specifically focuses on both Radcliffe and Shelley with some references to ecocriticism. Her discussion of Radcliffe mainly concerns the difference between upper class and lower class characters' response to supernatural events. She also argues that upper class society is more responsive to landscape and sympathetic to both nature and the poor peasants and servants. She demonstrates that landscape functions as a moral index whereby ennobled characters are able to bond with it. McGee also devotes one chapter to both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, in which she compares the two novels in the light of relations between the human and nonhuman. She argues that Shelley demonstrates the failure of communication between the human and nonhuman in *Frankenstein*. However, Lionel, as the last survivor of the human species in *The Last Man*, is successful in bonding with the nonhuman after the human species is wiped out. McGee's definition of the nonhuman world is only restricted to living creatures and animals and does not extend to material nature. Furthermore, she does not address the ecological implications of either the failure or success of such a relationship in sufficient detail. All in all, the dissertation is not so much couched in an ecocritical approach as it is in the political and social context in which Radcliffe and Shelley produced their works.

Mary Shelley has had more attention from ecocritics compared to Radcliffe. There are a few articles which address *Frankenstein* from this angle. Jonathan Bate (2000) offered the first ecocritical analysis of *Frankenstein* in which Victor Frankenstein represents culture and the Enlightenment spirit, but the creature embodies the Rousseauian state of nature. In Bate's view, it is Victor who is violating nature and his attempts to dominate nature fail, and he ends up being lonely and alienated from his society, similar to the creature he created. Bill Phillips' "Wet Ungenial Summer" (2006) addresses *Frankenstein* mainly in the context of the meteorological evidence of the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia in 1815 which led to global changes in the atmosphere with perceptible repercussions in terms of food supplies, crop failure and the ensuing political consequences like riots due to the lack of food. Phillips outlines the weather conditions of the stormy night when Mary Shelley and her companions stayed in Lord Byron's Villa where they decided to have a competition for writing the best horror tale. He relates that stormy night to the 'Year without Summer', referring to the unusually cold weather of summer as a result of Tambora's eruption. He also finds several references to strange weather conditions in *Frankenstein*, proving that the novel reflected climate concerns of the time. A more detailed account of Mount Tambora's eruption is presented in Gillen D'Arcy Wood's *Tambora: The Eruption That Changed the World* (2014) which recounts the global effects of the eruption and the resultant consequences such as epidemics and economic recession. The book makes references to literary works including *Frankenstein* in order to demonstrate the cultural and social responses to the calamity of climate changes. These two works specifically 'reframe' these Romantic texts, and subsequently link to other disciplines such as biology, geology and ecology to offer fresh insights ("Ecocriticism" 157). Another noteworthy ecocritical study of *Frankenstein* is Helena Feder's *Ecocriticism and the Idea of Culture* (2014) which devotes one chapter to the novel. Feder considers Victor and Walton to be the scientists who wish to transcend their world by conquering it. However, they find themselves surrounded by Arctic ice and water, extensions of material nature which remind them of their own limitations and materiality, of their being

embedded in the world and the impossibility of going beyond it. She also discusses the creature as an embodiment of the impact of the nonhuman world on human culture in ways that cannot be easily represented owing to their nonhuman ontological status. Timothy Morton's "Frankenstein and Ecocriticism" is a recent article in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein* (2016) which deconstructs the whole idea of nature where the creature is both natural and unnatural. He argues that this model of conceiving nature reveals why both the creature and Victor unsuccessfully seek a sense of belonging but nature's ambivalence does not allow for any identification.

Shelley's *The Last Man* is surprisingly among the least researched works of Romanticism. After the first publication of the book in 1826, the book was only published again in 1965, which might explain the dearth of scholarship on this work compared to *Frankenstein*. After its second publication, there was a resurgence of critical interest in the book, especially from feminist critics who studied the book as a biographical account of Mary Shelley herself who was despondent and lonely at the time of its composition. There is very little ecocritical study of *The Last Man*. One exception is Vicky Adams' PhD dissertation called "The Revolt of Nature" (2003). It is mainly a philosophical exploration of the influence of intellectual figures such as Percy Shelley, Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Burke, and Kant on Mary Shelley's views on women. As ecofeminism is also an exploration of diverse philosophical issues about women and nature, Vicky Adams indicates that Mary Shelley pointed towards many ecofeminist principles which were yet to be shaped in the twentieth century. Given the philosophical aspect of this study, the concept of nature is more of an abstract one dealing with humans' basic constitution rather than material nature. Lauren Cameron's "Questioning Agency" (2016) discusses the novel in terms of humans' failure to redress their needs with the natural world; this failure leads to their final destruction as they are merely a part of nature like any other species. Olivia Murphy's "Apocalypse Not Quite" (2016) approaches the novel as embodying a negative attitude towards apocalyptic and

Armageddon-based themes. She argues, instead, that Shelley envisages a chance for sustainability only in a world divested of humans.

Apart from the aforementioned research, few scholars have made a foray into an ecocritical reading of Radcliffe and Shelley. Nevertheless, these authors have been the subject of other trends of scholarship whose breadth and length is simply beyond the scope of this introduction. However, to put this project in perspective, a succinct survey of significant critical works on Radcliffe and Shelley will be presented. With regards to Radcliffe, as she is credited as the founder of the female gothic, I will review the main feminist readings of her novels along with some important psychoanalytic scholarship. I will similarly present a short review of the feminist readings of Mary Shelley as they pertain to the concerns of the current research.

The book which reawakened critical interest in Ann Radcliffe was David Punter's *The Literature of Terror* (1980) which presented a comparative study of Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. Given that the study of Romantic literature was focused on male authors and poets, the renewed interest in Radcliffe makes more sense considering the rise of a revisionist feminist criticism which identified the male prejudice that informed the reading of the literary canon. Radcliffe was deemed one of the founders of the school of terror and horror in gothic literature. Radcliffe is known for her 'explained supernatural' which refers to her tendency to explain the surreal and bizarre incidents with a return to reason by providing a logical explanation. Punter places Radcliffe as a central author with her own particular aesthetics in the Romantic literary culture. Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976) was another work which placed Radcliffe at the heart of feminist literary criticism. Moers coined the term 'female gothic' to refer to gothic literature written by women in the eighteenth century (90). She argues that Radcliffe created a whole different tradition whereby a "woman is examined with a woman's eye" (109), which influenced future gothic writers like Mary Shelley. She also credited Radcliffe with creating a female "traveling heroism" (122) by creating traveling

females who “became a feminine substitute for the picaresque” (126). Moreover, Radcliffe’s orphaned or estranged heroines suffer the tyranny of patriarchy at the hands of villains, from which they ultimately emerge triumphant. Therefore, Radcliffe is the apogee of a female consciousness who conveyed women’s plights to her public and influenced Mary Wollstonecraft’s feminist writings as well.

Feminist psychoanalytical scholarship has addressed Radcliffe’s female gothic as well from the perspective of the mother-daughter bond. One of the seminal articles in this regard is Holland and Sherman’s “Gothic Possibilities” (1986) which argues that the gothic is a manifestation of female psyche which is linked with space in the form of a castle. They postulate that a castle epitomizes an early developmental stage when the “boundaries between inner and other, me and not-me” are blurred “and self cannot distinguish itself from the mother” (220). Therefore, a fear of gothic spaces, such as the emblematic gothic castle, emanates from a fear of the impossibility of separation from a mother figure and achievement of an independent self. Juliann Fleenor also follows the same line of argument in her “Female Gothic” (1983), and posits that the heroines’ main struggle in female gothic is their “conflict with the all-powerful, devouring mother” (19) symbolized by the castle or spectral sightings. In essence, she maintains that female gothic literature is the voice of women’s protest and it reflects “the female experience” (27) of women at that time.

The question of women’s situation in the gothic was also covered in Kate Ferguson Ellis’s seminal book *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (1989), which examines women’s confinement to domestic spaces such as castles as a result of economic relationships that were regulated by men. In effect, she argues that women’s processive union with male figures fails to empower them and they are always intimidated with threats of rape and incarceration while even the matrimonial bond cannot save them from their plight. Therefore, the rigid patriarchal ideology of public and private sphere is perpetuated. Eugenia Delamotte’s *Perils of the Night* (1990) follows a similar logic

where two different pictures of the separate spheres are depicted. On the one hand, home is a paradise which houses an ideal femininity and, on the other hand, the outer sphere becomes equated with villainous males who terrorize women. The myth of the safe home is debunked when houses and castles become the repository of fear which restricts women's freedom and prevents the realization of "speaking I" (149) for female characters. Another important psychoanalytic reading of gothic literature is Diane Long Hoeveler's *Gothic Feminism* (2010) which offers a new definition of female gothic. Her book devotes two long chapters to Ann Radcliffe and argues that her heroines are portrayed as hapless victims of patriarchy and circumstances beyond their control. Still, they manage to manipulate the system and emerge victorious at the end. Their empowered resilience ultimately defines the female gothic as a literary genre in its own right. This is an apt formula for Radcliffe's works as all her heroines survive their ordeals and emerge to be stronger and more agentive towards the novels' conclusion.

The predominance of psychoanalytic scholarship for examining the female gothic was castigated by Robert Miles, who, in 1994, complained that this has "hardened into a literary category" (qtd. in Wallace and Smith 4) that implies a universal and homogeneous take on gothic plots and therefore drives gothic scholars to an "impasse" (5). He therefore calls for a different approach to female gothic. Robert Miles himself wrote *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (1995) which provides historical and social context in Radcliffe's time and argues that she reformulated gothic literature and offered a different "topography of the self" (11) which empowered her heroines in a tradition different from other gothic writers. Ricton Norton's *Mistress of Udolpho* (1999) is the only full biography of Ann Radcliffe which provides new information about her life, her family, her personality and also the rumours about her. The book also examines her role as a professional writer in the eighteenth century. E. J. Clery's book called *Women's Gothic from Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (2004) is another appropriate response to Miles' call, as this book employs a historicist approach to present a

different picture of women who are not always the marginalized other. She argues that women's foray into the gothic allowed them to gain professional status as literary writers. Orianne Smith's *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy* (2013) discusses the role of Romantic women writers as Cassandra-like voices that prophesied the world's end. In one chapter on Radcliffe, Smith argues that her heroines find spirituality in nature which makes them visionary prophetesses, distancing them from the secular worldview of other characters. *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and Gothic* (2014) is a recent collection of essays edited by Dale Townshend and Angela Wright that explores Radcliffe's art from a range of perspectives, such as the role of her poetry, travel writing, and her position in relation to other female writers contemporaneous with her. A historicist reading enables the critics to move outside the domestic walls of houses and castles and explore the enabling potentials of the act of writing for women and its wider influence on the female public.

Unlike Radcliffe, Mary Shelley has attracted much more attention as *Frankenstein* is a novel that has aptly lent itself to any literary theory. Given the proliferation of research on the novel, I will succinctly analyse seminal feminist and psychoanalytic scholarly research.<sup>1</sup> In 1976, Ellen Moers was the first critic to draw a parallel between the abnormal birth of a creature and Mary Shelley's own experience with childbirth. Moers' criticism is indeed nested in a biographical reading of the novel that reveals Shelley's aversion to childbirth as she was the cause of her mother's death during her birth. Moers goes on to suggest that the novel is an account of "guilt, dread, and flight surrounding birth and its consequences" (Moers 93). Gilbert and Gubar (1979) analyse the novel taking into consideration the position of female writer situated in a male culture. They argue that apart from the Miltonian tropes of Adam and Satan, Victor plays the role of Eve as well, which subsequently exhibit Shelley's anxieties about writing as she had to reconcile the memory of her deceased mother with her passion to write. To Shelley, reading was the equivalent of giving birth while Victor symbolizes a writer

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<sup>1</sup> Diane Long Hoeveler's "*Frankenstein, Feminism, and Literary Theory*" in *Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley* (2003) contains a comprehensive overview of feminist criticism of *Frankenstein*. I have selectively chosen the significant ones to present here.

who has created a “hideous progeny . . . a deformed book, a literary abortion or miscarriage” (223). Barbara Johnson (1982), an American deconstructionist, also analyses the book in the same paradigm where women are trapped in a society which is dismissive of women. Thus, the novel’s preoccupation with creation embodies “the struggle of feminine authorship” (“Monster” 7). Anne Mellor (1988), in a similar vein to Moers, argues that the novel is ultimately about men’s control over women by means of science and technology to “usurp female reproductive power” (*Her Life* 122).

The role of women in *Frankenstein* has been a topic of interest as well. One of the most influential essays, “Is there a Woman in this Text?” (1982), by Mary Jacobus, focuses on the absence of women and argues that the monster’s violence stems from the absence of female figures, which highlights his “loveless state” (133). Devon Hodge (1983) also presents a revealing take on *Frankenstein* insofar as he argues that Mary Shelley’s use of three narrators, Walton, Victor and the monster, is an attempt to appropriate the patriarchal voice and enter masculine culture. In fact, it is the voice of a female disguised as series of male narrators which undermines male authority (157). Margaret Homans (1986) explores the mother figure, and concludes that the novel is an account of woman in a society which debases women, and ultimately *Frankenstein* embodies the death of the mother (107). Marie Mulvey-Roberts (2000) uses Julia Kristéva’s idea of the abject to argue that the formation of self requires abandonment of maternal associations. However, the maternal returns and haunts the subject like the abject. Therefore, the creature is the abject that cannot be discarded and has returned (204).

During the 1990s, most scholars examined historical and political aspects of Shelley’s writings along with the enduring fame of *Frankenstein*. Steven Forry’s *Hideous Progeny* (1990) explores the ways the monster has evolved in the realm of theatre, cinema and popular culture since its inception in the nineteenth century. *The Other Mary Shelley* (1993) is a collection of essays that examines Shelley’s other less important novels and explores Shelley’s

role as a writer, editor, and feminist intellectual. The book reveals Shelley to be a cultural commentator and critic of the nineteenth century. *Iconoclastic Departures* (1997) is a similar collection of essays which depicts Shelley as a radical and revisionist author. The essays address Shelley's development as an independent author who redefines literary genres to demonstrate her ingenuity and novelty, while at the same time defying readers' expectations.

Later critical works on Shelley also try to situate Shelley in the historical and scientific context of her time. Jon Turney's *Frankenstein's Footsteps* (2000) discusses the book from the perspective of the science of biology and addresses the novel's reception in the next two centuries from this perspective. Turney also demonstrates other nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors and artists who have been influenced by *Frankenstein*. The book discusses medical controversies and debates in the past two centuries with regards to Shelley's 'cautionary tale'. King and Goodall's edited collection of essays in *Frankenstein's Science* (2008) examines the novel in terms of the scientific discourses and controversies of the nineteenth century, which contextualizes the novel as a tale of caution against the dangers of uncurbed scientific experimentations. Friedman and Kavey's *Monstrous Progeny* (2016) is a recent book that traces the evolution of Shelley's monster from its historical precedents in the sixteenth century to its modern adaptations in different forms in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. The book also engages with contemporary scientific developments such as AI and biomedicine with reference to *Frankenstein*. *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein* (2016) is the latest collection of essays which again places the novel in its social, political, and intellectual context of the time. However, the book's novelty is in that it employs a range of recent critical theories such as queer theory, race theory, female gothic, ecocriticism and adaptation theory. In fact, it is a merging of theory and context to shed light on the novel from a new perspective.

## 1.4 Chapter Overview and Contribution

In a departure from the dominant gothic scholarship on Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley, my project is specifically engaged with a diverse range of ecocritical concepts which reveal fresh insights. This project is not embedded in gothic studies and is instead an attempt to move away from the critical ‘impasse’ that Robert Miles believes critics are at when it comes to female gothic. Given the versatility of ecocriticism, critics are enabled to engage with multidisciplinary theories to offer fresh insights into female gothic as a genre where woman and landscape are central.

The first chapter lays the theoretical background for the study of Ann Radcliffe’s novels. The chapter starts with a discussion of travel writing and its significance to the budding art of novel writing in the eighteenth century. Radcliffe’s heroines are, in effect, travel writers who survey a vast stretch of land and interact with the envioning landscape as a source of empowerment and solace. Their position as traveling females, or nomads, disrupts the spatial boundary of private and public spheres and aligns them with the latter, which is traditionally a male domain. The dialogic quality of the road empowers them to be more agentive characters who can defy the patriarchal authorities. In addition, traveling females appropriate the role of the male aesthetic subject

Radcliffe connects her heroines to land and inflects the latter with social and political significance. Women viewed nature as an active agent to which they attached themselves and invested it with feelings and a life of its own. As a result, the concept of the sublime is also remodelled by women where their connection to nature creates the feminine sublime, with ecological implications of care and connection with nature, as opposed to the all-dominating male sublime. Besides, the aesthetic theories of the eighteenth century and especially women’s adaptations thereof laid the foundation for the conservation efforts of the twentieth century, creating empathy and an ethics of care for nature.

Chapter two provides concrete examples from Radcliffe's novels to substantiate the theories and ideas offered in the first chapter. Radcliffe depicts a Rousseauian world in which characters and nature are attuned to one another. People's attachment to their land creates a Heideggerian sense of dwelling which invests a place with meaning, value and emotion. The existence of the inhabitants becomes tied to their dwelling, and creates an ecological identity which is tied to place and nature. In this manner, empathy with place initiates a sense of morality and responsibility towards nature and humans' dwelling. The Rousseauian concept of social contract that has alienated humans from nature is poignantly reflected in the dichotomy of city and country as well. Moreover, Radcliffe offers the union of science and domesticity in the guise of benevolent father figures who are both avid scientists and philosophers thus presenting a non-hierarchical view of humans in nature. Women's interaction with nature also helps them to transform the function of male spaces such as castles and turn them into places which cease to express the gothic trope of female imprisonment. The feminine sublime, which is equated with the ecological sublime, is another by-product of this interaction. The feminine sublime creates a space for dialogical union, connection and sympathy with nature and other human actors.

Chapter three is focused on Shelley's *Frankenstein* and engages with both ecocriticism and animal studies. The creation of the monster is first contextualized in the intellectual debate of the time regarding the source of life known as the 'vitality debate'. I then argue that the creature resides in a liminal space, as both human and animal, which precipitates his and Victor's journey towards annihilation. Victor's experiments are examined in the light of animal cruelty which leads to the destruction of himself and his family as a consequence of humans' anthropocentric bias towards the nonhuman world represented by the creature. The creature's liminality is paralleled with Victor, who also oscillates between humanity and animality, until he and the creature converge at a point where Victor realizes he is one and the same with the creature. In fact, the creature is the apogee of a much needed ecological insight

that blurs the boundary between the human and nonhuman world, thereby challenging the anthropocentric prejudices that have made humans feel entitled to dominate the nonhuman world and nature.

Chapter four is a more detailed account of the blurred boundaries of humans and nonhumans, with a focus on eco-materialism which delineates the source of the creature's life. The creature is argued to be a pile of things, composed of dead pieces of humans and animals that are recycled and that have come to remind humans of their kinship with the inert matter which they, themselves, are composed of. Through an eco-materialistic reading, it is revealed that humans are enmeshed in a net of interconnection with nonhuman entities in the world with which they interact constantly. The Deleuzian concept of the rhizome, along with Stacy Alaimo's idea of trans-corporeality, are employed to reveal that the creature embodies a cyborg figure who manifests the agency of a nonhuman world and calls for a non-hierarchical ontology of being. In this fashion, the creature also becomes a symbol of a raging nature which has risen up to resist the humans' conquest, thereby asserting its thing-power.

The final chapter is aligned with previous chapters and discusses the agency of nature in *The Last Man*. This early cli-fi prototype weaves together social and environmental issues such as imperialism, war, commerce, women's marginalization, sanitation, pollution, epidemics, extinction and environmental refugees. Men's domination in politics and their passion for the possession of resources and commercial routes leads to a war that causes the outbreak of a global epidemic of plague. In effect, the disease epitomizes the power and agency of nature in the age of the Anthropocene, whose inception is roughly concurrent with the composition of the novel. *The Last Man* is an apt novel to end this project with, as its content is a recap of the previous arguments of this project such as the blurred boundary of humans and nonhumans, culture and nature, and a resurgence of the agency of nature as a powerful actor in the cycle of life. Moreover, the responsibility of humans in the degradation

of the ecosystem is explicitly demonstrated in *The Last Man* in a way that recalls Victor Frankenstein's tampering with the natural order of things.

I intend to reveal that there is a rich repertoire of literature that can meaningfully engage with ecocritical concepts. One of the main targets of ecocriticism is the binary-oriented mindset whose presentation threads all the five chapters together. There was a nascent, but probably unconscious, awareness about the problematic of the nature and culture binary and how untenable the borderline is. Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley engage with this concept in different ways. The dominance of psychoanalysis in Radcliffe scholarship has led to the neglect of this binary, as psychoanalysis pertains to the realm of the unconscious, quite contrary to the physical realm which is of interest to ecocriticism. In addition, feminist and psychoanalytic readings tend to yoke women and domestic space together, while this project explores the role of women in public space as well as their interaction with physical nature. Their connection with nature and their dwellings comprise a celebration of humans' connection with place, which eventually leads to the development of an ecological identity, hailed by environmentalists who deem it necessary for the rectification of our unsustainable practices. Apart from the examination of a sense of place in Radcliffe, highlighting the role of eighteenth century aesthetics in the formation of an ecological ethics of care, especially through the feminine sublime, is a novel contribution of this project.

Moreover, material ecocriticism, which is a recent ecocritical trend, is merged with the Deleuzian idea of becoming. It can reveal rich ecocritical insights and precepts that can be gleaned from applying material ecocriticism to earlier texts written at a time when there was little consciousness about the role humans played in environmental degradation. Nevertheless, a nascent anxiety about the anthropocentric misconceptions begins to emerge in the artistic expression of eighteenth and nineteenth-century England, which marks a turning point in the history of environmentalism. It was a time when the growing industrialization of society left its mark in the social fabric of life and in people's psyches. It was also the beginning of what

many climatologists refer to as the Anthropocene, which indicates a global change in the geological history of the earth, with grave consequences. Therefore, studying Radcliffe and Shelley as two authors situated in this critical time of the history of the earth can shed light on the role and responsibility of humans to their world.

## **2. Radcliffe's Female Travellers and Aesthetics**

## 2.1 Travel Writing and the Novel

Upon reading the works of Ann Radcliffe, one encounters two features which are hard to miss yet common to her literary repertoire. On the one hand, readers will frequently encounter expansive and detailed descriptions of land and scenery; on the other hand, there is the ubiquitous trope of the journey undertaken by her characters, especially her heroines who function as literary cartographers. These stylistic facets are among the highlights of her works as she deftly merges them using novelistic prose. Radcliffe's descriptions are comparable to the composition of landscape paintings while her prose contains a map with an intricate array of cities and countries full of spectacular landscapes. The presence of a traveling female in her novels strategically draws attention to the significance of travel writing and the novel in the eighteenth century where the two genres were extensively used by prominent female writers, such as Radcliffe herself and Mary Shelley to formulate their unique aesthetic voice. Travel writing predated the emergence of the novel and therefore, female writers were familiar with the conventions of travel writing which they utilized in their fictions.

Stories about journeys and travel are commonplace in the eighteenth century when the literature of the age discernibly includes novels whose plots revolve around heroes and heroines journeying across foreign countries or unknown lands (Buzard 37), mainly in Europe. This era was the scene of major economic and technological breakthroughs which facilitated mobility and journeys. The *Critical Review* in 1797 aptly called the eighteenth century "the age of peregrination" which marked a conspicuously unprecedented growth in people's passion for visiting other countries (qtd. in Turner 2). Additionally, the concurrent rise of the publishing industry helped travel narratives reach a wider audience who read them for both pleasure and enlightenment.

The preponderance of the travel motif along with the physical act of moving across space made travel writing a powerful tool to explore the question of identity for women

writers. As a consequence, landscapes were constructed through a highly personalised perspective, vividly rendered through an intensity of language and tone. Political and ideological issues were tantalisingly raised through the very act of female writers visiting then relaying their experiences in specific geographical sites. Furthermore, the role of women was problematized and interrogated once female travellers were situated beyond the traditional confines of the domestic sphere. Thus, the intimate and personal aspect of travel writing in the eighteenth century and the opportunities for analysis, reflection and narration that it offered made this genre of particular interest to female authors. Many well-known female authors of the century tried their hand at travel writing in one form or another. Helen Maria Williams, Ann Radcliffe, Priscilla Wakefield and Mary Wollstonecraft were but a few of the famous women writers who published travelogues. The fascination women had with travel writing, both as writers and readers of the literature, makes it all the more interesting when one considers that the eighteenth century had a very rigid code of conduct prescribed for women in a decidedly patriarchal era. Women were advised to celebrate the home as their proper place and model their behaviour according to the dictates of a cult of sensibility that encouraged exaggerated ‘feminine’ outbursts of emotions along with demonstrations of high sensibility and passion. This was meant to create an ideal collective of genteel women who would improve the morals of society. This “cult of refined emotionalism” (Barker-Benfield, *Sex and Society* xix) was, in reality, part of “the century-long campaign for the reformation of manners” (Barker-Benfield, “Sensibility” 103). The cult of sensibility, as such, was part of a larger ideological framework that led to the social subordination of women to their male counterparts.

One of the ways in which women resisted this subordination and circumvented male-imposed codified conventions was to appropriate a male literary tradition. Travel writing provided a tremendous opportunity for women to employ this mode of writing and manipulate it in order to undermine the rigid ideological assumptions about their gender and status in

society (Agorni 98). In other words, travel writing for women vicariously served as a subversive act whereby they were able to challenge the assumption that a woman's place was at home. Women asserted their agency by taking the initiative to travel to then enter public spaces that were traditionally occupied and regulated by men, all the while challenging assumptions about their 'rightful' role and sphere. Furthermore, female travellers astutely recorded their observations of foreign lands. In effect, they transformed themselves into female writers equipped with an aesthetic subjectivity who observed then represented the land, which was a role that was traditionally occupied by men, particularly in the field of literature. As a result, women were able to insinuate themselves into literary narratives and social discourses surrounding public space and were able to gradually align themselves with the image of public space itself. Radcliffe's novels rely heavily on this device where heroines artistically perceived then commented on the landscape and relied on a mode of representation that radically differed from mainstream eighteenth century's prevailing aesthetic culture. They interrogated prevalent artistic conventions such as the disinterested subject, the sublime and picturesque and ultimately revised them to create a female aesthetics of landscape. When one considers this textual space, which enabled women to break the mould, it comes as no surprise that the travel motif was extensively employed in the eighteenth century literature by female authors.

Travel writing also provides a fertile ground for the manifestation of gender politics in both public and private spheres. For this reason, the study of travel writing strongly invites a feminist critical lens which seeks a reinvestigation of women's role in literature whether it is fiction or nonfiction (Thomson 5). Up until the twentieth century, travel was traditionally gendered as an innately 'masculine' venture for males who had the necessary resources and class mobility to explore, discover, map and define the world on their own terms. Thus, travel writing came to the attention of contemporary feminist critics as a patriarchal discourse which the eighteenth and nineteenth century female writers had effectively appropriated and re-

inscribed by producing copious accounts of their journeys. These accounts constructed an emancipatory space where women writers were able to register the landscape with their own aesthetic and artistic touch which stood in direct contradistinction to masculine attempts to create an illusion of detachment from the landscapes which they described. Women, however, did not erase themselves from the land they described; instead, they formed a relational bond with it and imbued it with their own artistic sensibility by inflecting it with political and emotional associations. Therefore, travel writing equipped women with the opportunity to escape imposed gender roles and assert a distinctively female aesthetic mode of landscape.

The relevance of travel writing to Radcliffe's novels is highly evident when one notes the intersection of feminism and travel writing. Hélène Cixous, the French feminist, lauds the folkloric example of Little Red Riding Hood as a figure of a travelling female who transgresses the boundaries. She is the traveller who leaves the safety of her domestic space and ventures into the public sphere of a forest. She is punished for her intrepid adventure precisely because she undertook a transgressive act which subverted an ideological injunction that consigned women to home, and thus generated a series of binaries such as man/woman, culture/nature, activity/passivity and mobility/immobility (Cixous 43-4). This tale is an early example of how a travel story can be an exposé of the patriarchal hierarchies inscribed in the division of space, home and forest, and how it reveals the constraints of women's agency as well as the enabling opportunities of transgressing the confining boundaries (Ganser 13). Radcliffe's heroines also commit the same transgressive act as that of Little Red Riding Hood, by departing from the domestic sphere and setting off on a journey. *A Sicilian Romance* features Julia, a protagonist who is forced to flee from her house in order to avoid a forced marriage with a duke. She travels to several places and at the end of the novel returns home to find her imprisoned mother whom she assumed had died many years earlier. *The Romance of the Forest* focuses on Adeline, a helpless orphaned girl, who is travelling with Monsieur and Madame de la Motte and comes to discover her true identity after a series of trying ordeals

whilst traveling across different countries. A comparable journey also takes place in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* whereby the novel's heroine Emily, takes to the road after her father's death to live with her aunt in Venice. She then travels to the daunting castle of Udolpho from which she escapes after some arduous trials and returns to her home in La Vallée. The heroine of *The Italian*, Ellena, is kidnapped from her home and taken to a convent which she eventually flees with the help of her lover. She, like other Radcliffe heroines, discovers her true life history and regains her birth rights. Unlike the little heroine of the Brothers Grimm's tale, Radcliffe's travelling women manage to employ the subversive potentials of their travels and actively challenge the ideological spatial binary as well as the conventions of aesthetic writing. It might be argued that none of these characters undertake these journeys of their own volition; however, it is the presence of female characters on the road that affords them a stronger sense of self.

The reason that Radcliffe utilized the travel trope is not accidental in view of the fact that travel writing was actually akin to the novel in many respects. Jonathan Raban maintains that travel writing is a very fluid category to the extent that it can include disparate genres (253-4). The fuzzy boundary between travel writing and the novel made it an easy task for the novelists to incorporate tropes of travel writing in their fictions. In the eighteenth century, the novel was a relatively new genre and had not yet been established as a mainstream mode of writing. Prior to novels, accounts of travels, newspapers and history books constituted a large portion of available reading materials and subsequently shaped the public's literary taste. Therefore, novels, as a burgeoning form of literature, needed to incorporate as much of their early precedents as possible in order to be accepted as a new form. Unsurprisingly, travel writing was one of the main sources from which novelists borrowed extensively. According to J. Paul Hunter, the early fiction writers banked on the common tropes in both travel writing and fiction in order to pique the interest of people in reading novels (5). Thus, the travel motif constituted an integral part of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature. Indeed, itinerant

characters and narratives surveying different cities and sometimes countries were characteristic of some of the most seminal novels of that period.

The affinities between travel writing and novel have been meticulously investigated by Percy G. Adams' ground-breaking book *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* in 1983. The book is a thorough study of how "prose fiction and the travel account have evolved together, [and] are heavily indebted to each other, and are often similar in both content and technique" (279). Adams' book focuses on French and British literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and delineates how the newly flourishing genre of the novel borrowed from earlier, more common forms such as history, romance, epic and drama. The sheer similarity of novel and travel writing in terms of narrative frame, character types, literary tropes, aesthetic style, looseness of structure and expansiveness of the narrative line paved the way for novels to draw abundantly from travel accounts.

In spite of the fact that Radcliffe's novels are not travel accounts, it is impossible not to note the conventions of travel writing such as the intense attachment of the characters to the landscape and architecture. In the course of these travels, they subvert the traditional narratives that are inscribed in spaces that they enter and demonstrate their agency by actively resisting the demands of the patriarchal figures and even asserting their will over the villains. They also appreciate and 'domesticate' sublime scenes by creating a female version of the sublime where nature ceases to be the daunting actor which renders observers insignificant or drives them into paralyzing fear. It is only when they visit a foreign land that they perceive themselves and their surroundings in a different light and are able to overcome their circumstances. This makes the study of space and characters' interaction with it seminal to Radcliffe's work, especially when her heroines behave similarly to travel writers, registering the subtleties and details of their surroundings plus recounting their particular way of negotiating them.

It must be noted that in dealing with Radcliffe's novels, the critical focus will be on the description of landscape and characters' interaction with it. In this regard, the question of

epistemological truth, which has always been entangled with travel writing, does not apply to the description of space and landscape in her works from an ecocritical lens. The lack of veracity in landscape description is due to the fact that Radcliffe herself rarely visited the lands she described and only employed the already familiar conventions of travel writing to reach a wider readership. However, this seeming inaccuracy does not detract from the significance of her work. For instance, in *The Romance of the Forest*, its descriptive sections were mainly comprised of “Radcliffe’s reading of tour books, [and] there is little difference between its political assessment and that in her eyewitness response to the Rhine Valley” from her own travelogue (Dekker 84). Also, the ecofeminist focus of these texts enables the potential of women through their interaction with nature as women use nature as a motif in their writing in order to expose patriarchal oppression. The question of women’s representation of nature becomes central to Radcliffe as she examines how women interact with nature and subsequently gain a more astute sense of themselves. Thus, an impressionistic representation of landscape rather than its verisimilitude is central to Radcliffe’s writing. Even with nonfictional travel accounts the question of truth and veracity is highly contested as the accounts are processed through the ideological lens of the traveller who can never claim impartiality. As stated earlier, ecocriticism is more concerned with how the collective psyche of a society filters nature and what cultural imports it might entail, rather than how realistic and factual the described nature is.

## 2.2 Women on the Road

The prevalence of travel writing and journey accounts in the eighteenth century left an indelible mark on the psyche of the fiction writers of the time. Travel, per se, was deemed to be a masculine undertaking and it was not unusual for women to be accompanied by men while undertaking a long journey. In both the Romantic and Victorian eras, it was against accepted decorum for a lady to travel unescorted by men, even if the journey was a short one. A notable example in this case is Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* in which General Tilney sends Catherine off home alone in an act which was a deliberate and discourteous sign of his indignation. In such a context, women's foray into travel writing in the eighteenth century, which centred on travelling heroines, functioned as a subversive act that resisted stifling gender ideology around the role of the female artist. Such writers, particularly Ann Radcliffe, opposed the traditional aesthetics contained in descriptions of nature. These traditional aesthetics were solidified in principles that were rigidly set down by Anthony Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson and Archibald Alison, all of whom were proponents of the idea of 'disinterestedness'. By contrast, Radcliffe's approach to landscape description is marked by an intense intimacy and engagement with these spaces. Her heroines, in turn, are also emotionally invested in the traversed landscape and feel a connection to it which forms "a dialogic sense of the self, as a relational identity" (Agorni 100) with the space which re-inscribes and appropriates men's cult of aesthetics. In addition, the presence of an agentive heroine on the road is, in and of itself, a subversion of the spatial binary of public and private sphere which is firmly ingrained in early female gothic literature.

Female gothic literature exposed the oppression women suffered in their homes and "articulated [their] dissatisfaction with patriarchal society and addressed the problematic position of the maternal within that society" (Smith and Wallace 1). Radcliffe's gothic novels invert deep-seated assumptions regarding women's place in a patriarchal society. In her novels "repressed anxieties are explored and exposed, and semiotic boundaries blurred—the house

may be revealed to be a prison and the husband a prisonmaster” (Davison 54-55). Therefore, the female gothic, as a sub-genre, became an apt venue to reveal women’s suppressed fears and concerns in the private sphere. Besides, gothic novels were a deliberate subversion of the ideology of separate spheres which promulgated the paternal idea that a woman’s true place is in the safe walls of home protected by the well-intentioned patriarchs. For instance, in *A Sicilian Romance*, Julia is forced to flee her home on account of the Marquis, her evil father, who intends to marry her off to a Duke. Julia also discovers that her mother had been imprisoned in the subterranean dungeon in her own house by her father for several years. Ellena, in *The Italian*, is kidnapped from her own house and kept in a convent under the scrutiny of an evil abbess. Likewise, Madame Cheron, in *Udolpho*, is imprisoned by her husband, Montoni, in the castle of Udolpho which is supposed to be her domestic home. After Madame Cheron’s death, Emily is similarly kept in the castle against her will to be coerced into relinquishing her estate to Montoni. In all of the above texts, themes of female entrapment, containment and coercion abound.

The female gothic, such as Radcliffe’s fictions, became a discursive manifestation of women’s invisible fears in the private space which jeopardized their wellbeing with threats of rape, abduction, or forced marriage. Women writers found in the gothic genre a fitting avenue to expose the ambivalent and even dark side of the domestic sphere by exposing anxieties around paternal threats of confinement. These novels also passed a critique on educational and legal institutions which perpetuated such fears and anxieties. Such institutions, to women, were “profoundly alien. . . . and . . . were all too contemporaneous with the lives of the women who wrote and read gothic literature in the 1790s and early 1800s: the patriarchal family, the patriarchal marriage, and a patriarchal class, legal, educational, and economic system” (DeLamotte 152). Gothic novels laid bare long-standing inequity that made such injustice possible which may account for the preponderance of negative reviews of gothic literature in its burgeoning days.

One notably negative review was anonymous and appeared in *The Spirit of the Public* called “Terrorist Novel Writing” (qtd. in Ledoux 55). The review raised alarms as to the subversive potential of gothic fiction which could jeopardize patriarchal privilege and their supporting institutions which such fictions tacitly critiqued: “Can a young woman be taught nothing more necessary in life, than to sleep in a dungeon with venomous reptiles, walk through a ward with assassins, and carry bloody daggers in their [sic] pockets, instead of pin-cushions and needle-books” (55). The brunt of the criticism emanated from a deep-seated fear of women’s empowerment which may have been enabled by reading these novels, thus suggesting that the female gothic was, indeed, a subversive site for women that provided both writers and readers with the potential to undermine the long-held ideological and gendered assumptions.

One way in which gendered assumptions were challenged was in the reformulation of public space as a safe haven rather than a site of menace for women. In the case of Radcliffe, each one of her heroines is notably more powerful and agentive when freely situated on the road as opposed to trapped within the walls of domesticity. Radcliffe’s writing undertook the task of specifically debunking the myth of home as a protected space but this feat is only possible thanks to the liberatory possibilities offered to travelling women. In fact, until relatively recently travelling had, on the one hand, been marked by a gendered ideology which assigned immobility, passivity and the domestic sphere to women; on the other hand, mobility, activity and public sphere were assigned as the proper realm of men (Ganser 17). Therefore, the placement of women on the road reformulates the road from being a male- dominated space that enabled the journey and adventures of men to a site of contention where rigid gender roles are destabilized. This is due to the “dialogic quality of the road as a narrative space” (37) as observed by Bakhtin:

Encounters in a novel usually take place “on the road.” The road is a particularly good place for random encounters. On the road . . . the spatial and temporal paths of the most

varied people-representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point. People who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet; any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another. On the road the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways, even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of social distances (243).

The road is indeed a fluid space where rigid social and ideological paradigms are gradually dismantled and cannot operate as they do in the enclosed structure of domesticity. Therefore, differences are challenged, negotiated, contested, or accepted, but most importantly, a relational bond is established which not only connects people with one another, but also with the environment. This is especially true of Radcliffe's fictions where the heroines' relation to landscape invests them with a stronger and wiser sense of self which becomes an empowering tool in challenging the demands of patriarchy. Female characters such as Emily and Ellena create a dialogic bond with nature that enables them to subvert the function of space as an extension of patriarchal oppression. For instance, the castle of Udolpho and the convent of San Stefano, which both function as symbols of male power, cease to be sites of domination once Emily and Ellena occupy them. This is a point that I will revisit and specifically discuss in the next chapter.

The fixity of spatial binaries is prone to collapse on the road. This lays bare the social coding and gender differences that were glossed over and analyses them in ways that were previously unimaginable. Therefore, Neil Campbell justly calls roads “vibrant cultural contact zones”<sup>2</sup> (qtd. in Ganser 38) where social, ideological and gender differences are contested. These contact zones create enabling opportunities for subordinate parties. In the case of Radcliffe's heroines, their time on the road permits them to develop into more assertive

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<sup>2</sup> Contact zone, a term coined by Mary Louise Pratt, is defined as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (7).

characters in direct contrast to their meek personas prior to their peregrinations. Therefore, the agency that women acquire on the road brings them closer to redressing restrictive gender binaries and affords them the opportunity to establish a dialogue. Both Ellena and Emily exert their will over that of male figures such as Vivaldi, Montoni and Valancourt as I will discuss in the next chapter.

The dialogic quality of the road also has the capacity to reveal social ideologies at work; at the same time, women's occupation of the public space can unsettle some of the rigid gender and social assumptions regarding women. This hints at the inseparability of spatial configuration of society and its social regulations. Indeed, women's use of space to subvert dualities is akin to what Tim Cresswell calls "heretical geographies", meaning that the "being 'out of place' metaphor points to the fact that social power and social resistance are always spatial" (*Geography* 11). Accordingly, women's use of the public space has the potential to free them from the trappings of a meek and docile persona and expose the workings of a gendered ideology. This view resonates with the modern definition of a nomadic way of life. After all, Radcliffe's heroines such as Emily, Ellena, Julia, and Adeline have (in)voluntarily adopted a nomadic way of life by travelling from one point to another. A nomadic subject is marked by its ability to break boundaries and become transgressive; its subjectivity is not fixed or rigid, but very much 'fluid' and anti-hegemonic, especially when it comes to the gendered spatial division of public and private spheres. This transgressive subversion is also an empowering one (Osborne 194-5). The formulation of the nomadic subject as an enabling mode of being for women echoes with Rosi Braidotti's idea of a nomad as well which focuses on relationality: "the nomadic subject functions as a relay team: she connects, circulates, moves on; she does not form identification, but keeps on coming back at regular intervals. The nomad is a transgressive identity whose transitory nature is precisely the reason why she can make connections at all. Nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections" (*Nomadic* 42). The emphasis of nomadic subjectivity is on how one

connects and relates to a diverse range of spaces; it is a “site of multiple connections” (66), which entails the trespassing of boundaries and the disruption of ideological regimes of meaning. In fact, Radcliffe’s heroines’ nomadic subjectivity enables them to turn the public space into “a site of feminine presence’ (Ganser 77) where the oppressive father figures are rendered powerless. Conversely, it is the heroines who assert their newly formed subjectivity and power which is engendered by their connection and relationality with nature. Ellena, in *The Italian*, defies both Vivaldi and the villainous Schedoni after being rescued from San Stefano. Emily in *Udolpho* resists the demands of Montoni and also her lover, Valancourt. *The Romance of the Forest*’s heroine, Adeline, becomes an agentive travelling nomad after her escape from the Marquis’ residence with the help of Theodore, and her stay in Lenoncourt with La Luc’s family.

Such traveling nomads in Radcliffe’s novels form a stronger sense of identity by making connections not only to their environment but also the people they encounter. This new sense of being is the result of constant flows and transformations they experience through their journeys. Such a transformation or ‘becoming’, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s term, is realized due to the emancipatory possibilities of a nomadic life. The inherent opposition of a nomad to the rigidity and fixity of space breaks the boundaries or ‘deterritorializes’ them. Deterritorialization is the collapse of the boundaries or binaries in order to “increase [a nomad’s] territory” (Deleuze and Guattari 11) and is, therefore, a way of escape through what Deleuze and Guattari call “lines of flight [or] movements of deterritorialization” (3). The ‘lines of flight’ for the female travellers provided through their interaction and relation with nature lays the basis for “relational foundations . . . of subjectivity” for Radcliffe’s heroines as they forge a stronger sense of self once they realize their connection to and harmony with their environment and the possibilities this creates. I will provide a detailed account of how this emancipatory possibility is utilized by Radcliffe’s female travellers in the following chapter.

Apart from the subversion of the spatial binaries, Radcliffe's novels make a departure from her contemporaries in another way which directly bears upon environmental ethics. As mentioned earlier, an integral part of the eighteenth century gothic is based upon the dichotomy of private sphere for women and public sphere for men which Radcliffe dexterously subverts. The subversion of the binary is achieved by situating public space, which in Radcliffe's case is landscape, at the forefront of the novels. The female characters' active engagement and interaction with nature foregrounds it, while affording them an expanded sense of self and agency. In fact, landscape and nature are poignantly presented as actors which are involved in the story because of the characters' enmeshment with them. This, according to Lawrence Buell, is one of the defining criteria of an environmental text in which the text presents "some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given" (*Imagination* 8). Thus, Radcliffe's environment is not a static given but a psychological process which mirrors the character's growth and emotional state, especially in *Udolpho* and *The Italian* where Emily and Ellena's emotions and development are constantly reflected in nature.

Detailed description of nature, extensively employed by Radcliffe, has garnered a considerable deal of emphasis from ecocritics. This is based on the fact that "detailed description of a setting and its impact on the speaker . . . draws attention to the embeddedness of human life in the natural environment" (Müller 602). This attitude towards nature counters the dominant western perspective of nature engendered by science. The rise of science in the seventeenth century, along with the spread of the mechanistic worldview of nature, widened the gap between humans and nature. Francis Bacon and René Descartes were the pioneering figures of modern science. The Enlightenment perspective tended to construe the world as inert and passive matter that solely existed for human utility. The legacy of the Enlightenment was to construct a view of nature as a lifeless 'machine', hence its passivity. (Pratt et al. 23).

This view paves the way for the domination and devaluation of the inanimate world, including nature, simply because it has no intrinsic value.

Many ecocritics including Carolyn Merchant Before the rise of mechanical science and Newtonian physics, humanity and nature had been in an organic harmony with each other. Humans were deemed to be a part of an animate world in which nature was identified as a female nurturing source of life. This presented an ethical standpoint towards nature (Domosh and Seager 175) that protected its sanctity and integrity. This view is best illustrated by Carolyn Merchant: “One does not readily slay a mother, dig into its entrails for gold or mutilate her body” (*Death* 3). However, Europe’s Enlightenment presented a binary vision of the world where nature was relegated to the realm of inanimate matter that had to be dominated and harnessed for the benefit of thinking subjects or humans. Humans’ attitude towards their world was transformed drastically and rather than being part of holistic nature, humans became its exploiter (White 8). Therefore, mother-nature lost its significance as a living and nurturing organism and was transmuted into a collection of disparate resources for humans. The exploitation of such resources was couched in gendered language, equating the subordination of nature with that of women. Accordingly, men of science, in a Baconian fashion, were advised to tame nature:

Nature must be ‘bound into service’ and made a ‘slave’ put ‘in constraint’ and ‘molded’ by the mechanical arts. The ‘searches and spies of nature’ are to discover her plots and secrets. . . . Here in bold sexual imagery is the key feature of the modern experimental method-constraint of nature in the laboratory, dissection by hand and mind, and the penetration of hidden secrets (Merchant, *Death* 171).

The concept of nature as a female body to be explored and exploited is indeed a precursor of subsequent environmental problems. Furthermore, the explicit feminisation and the accompanying degradation of nature neatly corroborates with the process of women’s social subjugation through a patriarchal mindset. The same patriarchal ideology has dominated both

women and nature. Indeed, the presence of a gendered language around ‘nature’ closely resembles the presentation of women in Radcliffe’s gothic as well where meek heroines encounter threats such as incarceration, rape, and forced marriage to be coerced into giving up their property and land as in the case of Madam Cheron and Emily in *Udolpho*— hence, the association of women and nature.

In contrast to this passive and inorganic view of the world, Romanticism offered an alternative viewpoint that invested the world with life. The mechanistic view of a lifeless universe was once again replaced with the universe as a ‘living entity’. The universe and humans formed a seamless whole, a holistic network of which humans were an integral part. Nature could help us understand ‘the human mind’; it became a carrier of humans’ emotions and feelings. This view is known as ‘Romantic organicism’ (Baker 391-2) which Radcliffe deploys extensively by inflecting descriptions of landscape with her characters’ emotional state and moral integrity. In this regard, Radcliffe’s landscape descriptions are said to carry “talismanic importance” (Cottom, 35) where nature becomes an indicator of one’s sensibility and virtue, similar to a moral touchstone against which one’s moral integrity is assessed. The epitome of this claim in Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are Emily’s father, St Aubert, and her aunt, Mme. Cheron. Emily’s aunt displays an awkward and artificial taste in her garden at Toulouse where plants are tastelessly placed. Such a crass display of her taste hints at her class aspiration, her malevolent intentions for her niece, and her own marriage with Montoni for the sake of an aristocratic title. In fact, her residence in Venice signifies her indulgence in the urbane decadence of the city as opposed to the rural simplicity and the blissful, vernal haven of St Aubert’s La Vallée. Therefore, the landscape becomes a manifestation of feeling and morality. Only those characters with a sound moral integrity are able to appropriately respond to the surrounding landscape and tastefully invest it with feelings and affect. Such a conflation of nature with morality and emotion is one of the main reasons for ecocritics to panegyricize the Romantic era for supplying “a wellspring of love for,

sympathy with and confidence in the natural world” (Garrard, *Romantics* 115). This attitude recoups nature from a utilitarian perspective which is rightly identified as the culprit for today’s environmental woes.

Admittedly, there is no direct evidence that Radcliffe evinced any forthright objections towards such a utilitarian stance except for what can be gleaned and extracted from her texts, using a modern critical lens. There is, however, enough proof that the eighteenth century was marked by an acute awareness of these contrasting configurations of nature, as the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau reveal. In the same vein, Adam Miller makes a cogent argument in relation to the rise of a scientific zeitgeist in the eighteenth century and posits that Ann Radcliffe believed that “science as a fundamentally utilitarian endeavour was . . . a perversion of the aesthetic possibilities engendered by the scientific revolution” (530-1). Miller maintains that the explained supernatural, which received a negative reception from many of Radcliffe’s contemporaries, is actually an attempt to merge the narrative “with ordinary descriptions of material phenomena” (531).<sup>3</sup> Radcliffe presents her readers “with the opportunity to actively contemplate how the presence of things orders their experiences and connections to their natural, social, and domestic milieus” (531). Miller defines this “empirical and aesthetic presence of things [as]. . . Radcliffe’s scientific romance” (531). In other words, the lifeless world of matter and objects takes on a life of its own and becomes an integral part of the narrative by manipulating characters’ emotions and perceptions. This manipulation creates an eerie atmosphere of the supernatural, but still keeps the readers in the world of the natural with a logical explanation. The prime example of her scientific romance is in *Udolpho*, when Emily is being temporarily removed from the castle accompanied by two of Montoni’s thugs. On their way, a flash of light appears on one of the thugs’ weapon, a light which Emily had seen before in the castle too. One of the escorts dismisses the superstitious idea of the light as an omen and instead interprets it as an indication of an approaching storm.

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<sup>3</sup> The relation between life of things and ecocriticism (material ecocriticism) will be discussed at length in chapter five.

The rationalisation of a supernatural occurrence is validated by a scientific footnote by Radcliffe who refers her reader to “Abbe Berthelon on Electricity” (*Udolpho* 385), a French scientist who had researched electric currents. The presence of such a reference scientifically validates the flamboyant prose which entertains a degree of flights of imagination in Radcliffe’s romance (Miller 537). Therefore, Radcliffe employs nature, a common resource for both science and romance, not solely for its utilitarian purposes, but also for aesthetic ones. Indeed, the aesthetic values come to foreground an “animated presence in the material world” (536). Such a perspective squares with environmental ethics in the sense that the inanimate world is viewed for its own intrinsic value and is highlighted not merely as a lifeless backdrop for the narrative. Another example of this process is the conflation of spirituality with landscape in *Udolpho* and *The Italian* which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The non-utilitarian representation of nature is also demonstrated by the figures of La Luc in *The Romance of the Forest* and St Aubert in *Udolpho* who are scientists in their own rights, but also acute observers of nature who draw lessons of morality, virtue, simplicity, and bliss from nature. St Aubert’s pursuit of his botanical passion, a scientific act, is imbued with the bliss of domesticity and family in the bosom of nature:

One of the amusements of St Aubert was the study of botany, and among the neighbouring mountains, which afforded a luxurious feast to the mind of the naturalist, he often passed the day in the pursuit of his favourite science. He was sometimes accompanied in these little excursions by Madame St Aubert, and frequently by his daughter; when, with a small osier basket to receive plants, and another filled with cold refreshments . . . they wandered away among the most romantic and magnificent scenes, nor suffered the charms of Nature’s lowly children to abstract them from the observance of her stupendous works. When weary of sauntering among cliffs . . . they would seek one of those green recesses, which so beautifully adorn the bosom of these mountains,

where, under the shade of the lofty larch, or cedar, they enjoyed their simple repast, made sweeter by the waters of the cool stream, that crept along the turf, and by the breath of wild flowers and aromatic plants, that fringed the rocks, and inlaid the grass (*Udolpho* 6-7).

Miller analyses this scene as an example of Radcliffe's scientific romance, where the two baskets, one for collecting plants for St Aubert's scientific passion and one for food and refreshments for his family, represent the consilience of science and domestic bliss in nature. St Aubert pursues his scientific endeavours in the 'green recesses' of nature rather than its dark undiscovered depths to be penetrated and taxonomized by men of science (Miller 539); he partakes of nature's resources and bliss with his family benevolently. Contrary to Bacon and Descartes, St Aubert represents the harmony of nature, science and family.

A similar critique of scientific utilitarianism is presented in *The Romance of the Forest* by the unfavourable description of a doctor who is blind to nature's blessings and the knowledge it can endow him with. After Theodore is badly wounded in defending Adeline, he is visited by a doctor to treat his wounds. Adeline inquires if the doctor believes in the role of nature in improving a patient's condition:

"You do not approve, then, of the method, which I have somewhere heard of," said Adeline, "of attending to nature in these cases."

"Nature, Madam!" pursued he, "Nature is the most improper guide in the world. I always adopt a method directly contrary to what she would suggest; for what can be the use of Art, if she is only to follow Nature? This was my first opinion on setting out in life, and I have ever since strictly adhered to it. From what I have said, indeed, Madam, you may, perhaps, perceive that my opinions may be depended on; what they once are they always are, for my mind is not of that frivolous kind to be affected by circumstances (*Forest* 185-6).

After this conversation, Adeline loses her faith in the doctor and decides to hire a different physician for Theodore. The doctor is a comical representation of a utilitarian scientist who does not have a modicum of faith in, respect, or passion for nature and has a purely scientifically-driven mind. In the case of La Luc's failing health, he is advised to travel to benefit from a change of weather which proves effective in his case. However, Theodore's doctor also fails to see the continuity and enmeshment of human's body with nature and its salubrious effects. This passage is a testimony to a vision of harmony between science and nature which Radcliffe cogently portrays.

This animated view of the world and its materials conforms to a framework of environmental justice whose proponents call for the same principle of the unity of human and nonhuman world and hail it as a solution to modify the prevailing utilitarian attitudes towards nature and environment. Radcliffe's treatment of nature as an animated being provides a chance "for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its nonhuman contents" (Brennan and Lo). This possibility has the potential to reformulate the ontological boundary between the animate and inanimate world and, by extension, between that of culture and nature by merging them harmoniously like Radcliffe's 'scientific romances'.

## 2.3 Female Appropriation of Aesthetics

Ann Radcliffe's fictions present a holistic view of nature in which landscape and humans are engaged in an interactive process. In this process, the inanimate world of nature is foregrounded and becomes a repository of heroines' emotions and memories. This new perspective on nature that evolved during the eighteenth century was the direct result of the democratization of art and literature. It was a time when artists moved away from rigidly defined neoclassical principles, with a predisposition for a highly polished and refined style. Instead, more inclusive values came to be embraced in arts as wild and coarse nature was depicted more frequently (Cottom 28). Such changes also had great implications for female artists as they tried their hands at writing either novels or travelogues in ways that altered the mainstream principles of aesthetics especially with regard to landscape description. Women writers' style made a departure from the male-authored artistic principles and articulated a new mode of writing distinct from the prevalent male one.

A female sensibility, in regards to landscape, was rooted in the aesthetics of the eighteenth century. Ann Radcliffe and her contemporaries were inevitably immersed in the aesthetic discourse of the time practiced by figures such as Shaftesbury, Alison, Hutcheson, Gilpin, Burke, and Kant. Such critics hailed the idea of a disinterested observer whose focus was on the detachment of observer from nature and the description of the generalities of landscape. Female writers used existing paradigms in their own writing yet adroitly tailored these conventions to their own will. Radcliffe was one such writer whose depiction of nature, the sublime, and picturesque makes a shift from established aesthetic injunctions by underlining the role of a participating observer who bonds with landscape as opposed to a detached disinterested one.

The aesthetic theory of the eighteenth century developed under the influence of new forms of science and both viewed nature as an object of study. Nature was abstracted and

turned into an object to be viewed, analysed, understood and appreciated by the detached taxonomical gaze of scientists and also the similarly detached perspective of artists. The emphasis on ‘disinterestedness’ in aesthetic representation of nature resonates with scientific empiricism which was emphasised by Enlightenment scientists. Nature was construed to be an object of artistic investigation from which the artist had to remain detached, devoid of any personal interest (Carlson and Lintott 3). This meant that “the perceiver’s interest is in the perception alone and terminates upon the object” (Rind 70). In other words, the significance of the object of the aesthetic gaze, or nature, solely lies in the act of perception regardless of subtleties, implications, and associations of the perceived object. This conception of nature is comparable to the scientific gaze whereby the empiricist approach renders it as a series of lifeless objects fit for clinical investigation. Similarly, nature turned into the lifeless object of the artist’s eyes who had to maintain a disinterested distance from it in order to gain mastery over nature.

Three figures played a significant role in the development of a disinterested aesthetics of art, namely: Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Alison. Shaftesbury stripped the aesthetic representation of any personal attachment and interest in order to achieve the ideal aesthetic experience. Following him, Francis Hutcheson went further to even remove any ‘cognitive interests’ from aesthetics; and the culmination of this idea was brought about by Archibald Alison who compared disinterestedness with a “vacant and unemployed . . . state of mind” (Carlson and Lintott 3). Such a formulation of aesthetics impoverished the concept of nature and divested it of all spiritual, political, and social significations, similar to the mechanistic manner in which science viewed nature (4). The idea of disinterestedness was meant to strip nature of all its secondary associations in order to make possible a ‘pure’ experience of the aesthetic (Carlson 3). Therefore, the separation of humans from nature, originally engendered by science, was also partly perpetuated by the disinterested eye of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory.

The development of three distinct modes of addressing landscape representation, the beautiful, sublime, and picturesque, was also influenced by the central idea of disinterestedness. The beautiful referred to ‘delicacy’, ‘smoothness’, and other pleasing aspects of a cultivated nature. The sublime referred to ‘vastness’ ‘terror’ and in general the terrifying aspects of nature. The picturesque formed a middle ground between the other two categories and became more popular towards the end of the eighteenth century. It became the primary mode of viewing nature with a legacy that lingered into the next two centuries (Carlson and Lintott 4-5). The picturesque rendered nature as a painting or a work of art to be seen disinterestedly. The picturesque mode was intended to serve as a mediatory term to dilute the rigidity of the sublime and beautiful, but some practitioners of aestheticism and art critics did not respond kindly to this new category. For instance, Ruskin called it a “parasitical sublimity” and Hazlitt, hesitant to offer a complete censure, considered it “an excrescence on the face of nature” (qtd. in Trott 74). William Wordsworth did not regard it positively either and Jane Austen construed the discourse of the picturesque to be an impediment to the realization and assertion of a feminine identity, exemplified by Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* who is incapable of understanding the real world as she is immersed in processing her environment through the aesthetic of the picturesque (Kinsley 82). Nevertheless, Ann Radcliffe used the picturesque mode as the description of scenic landscape in her fiction resembles landscape painting. The best description of her use of the picturesque comes from Sir Walter Scott who described Radcliffe’s style as one which combines “the eye of the painter, with the spirit of the poet” (qtd. in Rogers 9). She also deployed the other two categories, but wielded them differently from how they were commonly used.

In the eighteenth century, women’s writing, including Radcliffe’s gothic fictions, was generally not as positively received as that of their male counterparts. The prevalent attitude was dismissive of women as their art was deemed inferior and they were considered to be too incompetent to effectively represent landscape (Barrell 19). Joseph Addison considered

women to be beautiful creatures whose greatest concerns were preparing ‘Jellies and Sweetmeats’, learning ‘Sewing and Embroidery’, and mending their ‘Hair’. Some, he continued, also dressed to please the eyes of their ‘Male-Beholders’ (qtd. in Bohls 3). Such attitudes towards women were deeply patronizing and deemed them to be proper objects of beauty, and “second-class practitioners or consumers” (2) of arts, but rarely as competent artists or writers. However, women’s venture into both travel and novel writing proved the opposite. The most prominent descriptions of the landscape in the era were authored by women in modes of fiction and nonfiction. They assiduously formed, then developed, both alternative and innovative ways to utilize in their own writing. Naturally, they engaged in travel writing and novels, which were more accessible modes of writing in order to break “out of masculine tutelage” and make their mark on the eighteenth and nineteenth century aesthetics of landscape representation (3). Radcliffe, along with other female writers such as Mary Shelley, Elizabeth Montagu, Mary Morgan, and Sarah Murray were among women who employed this strategy.

Radcliffe’s contribution in this regard is very significant insofar as she managed to change the nature of the picturesque and sublime by weaving the observer into the land and imbuing it with a feminine sensibility. Her heroines were placed in the picturesque and sublime scenes of landscape, but rejected the idea of a detached observer that was advocated by the founding fathers of aesthetic discourse. She inflected the landscape with intense emotions and memories of people, as is the case in *Udolpho* where Emily is constantly reminded of her deceased father or her lover Valancourt by looking at landscape. Consequently, the female appropriation of the aesthetic subject (Bohls 7) goes against the grain and counters the idea of a disinterested observer. In this scenario, Radcliffe proves that

the aesthetic experience can be fully achieved even by a female observer who is interested and invested in the political, social, and ideological resonances of landscape.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of a disinterested subject, introduced by Anthony Lord Shaftesbury, is quintessentially a very exclusive and undemocratic notion. Such a solitary experience could only be achieved by a person whose artistic taste, judgements, and attitude distinguished him from others and placed him in the coterie of “the educated, wealthy, landowning gentleman of taste [as opposed to] the ‘vulgar’, a category which included women along with anyone of working class or non-European status” (Kinsley 77). This demarcation marginalized women and did not allow them the opportunity of participation in the creation of proper arts. Elizabeth Bohls argues that over time, these ideas were challenged and resisted by the subversive act of women appropriating and occupying the position of the aesthetic subject (7) through travel writing. Radcliffe used the same strategy in her novels which resemble accounts of travels and journeys that contained empowered and agentive heroines who supplant a male aesthetic observer. This emancipatory occasion empowered women to venture into the patriarchal realm of arts and reformulate it in order to challenge its gendered ideology.

A male-authored aesthetic discourse of disinterestedness and detachment around nature was comprised of three primary representative modes: namely, the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque. Amongst the three, the picturesque gained the highest prominence due to a growing understanding of the concept of visual arts which was a serendipitous outcome of increasing travel and a strong passion for nature (Trott 74). In general, the cult of the picturesque advocated detachment on the one hand and an expansive view on the other, both of which were altered by women writers. Art critics of the day, such as Joseph Addison, encouraged the use of a vast prospect when depicting nature as it entails freedom; the viewing eye is not confined and is immersed in the landscape which is conducive to humans’ ‘fancy’

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<sup>4</sup> Radcliffe also links the interiors of castles with patriarchal power and female oppression. In this vein, her descriptions are far from being disinterested observations. Instead, they become tied with ideological and political messages.

(qtd. in Bermingham 84). The crux of Addison's injunction is that unconfined spaces engender creativity and stimulate imagination producing endless possibilities since the eyes have the latitude to roam around unburdened by confinements. Such an expansive view is conducive to artistic imagination. On the other hand, confinement is an impediment to the aesthetic experience as the mind is put under restraint, the eye cannot wander freely. The imagination, in turn, is crippled and the culmination of aesthetic appreciation is ultimately thwarted. In Addison's comments, the aesthetic experience of a wide prospect was exclusive to the "Mind of Man" (Labbe ix) from which women were excluded for their inability to fulfil the requirements of a detached, disinterested observer. This implies that men's minds and imagination should embrace open spaces as an index of liberty and creativity, whereas women must be content with confinement as it is perceived to be natural for them (ix). This is a manifestation of the gendered dichotomy of private and public spheres in the aesthetic discourse of the era resulting in women's marginalization from arts.

At the core of such gendered aesthetic principles such as freedom, creativity, imagination, and a wide prospect was a desire to visually control landscape and nature. The authoritative faculty of a man's mind was seen as capable of subjugating and taming the vastness of nature through his visual power. The power of nature is rendered feeble and passive in comparison with the mind of man which vicariously controls and confines nature in art. This is also a legacy of the Enlightenment mindset in which nature was the passive object of scientific experimentation and investigation. In a similar fashion, "the conventions of the eighteenth-century aesthetics encourage[d] a construction of the landscape scene as passive in relation to the active subject position of the observer" (Kinsley 111). The aesthetic discourse provided male artists and men of reason, with the means to possess and dominate the landscape. The emphasis on detached observation and extensive views is not only relevant to the visual control of scenery, but it also serves as an organizing and structuring principle

which justifies the perpetuation of control over the ‘other’, be it nature, landscape, or even women.

The visual mastery of landscape afforded male artists a means for domination and power. Detachment and disinterestedness provided men with a ‘vantage point’, to use Labbe’s term, to look over the land. Such a ‘vantage point’ was not merely an indication of a physical and literal ascendancy, but it also a sign of social power (Labbe xi) since only educated and wealthy men of distinction were privy to such privileges. In other words, the ability of the detached observer to dominate the scenery is an extension of his social and economic power to rule over others and demand obedience, a privilege accorded to men of a certain social class. The idea of landscape representation being conflated with social class and power dates back to the Renaissance. The wealthy and influential landowners commissioned Renaissance artists to paint their lands. The hired artists added perspective to the paintings of their patrons’ lands in order to give them an aura of power and authority by having depth in the paintings which created an illusion of visual mastery over the land. In fact, the evolution of perspective in landscape painting was “a way of seeing, a composition and structuring of the world so that it may be appropriated by a detached, individual spectator to whom an illusion of order and control is offered through the composition of space” (Cosgrove 55). Indeed, space is entangled with other social structures and, as Henry Lefebvre points out, it can be “a means of control, and hence of domination, and power” (26). In a similar vein, the eighteenth century cult of the picturesque enhanced a masculine monopoly of art resulting in an aesthetic dominance. Female subjectivity over aesthetics was largely denied or ignored since women occupied object status and were categorised as ‘other’. They were to be seen, rather than possessing any instrumental viewpoint of their own. Only male artists of some distinction were deemed capable of appreciating and producing true art.

Since women were excluded from this experience on the basis of their gender and social position, they embraced attachment and empathy with the landscape as a counterbalance to the

patriarchal aesthetic conventions of the time. They also developed a dialogic relationship with nature in order to construct a different sense of self. This connection is paradigmatic of the female picturesque which was engendered by the new possibilities created by women writing either travelogues or placing their fictional characters on the road and beyond the private sphere. The technique of attachment was a resistance against the male-authored picturesque whose obsession with control and dominance denoted a subliminal fear of the unknown, the ‘other’, and women. Accordingly, the male artists of the eighteenth century necessitated “a masculinist vision of detached and authoritative aesthetic contemplation . . . [that] exclude[d] the female” (Kinsley 79). Therefore, women reclaimed their position by appropriating the position of the privileged male subject then inserting themselves into the landscape and associating it with issues of gender, power, social position, and their identity. This created the concept of empathy and communion with nature which became the trademark for women writers.

Connection with the landscape is indeed one of the indices of a ‘feminine’ text since female writers were accustomed to being more detail-oriented and focused on minutiae. They were then able to bring an eye that was trained towards registering detail and nuance to the larger spaces of nature or landscape. Indeed, all of nature’s subtleties and particularities were foregrounded as female writers invested their landscapes with connection, association, and interestedness. Their ability to see, feel, and experience the environment was a necessary counterweight to the more rigid ways of registering a place as practiced by their male counterparts. Thus, women’s texts were usually discredited for dealing excessively with trifles (Russell 213). What distinguished male from female perception of landscape in travel writing and also, by extension, in novel writing, according to Romero, was that for women “the accent was on detail; intensity of individual experiences; empathy for some people” (qtd. in Hagglund 10). This applies to Radcliffe’s novels as, for instance, Emily’s gaze in *Udolpho* reveals to us the desolate life of the peasants and a poor shepherd whose sheep have been

stolen, as she is traveling with her father through the Alps, thus deliberately creating a contrast between the idyllic scenery and its impoverished inhabitants. Also, in *The Romance of the Forest*, Adeline's observation of the landscape is not only imbued with moments of intense empathy and relation, but also with political associations. As she is traveling with La Luc towards Italy, she is struck by the contrast between the dazzling beauty and lushness of nature and the melancholy and languid faces of the inhabitants which she blames on "an arbitrary government, where the bounties of nature, which were designed for all, are monopolized by a few, and the many are suffered to starve tantalized by surrounding plenty" (281). Therefore, women's treatment of landscape was far from that of a disinterested subject and more inclined to linking it with political and ideological associations.

Women's strategy of resistance to the patriarchal monopoly of aesthetics was to function as literary cartographers when surveying a land by highlighting its minutiae and subtleties in order to domesticate and bring it into unison with their own mode of inhabiting and seeing the world. Men, on the other hand, abstracted and generalized the landscape in order to own and control its vastness, but women alleviated the fear of vastness by relating to the land.<sup>5</sup> Women's conflation of the land with their sensibility mitigates the fear of the vast unknown land by making it familiar and relatable. The patriarchal, reductionist way of seeing the landscape is akin to the male cult of the picturesque, which strives for objectivity, abstraction, disinterestedness, and wholeness, by disregarding rich details. The male subject is not only detached and uninvolved, but functions as an unaffected viewer. Even social and ideological constructs such as sex and gender are both outcomes of such reductionism as it is rarely possible to have an objective patriarchal account of knowledge whose constitution is not founded upon the exclusion of women. Women's absence is solidified as a textual imperative

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<sup>5</sup> This might account for the "preponderance of women among patients with agoraphobia [which] is usually explained as a consequence of social and cultural factors; thus, agoraphobia has been portrayed as a 'caricature of the traditional female roles'" (Starcevic 47) which affects more women than men. It is also considered to be "a cultural phenomenon" (Ganser 71) rather than a psychological disorder.

for the creation and perpetuation of male subjectivity that organizes and controls the composed aesthetic scene.

Contrary to a masculine vision of aesthetics, women's embeddedness in the landscape functioned as an empowering state to compensate for their exclusion and marginalization from the literary tradition. Their self-styled variations on the representation of landscape served the ideological purpose of offsetting male domination in the artistic domain. Nevertheless, the repercussions were felt beyond the realms of fiction and travel writing as women's compensatory tactics left their mark on the creation of a genuine feminine sensibility to landscape which formed one of the foundations of ecofeminism in the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> The conflation of women with landscape and environment has been at the core of modern ecofeminism, which investigates the dual oppression of women and nature that is triggered by a patriarchal perspective. This philosophical movement also reveals the ways in which women use nature to define themselves and develop a sense of agency through engagement with their own historical and discursive contexts. The reformulation of categories of landscape, such as the picturesque, was also one of the many ways in which women writers engaged with nature in their writing in order to assert their voice and resist patriarchal inscriptions.

Apart from the picturesque, the sublime was also modified in the hands of female Romantic writers, including Ann Radcliffe, to accommodate their own mode of expression and being. The sublime, as many commentators have pointed out, is an overtly gendered concept which is closely identified with the "experience of masculine empowerment" (Mellor, *Gender* 85) through experiencing nature. Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant both formulated the idea of the sublime with slightly different definitions; however, they both retained

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<sup>6</sup> Such a sensibility towards nature still reverberates even in modern times in women's involvement and activism in environmental movements around the world whose prime example is the Chipko movement in India where it is consecrated as a "privileged terrain" (Byres 33) in ecofeminist discourse which hallmarked an environmentally-oriented women's movement. Chipko, meaning "embrace" in the local language, refers to a group of women in an Indian village in 1974 who hugged trees to prevent contractors and loggers from felling the trees. The news of the event reached other nearby villages quickly and soon other women joined forces with the locals to save their ancestral trees. The event has been heralded by ecofeminists as one of the most significant movements where the need for gender equality, sustenance, and the environment comes to the fore.

overtones of the gendered concept of the sublime biased against women's way of experiencing nature. In Burke's definition of the sublime, anything that triggers terror, horror, pain, and danger becomes the main ingredient because it can create intense emotions (Burke 36). The mind is so overwhelmed with such profound emotions that it evokes a sense of infinity, vastness, and boundless dimensions. Such a state of expansiveness is invoked by encountering natural scenes of grandeur, obscurity, utter darkness and intense light. Feelings of terror and horror are then supplanted by astonishment, awe, and eventually submission (Mellor, *Gender* 88). Contrary to Burke, Immanuel Kant's account of the sublime modifies the experience of overwhelming horror and terror which is integral to Burke. Kant's focus is on the power of the human mind and reason to soar above the overpowering infinity of nature. In Kant's modification, "the experience of the sublime consists in a feeling of the superiority of our own power of reason, as a supersensible faculty, over nature" (Ginsborg). This idea is embedded in his transcendental philosophy, celebrating the pleasure that emanates from the victory of reason over the stifling terror and horror of nature's power. Kant's sublime is indeed the achievement of "intellectual mastery over the power of nature" (Mellor, *Gender* 87) which echoes the legacy of the science-oriented approach of the Enlightenment scientists towards nature.

Both Burke and Kant's notions of the sublime bear the signature of a gender dichotomy where the female is excluded from this experience and it is only the male subject who is capable of achieving it, hence his empowerment. Women, according to Burke, are more aligned with the mode of the beautiful which is associated with "qualities in things as induce in us a sense of affection and tenderness" (Burke 47), qualities which are by definition feminine, motherly and thus remote from the sublime. Kant's sublime fares no better than Burke's as it is also founded on excluding the female subject from its rhetoric. His valorisation of the triumph of reason over the realm of nature reverberates with the Cartesian binary of the detachment of mind from body. Kant's sublime is predicated on the erasure of the realm of

senses, emotions, and body that are all linked with women (Mellor, *Gender* 88). As a result, the sublime becomes the privilege of a male observer's mind while women are positioned as being unable to fully experience and appreciate it. This formulation of the sublime lingered well into the Romantic period and male poets of the time continued the myth of the sublime as exclusively belonging to the individual male subject.

The Romantic sublime, as a masculine phenomenon beyond the reach of women, is poignantly defined by Weiskel, whose definition relies on Freudian psychoanalysis. He describes the Romantic sublime through the Freudian Oedipal anxiety where the male subject "momentarily experiences the abstract ad infinitum" (62). Infinity is experienced by abandoning the physical world with all its particularities and, instead, focusing on eternity and vastness. The transcendence over the material world entails the elimination of women from this experience. In short, the Romantic sublime "is the very moment in which the mind turns within and performs its identification with reason. The sublime moment recapitulates and thereby re-establishes the Oedipal complex, whose positive resolution is the basis of culture" (94). Weiskel's account of the sublime does not allow the slightest room for female agency and self-realization as the substantiation of the sublime is premised on the positive resolution of the Oedipal anxiety and fear of castration which pertain to men only. Nor does it acknowledge the inclusion of women in the act of creating culture, since it is only the resolution of the male Oedipal complex that can create human culture through the sublime, which reaffirms the role of man's mind and reason. Indeed, this account corroborates the Kantian sublime, restating the role of the rational mind by splitting it from the emotional and physical body. Jacqueline Labbe also draws on Weiskel's description to foreground the gendered bearings of the Romantic sublime. She describes the sublime as a moment in which the male subject has achieved mastery over nature by being the disinterested perceiver of scenery. It is the triumphant moment of a disinterested male subject ascending to the higher realm of reason synonymous with power. Labbe compares this overwhelming moment with

“penetrative sex [and] masculine orgasm” (42), since it is the masculine mind which has incapacitated and erased nature and female in an act of domination and control.

As a reaction against the masculine sublime of Burke and Kant, women writers developed a different approach to deal with the overwhelming powers and emotions triggered by nature. The feminine sublime is, in reality, a textual position that many female writers of the time adopted, regarding aesthetic discourse from which they were mainly barred. Patricia Yaeger describes this feminine sublime as a rejection of the all-possessing masculine sublime which dominates nature. The alternative for the male “vertical sublime” is a female “horizontal sublime” which is not limited to the resolution of castration anxiety (191) that concerns only men and the formation of their subjectivity; the feminine sublime, by contrast, is actually a site of connection and relation. Instead of repressing the “the desire for pre-oedipal bonding with a mother’s body desire”, it celebrates it “as a primary, healthful part of the writer’s experience” (205). The connection to nature as a nurturing source counters the male sublime’s anxieties about the negation of mind and reason by overwhelming emotions.

The feminine sublime lauds such emotions as a rapturous phenomenon whereby women are connected with nature in a reciprocal fashion (Mellor, *Gender* 97). They form a bond with nature which becomes a manifestation of their female experience and a soothing source from which they can acquire a formative and a stronger sense of self. The feminine sublime is not concerned with transcendence of self and the power of reason over nature since it does not share the sense of fear and anxiety that the male sublime does. In this vein, such a conception of the feminine sublime reverberates with Christopher Hitt’s call for an ecological sublime that would offer an alternative to the all-dominating traditional sublime that seeks to affirm the sovereignty of man’s mind over nature (609). The feminine sublime substantiates the opportunity for an ecological sublime in which nature is a participatory actor in the formation of one’s subjectivity and sensibility. In other words, the female aesthetic viewer does not seek to reaffirm her domination of nature by visual possession of landscape. Instead, she becomes a

part of nature who takes in the experience of the sublime without being excluded from it, as is so often the case with the exclusive terrain of the male sublime. Therefore, the female ecological sublime connects characters to nature in a mutual experience whereby women gain a better sense of self by being situated in nature.

The positive influence of women writers in eighteenth-century aesthetic theory cannot be disregarded as it provided an opportunity for their active participation in the artistic arena. Such participation, in the form of writing novels or travel accounts, not only ended and altered man's monopoly of what qualifies as superior and proper art, but laid the foundation for principles which were embraced by ecofeminists two centuries later. These new principles included establishing a relational bond with nature, connecting and communicating with it, inscribing its details and richness, implicating the observer in the landscape, and associating nature with all its political and social ramifications. In effect, nature ceased to be the passive object of aesthetic discourse and became a vibrant presence with the ability to initiate and register internal transformation in characters rather than merely serving as an empty canvas for the attainment of the male sublime.

Women's relational communion with nature was also enabling as it provided a palliative to Cartesian duality, which was considered responsible for turning nature into a lifeless mass for humans' exploitation by sundering the mind from the body. Women's aesthetic vision did not strive towards mastery and control over nature, but sought to establish a dialogical relation for communion and harmony with it where body and mind interact mutually and the binaries are dissipated. In this fashion, the constitution of individual and collective identity is not based on the exclusion of either man or woman from the realm of body or mind. This is the case in Radcliffe's fictions, where good-hearted male and female characters such as Emily, Valancourt, St Aubert, Ellena, Vivaldi, La Luc, and Adeline, all appreciate nature on a horizontal level where both male and female are engaged in this aesthetic process. In addition, the female characters are further empowered and enabled by the same process.

The assertion that female authors forged a more relational bond and a less disinterested tie with nature by no means overrules the fact that some male authors such as John Keats or William Wordsworth also depicted the picture of a poet's mind interacting with its surrounding nature. Nevertheless, the emphasis of poets like Keats and Wordsworth was on the affirmation of an authorial poetic voice through its interaction with nature. In other words, nature is only an ancillary in reaffirming the mind of a poet who is only reminiscing and creating art in his prolific solitude. In this account, nature is assigned a supplementary role only. Still, the poet does distance himself from the eighteenth-century perspective of an absolute disinterestedness in nature. However, female authors' tie with nature was a non-instrumental one which treated nature as an entity with transformative powers, and these in turn enabled them to trigger a change.

The connection of female characters to nature and the creation of a horizontal platform where male and female develop a bond with their environment is also a celebration of place as an integral part of one's identity. The expanded sense of self and female empowerment is rooted in the characters' place-bound identity which can lead to the blurring of borders between the binaries of the mind and the body. This connection is also linked with the reformulation of aesthetic concepts such as the sublime which created a site for empathy and care. The next chapter will contextualize the concepts and theories presented here, to delineate how Radcliffe's reconceptualization of women's relation to nature bears upon environmentalism.

### **3. Place Attachment and Eco-Identity**

### **3.1 Radcliffe's Emplaced Inhabitation and Rousseauian Dwellings**

Ann Radcliffe's oeuvre is marked by its textual visuality and its pictorial exuberance which reflects the popularity of the aesthetics of the eighteenth century and the tradition of landscape painting made fashionable by artists like Salvatore Rosa and Claude Lorrain. Her descriptions are distinguished by rich exterior landscape details which are fused with human emotion and poetic sensibility. George Moir in 1839 commented that she had a uniquely innovative style as the first writer to embellish her novels with the art of landscape painting. This approach was an integral part of her narratives, enhancing the dramatic effects of her plots (qtd. in Orestano 51). Moir considers her landscape descriptions to be a stylistic trope and, therefore, dismisses critiques that her expansive depictions of nature were either redundant or implausible for not resembling the places she had not actually seen.

Radcliffe's new approach, on the one hand, distinctively infuses her spatial descriptions with a subtle critique of gender ideology by marking places such as castles and patriarchal home as claustrophobic places of oppression. On the other hand, her novels contain a textual richness which provides an escape from the stifling interior of the castles through descriptions of the vast and sublime mountains and valleys of the Pyrenées and Apennines. Such a wide landscape creates an alternative space for her characters, especially her heroines, to engage with nature and the environing greenery which, in turn, enhances the heroines' sense of self and increases their agency. Despite the fact that her inspiration for describing foreign lands came from second-hand sources such as travelogues or paintings, Radcliffe still managed to maintain a touch of familiarity, so that British readers of the time, who were more attuned to their local setting, felt at home with the offshore places described in her novels. Evan Gottlieb uses the term 'cosmopolitan' to describe this innovative style and maintains that the "gothic becomes truly global" (95) because of Radcliffe's genius for introducing foreign settings with such mastery as to render them relatable to English readers. She is deservedly called "the first

poetess of romantic fiction” (qtd. in Clery 74) by Walter Scott for a masterful mixture of landscape description with narrative style.

Radcliffe’s descriptions do not serve the mere purpose of creating a physical setting to function as a backdrop for the main plot. Her extensive descriptions function as a barometer that duly measures the purity and integrity of characters whose responses to landscape reveal their dispositions. Landscape also bears traces of a gendered social ideology which Radcliffe seeks to subvert through her heroines’ relationship to and engagement with nature. Elizabeth Bohls rightly observes that Radcliffe’s heroines’ response to landscape is an exposé of the architecture of “gendered oppression” (226), especially in the sublime landscape, while the picturesque, by contrast, provides a more comforting site of relief. Bohls’ interpretation reaffirms the male sublime and the female picturesque; however, Radcliffe also manages to create a feminine sublime which is a more androgynous category as it allows room for *both* male and female subjects to experience the sublime. Her feminine aesthetics construct a site of connection and communion as opposed to the patriarchal aesthetics of disinterestedness and disconnection. They also construct a space which permits the emergence of a female self that is more empowered and assertive, paving the way for establishing an ethics of care that extends to people and their environment.

The creation of such a utopian vision of aesthetics of empowerment and care in Radcliffe is based on Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s writings. Rousseau’s ideas suggest parallels with the basic tenets of modern environmentalism in terms of identifying the roots of modern environmental plights. His *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men*, written in 1754, provides a trenchant critique of modernity, which inaugurated the environmental exploitation of natural resources. His essay traces the detachment of human from his natural state and the ensuing social inequalities which emanate from the establishment of social contracts. According to Jonathan Bate, the word “nature” is used in two different senses by Rousseau: one refers to humans’ inherent predispositions and

characteristics while the other refers to the physical world, unmarred by the influence of humans (*Song* 32-3). The second definition is of particular interest to ecocritics as it comes close to the binary of culture and nature. Rousseau posits that progress and the subsequent development of human civilization is chiefly responsible for man's detachment from nature and any consequent problems, some of which are quintessentially environmental. He believes that human beings, in their original natural state, are inherently good through their propinquity to nature which enables them to be generally happy and sustain themselves so they are not burdened by the demands created by the development of a modern society. In effect, the progress of civilization and reason replaces the original state of nature and incites artificial desires in humans. This is the establishment of modern societies and their social contracts which give rise to inequality between people. The formation of civil societies imposes social needs such as the need for labour and property. This, in turn, generates greater social inequality and exploitation of the weak.

Although Rousseau does not directly comment on environmental issues he, nevertheless, identifies the roots of man's domination over nature as the basis of an ensuing detachment. Rousseau also reveals a fundamental inequity in the relationship between human and nature which has a direct bearing on environmentalism as a philosophy. The Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, is the culmination of humans' detachment from nature; the eighteenth century celebrated reason over emotion, saw the rise of modern sciences, sanctified the exploitation of nature for humans' progress, and widened the gap between nature and culture. In effect, Rousseau's central argument is that a rampant march towards progress catalyses inequality and, by extension, the alienation of humans from nature. In the same vein, Romanticism raises similar concerns about human beings' separation from nature which can lead to many ills (38) and, instead, encourages a return to nature as a remedy, solace and a token of reconciliation. Rousseau's writing constitutes one of the earliest commentaries on dichotomy between nature and culture which underpins the modern philosophy of environmentalism. This binary, in

Radcliffe, can even be extended to the dualism in urban and rural settings which I will discuss at length in the following sub-section of this chapter.

Another noteworthy aspect of Rousseau is his writing on botany and plants which represented a distinct departure from conventional wisdom on nature in the eighteenth century. His account of nature and plants, as noted by Kuhn, varies significantly from the scientific paradigm which classifies plants as static objects of study (6); instead, he embraces a more dynamic approach in which nature is an organic unity. For instance, Kuhn cites Rousseau's definition of a flower from *Letters on the Elements of Botany*, where a flower is not reduced to its constituent elements as was commonly done back then; in lieu of such a definition, Rousseau conceives of a flower as an organism in its 'becoming' (7), its growth, and blossoming as a living organism which is a part of another organism. This holistic view is a shift from the atomized version of nature popularized by the rise of mechanical science and biology along with the latter's obsession with taxonomy.

Rousseau's new attitude towards nature makes him keen on seeing and feeling nature rather than "dissect[ing] and nam[ing]" it (Corkle 56). For him, the truth lies in nature and can only be abstracted by connecting with and seeing nature, rather than detaching oneself from it in order to understand its secrets with the disinterested eyes of the scientist or botanist (58). In fact, in Radcliffe's *Udolpho* and *The Romance of the Forest*, good-hearted and wise characters such as St Aubert and La Luc are both interested in the study of plants and pursue their botanical interests by observing and relating to nature rather than dissecting it. I will discuss this aspect of Radcliffe's fictions in more detail later in this section. Therefore, not only does nature cease to be an inert and static given but simultaneously asserts itself as a dynamic presence through which characters can elevate themselves and find meaning and value. This connection crystalizes once humanity is in alignment with nature, a wholesome harmony between humans and nature, or to put it differently, nature and culture. Connecting with nature, seeking truth, and garnering fortitude from it are best expressed in both *The Mysteries*

of *Udolpho* and *The Romance of the Forest* where Emily and Adeline are educated by St Aubert and La Luc respectively, benevolent father figures who create a mode of life which is ethical and responsible towards both nature and humans.

St Aubert and La Luc's philosophy of life, modelled after Rousseau, is nature-oriented and posits that both men and women are capable of bonding with nature. Female characters are the central focus of this nature-oriented education as they are more attuned to the subtleties and changes in landscape. The heroines are depicted as being more conscious of their environment and responsive towards it through their acute perceptions of and involvement with it. This is not to say that male characters are totally impervious to landscape. Indeed, there is a host of them such as Valancourt, Monsieur St Aubert and La Luc who are clearly perceptive of their surroundings and relate to them as a source of solace and contemplation. The opposite scenario is also true where more villainous characters, whether male or female, are unreceptive to nature and landscape and either do not connect with it or have a coldly pragmatic attitude towards the land, such as Monsieur Quesnel who wishes to uproot some of the trees in La Vallée and make some 'improvements'. To put it simply, nature operates as a moral index where readers may observe that virtuous characters forge connections to nature, while morally ambiguous or villainous characters remain disconnected from the natural world. Thus, the heroines of Radcliffe's novels demonstrate the former approach by forging a dynamic bond with nature whereby a new agentive self emerges. They undertake a journey and endure a number of trying ordeals and relate to nature as if it were a reciprocal agent that provides them with the necessary fortitude to prevail. Furthermore, their engagement with the natural world permits them to access a higher sense of 'self' where they are eventually attuned to a wider cosmos. This significantly differs from virtuous male characters who are in tune with nature, yet retain a curiously static interaction with it, which is to say that their bond with nature fails to trigger a fundamental change in their character or circumstances.

At the core of Rousseau's writing, one can detect a degree of resistance to the encroachment of modernity on the natural state of man. He blames modernization for rising social inequity and injustice which separates human from nature and disrupts his natural alignment to it. The benevolent patriarch of *Udolpho* also harbours the same deep distrust of modernity and progress. He is a figure who is deeply disappointed with the corruption and decadence of city life which has a demoralizing effect on the simplicities and joys he can derive from a natural and domestic life in the country:

The world . . . ridicules a passion which it seldom feels; its scenes, and its interests, distract the mind, deprave the taste, corrupt the heart, and love cannot exist in a heart that has lost the meek dignity of innocence. . . . How then are we to look for love in great cities, where selfishness, dissipation, and insincerity supply the place of tenderness, simplicity and truth? (*Udolpho* 50)

St Aubert is not a revolutionary character and does not rise up against such frivolities with which he was familiar as he had previously spent part of his life in big cities. In the face of the extravagances and spectacles of city life, St Aubert seeks refuge in his simple green dwelling in Gascony where he engages himself in simple delights of gardening and reading literature and gently tending to his family life.

St Aubert's dwelling in his chateau in Gascony is not merely an escape from city life. It is an active and informed choice to build his own abode within the joyous and simple offerings of nature which can approximate him to a Rousseauian original state. In fact, St Aubert engages in an act of place-making which, in and of itself, is a political statement of resistance. He creates a landscape, both 'natural' and 'cultural', as it includes valleys, mountains, bushes, along with his own additions to the landscape by planting and building his actual abode there. This creates a 'place', according to Tim Cresswell, which is a landscape to which humans are attached, and attracted to both its natural and cultural elements (*Place* 11). He actually creates a sense of place, or *genius loci*, a place from which life emanates (Norberg-Schulz 5) and to

which people relate by making their inhabitation there. A place that is infused with value ceases to be a vacant space solely to be occupied and becomes, instead, a source of life, empathy, and connection. The creation of a sense of place is described in rich detail in the opening chapter of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* which sets the scene for the portrayal of an Edenic pastoral world which is the ideal place for St Aubert, his wife, and Emily. His mansion boasts of a panoramic green landscape with the sublime Pyrenées in view:

On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau of Monsieur St Aubert. From its windows were seen the pastoral landscapes of Guienne and Gascony stretching along the river, gay with luxuriant woods and vines, and plantations of olives. To the south, the view was bounded by the majestic Pyrenées, whose summits, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen, and lost again, as the partial vapours rolled along, were sometimes barren, and gleamed through the blue tinge of air, and sometimes frowned with forests of gloomy pine, that swept downward to their base. These tremendous precipices were contrasted by the soft green of the pastures and woods that hung upon their skirts; among whose flocks, and herds, and simple cottages, the eye, after having scaled the cliffs above, delighted to repose. To the north, and to the east, the plains of Guienne and Languedoc were lost in the mist of distance; on the west, Gascony was bounded by the waters of Biscay (5).

The pastoral elements of the scenery reinforce the ideals of a humble, but ample life which is harmonious with St Aubert and his family's convictions. His abode also has an elevating quality where he, his wife and Emily take regular strolls and bask in the scenery which is commensurate with their moral integrity and Rousseauian philosophy of life. Additionally, Radcliffe informs her readers that this is the spot where St Aubert grew up as a boy and spent most of his days, which links the place with memory. St Aubert recalls how he was delighted and nourished by "the homely kindness of grey-headed peasants . . . whose fruit and cream never failed" (6). His recollection of his early days in Gascony infuses the place with memory and life which is what creates a sense of place in his abode. The place becomes a lived

experience of dwelling which connects St Aubert more deeply to Gascony as a result of his memories. In effect, the family of St Aubert owe their happiness to an emplaced engagement with their abode as their bliss and sense of being spring from the land they inhabit.

As a habitation, Gascony provides refuge from the modernisation of city life, which St Aubert overtly disdains. The establishment of a living, dynamic dwelling place in which one's personal memories are intimately interwoven is part of a process of place-making that Australian eco-feminist, Freya Matthews, describes as 'nativism'. Matthews proposes that there is a series of actions or even rituals which not only ensure that inhabitants belong and connect to their habitation but also constitute the very foundation of nativism. For example, she recommends committing and devoting ourselves to our place of dwelling by investing it with life and spirit, beautifying it by planting trees and flowers, creating a safe and welcoming place for both humans and nonhumans, and connecting with neighbours to foster a sense of community which buzzes with life and energy (50-53). St Aubert's La Vallée is the epitome of dwelling as a form of nativism as his favourite pursuit is botany, in addition to planting and strolling among the trees and flowers. St Aubert adorns his house by "plant[ing] a little grove of beech, pine, and mountain-ash. . . . [and] creat[ing] a plantation of orange, lemon, and palm-trees, whose fruit, in the coolness of evening, breathed delicious fragrance. With these were mingled a few trees of other species" (*Udolpho* 7-8). He spends most of his time in this spot conversing and playing games with his family. He is also kind to animals as he has a fishing-house in his chateau which he never uses because "for fishing he had no use, for he never could find amusement in torturing or destroying" (11). His neighbour is M. Barreaux, a similar-minded man whose love for plants and botany has brought them together. M. Barreaux is a rigid and solemn man who has similarly opted for the serenity of the countryside as opposed to the city. Their friendship and neighbourly bond are so strong that M. Barreaux is actually the first person to offer his condolences to St Aubert on his wife's death. Even during St Aubert's journey to recover his health, his pastime involves engrossing himself with a

botanical book written by his neighbour. M. Barreaux also becomes the first person to offer to help to Emily after St Aubert's death to the point that Emily feels more comfortable with him rather than with her own aunt, Madame Cheron. A strong sense of community is reinforced by a harmonious symmetry between nature and the inhabitants of the province of Gascony illustrated by the dance of the peasants and their 'debonnaire steps' and 'sprightly melodies' which comingle with the French scenery of La Vallée. The fairly well-to-do St Aubert and even the peasants who live in the neighbourhood share the simplicity and the moderate prosperity that characterizes that region.

Another critical factor in experiencing nativism is physically walking through a landscape. According to Henry David Thoreau, walking is a way to see and learn from nature. It is, indeed, a metaphor for experiencing and living with nature: "I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least— and it is commonly more than that— sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements" (3). His belief is that human is first and foremost a part of nature rather than an individual in a society (1). Similarly, for St Aubert and his family, as people who have detached themselves from the corrupting influence of society, wandering the verdant landscape is a vital part of their inhabitation. As explained in previous chapter, St Aubert's walks unite domestic joy and scientific pursuit of botany without compromising one for the other. He especially remembers the "wild walks of the mountains" (*Udolpho* 6) from his childhood days in the mountains of Gascony. In one particular stroll, Emily and her father encounter a large chesnut tree and Emily's poetic mind compares the breeze running through the tree to the "voice of some supernatural being – the voice of the spirit of the woods" (16). She uses this chance to read her father a poem she composed, inspired by the light of a glow worm in the chesnut tree. The inhabitation and embeddedness of characters with nature bring out the poetry of the place. This is the essence of dwelling, as Heidegger explains: "Poetry first of all admits man's dwelling into its very nature, its presencing being. Poetry is the

original admission of dwelling” (Heidegger 225). In fact, a female’s reunion with nature recurrently coincides with the creation of art. Poetry of place registers the essence of landscape and invests it with life, a sign of the extended inhabitation of people and land. It gives life and presence to landscape which is no longer inert and lifeless. Furthermore, this is an apt symbiosis of culture and nature in Radcliffe. As poetry is an artistic and cultural endeavour, its composition inspired by natural objects in this context can be interpreted as a manifestation of the synthesis of nature and culture in an inhabited dwelling. Since characters are informed by their experience of nature, they engage in the cultural act of place making by creating poetry about the place or its markers. This is consistent with Tim Cresswell’s idea that what differentiates a place from space is the value and meaning that inhabitants of the place afford it (*Place* 10). A place that is marked with memory, value and significance takes on life and turns into a part of one’s identity.

Nativism is also a relational cohabitation between humans and things in nature. Mathews argues that once an inhabitant/native considers himself to be of the world, things in the world also become a part of him. The dweller is infused and interwoven with the world and its things. If this level of empathy is achieved, we become more mindful of and responsible for our world; the world, in turn, ‘attunes’ itself to us and accepts us as its inhabitants (55). St Aubert, as a native of his place, is indeed attuned to his world and feels for and empathizes even with the things of his place. Upon improving his estate, he sometimes has to compromise his botanical taste for his feelings for nature. He is so greatly attached to two trees that he cannot persuade himself to cut them down in order to gain a better prospect from his house: “Such was his attachment to objects he had remembered from his boyish days, that he had in some instances sacrificed taste to sentiment. There were two old larches that shaded the building, and interrupted the prospect; St Aubert had sometimes declared that he believed he should have been weak enough to have wept at their fall” (*Udolpho* 7). He has so much implicated himself in his place that the death of a thing is construed to be a loss to his

emplaced identity in nature. Inhabitation can create a strong and deep connection with nature that the true inhabitant may even consider land and nature to be a part of their family. In this manner, nature is also afforded a level of consciousness. The emplacement of humans with a conscious nature is parallel to a philosophical notion called panpsychism (Mathews 53). Panpsychism is defined as the belief that the mind is a part of all objects and entities in the world (Seager and Allen-Hermanson). The significance of Matthews' idea of nativism imbued with panpsychism is in its reaction against the Cartesian worldview in which things and matter are divested of their presence and life as objects unworthy of our empathy. Matthews maintains that the definition of nativism couched in panpsychism accords agency and 'subjectivity' to all the world objects (58), even if it is a tree like that of St Aubert. St Aubert's life, along with that of his family, is continuous with nature as the death of a tree is not considered the loss of an object, but the death of a part of the world, or a part of their emplaced self. Life in La Vallée is a relational life with nature, and the identities of its inhabitants are equally relational with nature on the basis of their commitment to their dwelling, place and nature.

Continuity and stability are other important features of dwelling in a place or becoming the native of a place. St Aubert leaves life in a big city and retires to a small place in Gascony which happens to be the place that is attached to memories of his youth. It is actually a return to the place where he established his roots. Both St Aubert and his wife are buried there after their deaths. Even for the grieving Emily, the place is conflated with memories of her parents, especially of her father. When she walks into her father's library, the objects in the room evoke his image poignantly:

Not an object, on which her eye glanced, but awakened some remembrance. . . . when she opened the door of the library. . . . every thing spoke of her father. There was an arm-chair, in which he used to sit; she shrank when she observed it, for she had so often

seen him seated there, and the idea of him rose so distinctly to her mind, that she almost fancied she saw him before her (*Udolpho* 91-2).

The place connects Emily to her deceased father. The emotionally distraught and orphaned Emily finds solace after some weeks in the landscape of La Vallée and garners composure from her dwelling. The traumatic memory of her parents' deaths is alleviated because of her connection to the land as she strolls in the gardens and watches "the flowers his hand [St Aubert's] had planted" which "awaken the tones of that instrument his fingers had pressed" (96). The garden invokes the harmony, bliss, and pleasures Emily experienced with her father in Gascony. She comes to terms with her father's death after she relives her joyous experiences with him through her interaction with nature that imparts his memory.

The continuity of life at La Vallée is also perpetuated at the end of the novel when Emily and Valancourt, now married, choose La Vallée as their residence:

Valancourt led her to the plane-tree on the terrace, where he had first ventured to declare his love . . . on this spot, sacred to the memory of St Aubert, they solemnly vowed to deserve, as far as possible, by endeavouring to imitate his benevolence . . . and by affording to their fellow-beings, together with that portion of ordinary comforts. . . . O! how joyful it is to tell of happiness, such as that of Valancourt and Emily; to relate . . . to the beloved landscapes of their native country,—to the securest felicity of this life . . . the pleasures of enlightened society, and to the exercise of the benevolence, which had always animated their hearts; while the bowers of La Vallée became, once more, the retreat of goodness, wisdom and domestic blessedness! (631-2)

The return of the married couple to Emily's birthplace is an image of the native, integrated with land and nature. Stability and harmony are sanctioned by the bonds of matrimony under the same tree where they first expressed their love for each other. Also, the promise of a benevolent life and compassion for one's neighbours and 'fellow beings' signals the continuity of the act of place making by perpetuating a sense of community. The contiguity of bliss and

wisdom to nature and land is a substantiation of *genius loci*, or a sense of place. The dialogic convergence of humans and nature, nature/culture, enfolds the past, present, and the future and promises an integration of human into nature. This continuity is guaranteed on account of the dynamic fusion of nature and culture which is best realized by ‘becoming native’ to nature and our dwelling.

The sense of the community and commitment to a neighbourhood and its inhabitants is also a prominent feature of St Aubert’s inhabitation. This aspect of ‘becoming native’ has resonance with ecocriticism. Environmentalism, according to Nichols, must be equally conscious of social issues as well as environmental ones. Social environmentalism can move beyond the deadlock of a binary-oriented worldview and instil a sense of responsibility in humans not only towards nature, but also towards their own fellow human beings (xvii). The inseparability of responsibility of man towards both human and nonhuman underlies the stability and durability of La Vallée as a centre for the dynamic fusion of nature and culture. St Aubert, as explained earlier, not only evinces a high level of sensibility and kinship with nonhuman world, but also cherishes the people, farmers or gardeners, who nurture his small piece of land. Both he and Emily usually “walk[ed] towards the mountains, intending to visit some old pensioners of St Aubert, which, from his very moderate income, he contrived to support. . . . After distributing to his pensioners their weekly stipends, listening patiently to the complaints of some, redressing the grievances of others, and softening the discontents of all” (*Udolpho* 17) he gains serenity and tranquillity of mind. His peace of mind “results from the consciousness of having done a beneficent action” (18) and consequently St Aubert becomes more attuned to his surroundings and his mind becomes more disposed “to receive pleasure from every surrounding object” (18). In effect, his generosity and compassion for his neighbours and workers make him more appreciative of nature, and he garners strength of mind from the landscape which is a result of his success in establishing a nature-aligned inhabitation. He is both an environmentally and socially conscious native of his land whose

existence is contiguous with the world at large. His sensitivity to his people and landscape is also the factor that brings him close to Valancourt, whom he deems to be a proper match for Emily. St Aubert often has long conversations with Valancourt and discovers that he also enjoys the simplicity of nature as opposed to the luxuries of cities, to the point where he even considers Valancourt to be “a characteristic figure in the scenes around them” (50). Embedding Valancourt into the landscape is characteristic of St Aubert’s frame of mind in which people and land are not separate. This further reinforces the non-binary mindset of a native to whom humans compose nature as much as nature composes humans.<sup>7</sup>

The sense of place St Aubert has created in his estate is, indeed, a reflection of his Rousseauian worldview which affords him refuge from the vices of city life. His dwelling is modelled after a pastoral setting which foreshadows modern environmental discourse as the idea of a pastoral haven is essentially an antithesis to the disorderly state of modern societies since the pastoral, in general, promises stability (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 56). Radcliffe’s pastoral vision is in itself problematic as well since it occludes the condition of labour and creates an untruthful picture of social life. This is one of the pitfalls of Radcliffe’s fictions.<sup>8</sup> However, she does make some passing references to squalor in peasants’ lives and the social inequality. Nevertheless, Radcliffe’s pastoral worldview is mainly a manifestation of St Aubert’s act of place-making which effectively creates an immune sanctuary, embedded in nature, that guards against the ravages of the outside world. His aesthetic retreat of La Vallée is a great bastion of bliss, a bulwark against the corrupting intrusion of the outside world. He is dutifully devoted to the education of his daughter Emily, who is treated like a flower in the aesthetic garden of La Vallée. He is in charge of domesticating and aestheticizing his property as well as his daughter, hence his passion for literature and gardening. The integrity and wellbeing of his estate and family depend on his skills as a teacher to convey both his love of

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<sup>7</sup> This idea resonates with New Materialism and material ecocriticism which I will elaborate on in chapter five on *Frankenstein*.

<sup>8</sup> An idealization of pastoral often obscures social realities and inequalities. A critique of Radcliffe’s vision of an environmental pastoral will be presented in the concluding chapter.

aestheticism as well as his love of great works of genius to his daughter, a task which, in turn, brings about matrimonial and familial bliss.

The happiness and blossoming of Emily depends upon St Aubert's skill as both an educator and a gardener. The significance of green aestheticism and education is inscribed in the architecture of the chateau with a library, greenhouse, and Emily's room carefully placed along a line on the same side of the chateau. The west wing of the mansion accommodates a library which houses a good supply of "the best books in the ancient and modern languages" (6). The windows of the library open to a grove with tall trees and a river where the eyes can feast on the "gay and luxuriant landscape" (6). On the eastern side of the house is Emily's room decorated with her favourite books, musical instruments, birds and plants with a window which opens to a stretch of lawn with "almonds, palm-trees, flowering-ash, and myrtle" (7). What architecturally and symbolically unites the library to Emily's room is the green-house between the east and the west wing of the house. The chateau is a metaphor of the harmony between nature and culture as demonstrated by the placement of the green-house, stocked with "scarce and beautiful plants" (6), between the library and Emily's room which figuratively situates nature at the centre of Emily's education. This is a testimony to the skills and knowledge of St Aubert as a gardener since he holds botany in high regard as one of his favourite subjects among other sciences. According to Peter Otto: "If one takes the chateau and its windows as metaphors for, respectively, St Aubert's body and senses, then body, building, nature, and God are in this locale joined in an unbroken chain of cause and effect, which links the near and far, part and whole, the beautiful and sublime, and the temporal and the divine" (301). In other words, the chateau is a metaphorical manifestation of integrity and wholeness, the point of the convergence of the sublime and the divine, the material and the metaphysical, culture and nature. It is a place where difference is obliterated and everyone and everything is placed on an equal plane. The central position of the green-house is also a moral anchor which unites sophistication with aestheticism, or nature with culture. The gardener of

this large green-house, St Aubert, does not only safeguard his property and family with sensitivity to plant life, which becomes an extension of his morality, but he also cultivates Emily's mind with great care by teaching her "a general view of the sciences" (9) as well as great literature. She is given a well-rounded education and gains familiarity with both science and arts, twin disciplines which support her affective life and happiness in the valley of Garonne. La Vallée becomes "a repository of taste and refinement—evident in its family's collections of books, flora, musical instruments, and arts" (Lewis 54). The significance of Emily's residence at La Vallée is accentuated by the highly visual and tactile imagery that is deployed. After all, the domestic bliss of St Aubert's family could not have been realized were it not for the bounties and beauties that La Vallée offered. This is why St Aubert strongly opposes his brother-in-law's plans for the improvement of the estate which, for so long, had housed St Aubert's memories and served as an anchor of stability. The peace at La Vallée is temporarily disrupted by the premonition of Quesnel's plans, the death of St Aubert, and Emily's unwilling departure; however, stability is restored, once again, by Emily's return at the end.

The architecture of St Aubert's abode actualizes the idea of a sense of place as it breathes life and cherishes simplicity and domesticity. This is a Heideggerian notion of place in which, according to Norberg-Schulz, the architecture of a place must create 'genius loci', or invest the place with value and meaning so it can become a place of dwelling (5). The layout of the chateau with a greenhouse in the middle which connects a library to Emily's room is one example of architecture creating a 'genius loci' where the symbiosis of nature and science is best represented in the dwelling at La Vallée. Heidegger defines dwelling as: "the way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell" (145). The word dwelling also means "to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine" (145).

In other words, dwelling in a place does not simply mean living there, but becomes a way of life for humans to relate to the place by protecting it as St Aubert does. Being guardians or custodians allows humans to relate to a place as it becomes a part of their life and even a part of their very being. Indeed, La Vallée becomes a *genius loci* on account of St Aubert's acts of place making. Thus, a meaningful convergence between humans and landscape is achieved in the novel. The simplicity of nature and the enlightenment of the intellect go hand-in-hand to create a prime example of Heideggerian dwelling in St Aubert's Gascony. St Aubert is a scientist for his botanical passion and also a humanist for his interest in books and simple delights derived from nature. His dwelling is the epitome of the dynamic fusion of nature and culture which, similar to the idea of panpsychist nativism, offers a remedy to the Cartesian dualism. The establishment of a non-binary relationship to the earth fosters a sense of caring and connection of which the world is in dire need to protect damaged nature.

The inhabitation of such a dwelling is a common trope in Radcliffe's novels. The influence of Rousseau and his green philosophy is even more pronounced in *The Romance of the Forest* where an ideal pastoral world becomes the new space for the heroine Adeline, in order for her to explore her own subjectivity after she resides in Leloncourt and meets La Luc. La Luc is another benevolent patriarch like St Aubert who is similarly interested in both science and nature. He has created an ideal dwelling for the people of the village of Leloncourt who partake in both his wisdom and the beauties of landscape. Adeline is quite a voiceless, meek, and flat character before arriving at the village. At the beginning of the novel, she is at La Motte's disposal and he has no choice but to either take Adeline with him or let her be killed by the bandits. Adeline is later suspected by La Motte's wife of having a romantic affair with her husband. Furthermore, La Motte becomes a tool in the hands of the scheming Marquis de Montalt who wants him to hand Adeline over to him to be his mistress in return for the debt that La Motte owes him. Upon the discovery of Adeline's true identity, the Marquis plans to murder Adeline who is the last member of his brother's family and the true

heir to his estate. Adeline consequently flees the Marquis de Montalt's castle with the help of her beloved, Theodore. Up until this point, Adeline is the object of everybody's pity or lust. She appears to solely exist as a plot device to trigger important events rather than a fully realised character, or as Dekker puts it, her "subjectivity becomes the theatre in which the most important action takes place" (103). However, when she embarks on a journey to flee the malevolent Marquis, she discovers a different sense of self, regains control of her life, and makes important decisions independently. Changing Theodore's doctor, whom she deems too incompetent to treat her lover, as the surgeon has no faith in the powers of nature, is one of such decisions. During her journey from France to Savoy, she becomes more attentive to and perceptive of her surrounding landscape and even conflates it with political, ideological, and economic overtones. For instance, she contrasts the abundance of natural provisions with the desolate state of the people and blames the government for their dire situation. Her interaction with the landscape goes against the idea of a disinterested subject, who is usually a male one, as she demonstrates her ability to appreciate the landscape. She also retains a personal level of attachment to it as she discovers a voice for the first time in the novel and subsequently takes charge of her own life. Her stay in Leloncourt proves to be fruitful as it is only in this Rousseauian utopia that her figurative search for a father figure is consummated by finding the benevolent natural philosopher La Luc.

La Luc is the pastor of the small Alpine village of Leloncourt and is also in charge of the welfare of the place and its people. He is greatly admired and respected by them as they look "up to him as to a father; for while his precepts directed their minds, his example touched their hearts" (*Forest* 245). His prudence and wisdom preside over this village which is a space liberated from the turmoil and strife that have afflicted other parts of the country. He willingly embraces and welcomes Adeline to his family, especially after he realizes that she has been deprived of a loving father and has never tasted paternal kindness. The surrogate father figure sets himself the task of educating Adeline and opening her eyes to the beauties of nature and

also to the words of the wise poets and authors. His role is comparable to that of St Aubert in *Udolpho*. He, too, is ingrained with a Rousseauian philosophy and seeks to impart that wisdom to his family and neighbours. He is Adeline's teacher who instructs her both in the works of literature and the pleasures of nature which can be the best anodyne to Adeline's perturbed state of mind after all her ordeals:

The pleasing society of which she partook, and the quietness of the country, at length restored her mind to a state of tolerable composure. She was now acquainted with all the wild walks of the neighbouring mountains, and, never tired of viewing their astonishing scenery, she often indulged herself in traversing alone their unfrequented paths. . . . She generally took with her a book, that if she perceived her thoughts inclined to fix on the one object of her grief, she might force them to a subject less dangerous to her peace. She had become a tolerable proficient in English while at the convent where she received her education, and the instruction of La Luc, who was well acquainted with the language, now served to perfect her. He was partial to the English; he admired their character . . . and his library contained a collection of their best authors, particularly of their philosophers and poets. Adeline found that no species of writing had power so effectually to withdraw her mind from the contemplation of its own misery as the higher kinds of poetry. . . .

She frequently took a volume of Shakespear or Milton, and, having gained some wild eminence, would seat herself beneath the pines, whose low murmurs soothed her heart, and conspired with the visions of the poet to lull her to forgetfulness of grief (261).

Adeline also learns to inhabit the place and create a dwelling for herself. She enjoys taking walks and contemplating both nature and the genius of poets and writers. She is seeing, feeling, experiencing, and learning from nature, as Henry David Thoreau recommends, through her strolls in the mountains. She finds solace both in books and nature, symbolizing a harmonious synthesis of nature and culture. She is, indeed, establishing herself as a 'native' in her dwelling of Leloncourt. She is educated under La Luc's guardianship in the same fashion

as Emily. Both are instructed by benevolent father figures to become versed in literature and perceptive of their surrounding environment. La Luc has created such a dwelling by integrating culture and nature. He is a Rousseauian philosopher and a naturalist interested both in chemistry and astronomy whereby he has synergized with his environment. He actually sees the presence of a meaningful deity in nature and uses nature to elevate himself and broaden his mind without dominating it as other Enlightenment scientists did. In fact, he and St Aubert move beyond an instrumental and exploitative approach to nature and manage to construct a mode of being that is embedded in a mutual relationship with nature. Adeline and Emily also derive solace and gain the sense of an expanded self from nature which elevates their minds to a greater presence in nature. I will expand on this idea in the section on female eco-sublime.

The utopias created by St Aubert and La Luc also suggest parallels with environmentalism. Both La Luc and St Aubert are scientists who appreciate nature for its own merits and also for their own scholarly pursuits. It is a general fact that the roots of the modern conservation movements go back to the eighteenth century's aesthetic theory regarding landscape appreciation. According to modern environmental aesthetics, there are several models for appreciating landscape for those with an interest in environmentalism. One such model is called the "Natural Environmental Model", or as it is sometimes alternatively called, "scientific cognitivism", which maintains that one needs to have knowledge of 'natural sciences' to be able to aesthetically appreciate landscape (Carlson 11). Also appreciating and understanding nature makes us respect and value it as we realize our life is continuous with nature. St Aubert and La Luc are representative of this model as they open the eyes of others, especially of Emily and Adeline respectively, to the lessons and merits of nature. As Rousseauian scientists, who are versed in natural sciences, they appreciate nature more effectively. Their appreciation and wisdom, in turn, are transferred to female characters who use nature as a site of empowerment, connection and also solace against patriarchy.

The communities that are created by La Luc and St Aubert manifest Radcliffe's recurrent vision of a female utopia. In such utopias, integrity and stability prevail mainly as a result of the harmony between human community and nature which not only creates a sense of place, inhabitation or dwelling, but can also serve as a temporary sanctuary or respite for gothic heroines from their vicissitudes. One prominent example is in *The Italian* where Schedoni, the villainous monk, takes the abducted Ellena to San Stefano, a convent run by an evil abbess. Upon the discovery of Ellena's true identity, Schedoni decides to move Ellena to the convent of Santa della Pieta which is under the tutelage of a good-hearted abbess. She is neither bigoted nor sombre in her approach to religion or in her behaviour towards others. She also "encouraged in her convent every innocent and liberal pursuit" (*Italian* 300) which makes the nuns in her convent shine in their musical abilities. The peace and solace in this utopian convent are cast as the structural opposite of the unparalleled ghastliness of San Stefano. The significant feature of the convent lies in its setting, in the sense that the harmony inside this solemn space is extended to the outer space as well where the surrounding nature also resounds with beauty, harmony, and affluence:

The local circumstances of this convent were scarcely less agreeable than the harmony of its society was interesting. These extensive domains included olive-grounds, vineyards, and some corn-land; a considerable tract was devoted to the pleasures of the garden, whose groves supplied walnuts, almonds, oranges, and citrons, in abundance, and almost every kind of fruit and flower, which this luxurious climate nurtured. These gardens hung upon the slope of a hill, about a mile within the shore, and afforded extensive views of the country round Naples, and of the gulf (301).

The accord between the religious institution of the convent, its inhabitants, their other-worldly pursuit, and the outside landscape, is established by the dialogic unifying forces of nature and culture. This creates a Rousseauian utopia which unites the pursuit of noble arts with the simple pleasures of nature. This rapport also owes its existence to the domestic ambience of the convent which is akin to "a large family, of which the lady abbess [is] the mother" (300)

who actuates the balance between culture and nature by allowing the pursuit of arts and cultivation of land. In fact, this place resembles Lenoncourt and La Vallée in creating a place which depicts the propitious harmony of nature and culture.

The same feminine spirit that nurtures Santa della Pieta prevails over La Luc's Lenoncourt as well where the wisdom and guidance of the philosopher and scientist La Luc looks over the place. His conduct and guidance is an epitome of "virtuous social harmony, organized under a feminine tutelary deity" (Markman Ellis 64), the deceased wife of La Luc. In other words, his wife is the source of La Luc's vision of benevolence and kindness. He garners his wisdom and power from the consolation he gets in the mountains and scenery which invoke the "remembrance of times past" (*Forest* 246) with his wife. Once again, it is the fusion of a place with memory that brings it to life and creates a sense of place. The same applies to La Vallée where Emily and Valancourt's happiness increases once they walk over the scenery and remember Madame and Monsieur St Aubert's "favourite haunts" (*Udolpho* 631). A place imbued with memories of domestic and family bliss becomes a Radcliffian utopia for her heroines, since communities that create a space where the dichotomy of culture and nature is mitigated are always presided over by a feminine sensibility. Even the benevolent patriarchal figures are tinged with a female sensibility which engenders the possibility of a female utopia.

Another point to be made about patriarchal figures in female utopias is that such patriarchal figures also do form a bond with nature, but they fail to trigger a change in male characters' disposition as they are as static as they were before they began their journeys. In contrast, female characters undergo a transformative change through their journeys and sojourns in female utopias. Also, the excessive sensibility of benevolent patriarchal figures such as St Aubert, La Luc or Valancourt are attributes of a female author, Radcliffe, who has conflated them with qualities deemed to be feminine in the eighteenth century. In other words, the seemingly Rousseauian patriarchs who run the female utopias are in actuality a reflection

of Ann Radcliffe's feminist vision of an ideal female society. To paint this society, Radcliffe sets her female characters in motion by depriving them of a mother figure as maternal figures are either dead or absent from her fictions. Mother figures usually embody stability and peace, qualities which do not fare well with female gothic, hence the textual necessity of absent mothers. Also, the chaos and turmoils triggered by absent mothers are alleviated by heroines' bonding with nature. This bonding signifies the trope of the feminine sublime, which leads to the formation of female utopias where nature and culture dialogically interact.

Such female utopias where culture and nature merge dynamically to create *genii loci* are ideal places of inhabitation or dwelling in a Heideggerian sense, in which the place is felt and experienced. This kind of dwelling is bound with memory and remembrance which leads to humans' engagement with place. Jeff Malpas, an Australian philosopher, explains that humans are thinking creatures whose identities are constituted by their cognitive abilities to think, experience, and remember. Thus, a sense of place is inseparable from one's identity and this makes identity "essentially place-bound" (177). For this reason, the stability and integrity of Radcliffe's utopias depend on the people who inhabit them and engage with them through the memories of their childhood, a deceased beloved, or an absent lover.

La Vallée's scenery invokes the memory of Madame St Aubert to her husband; Emily remembers her parents by looking at 'the chain of Pyrenées' and the scenes they used to stroll together; she recalls Valancourt by looking at 'moon-light landscape'; Valancourt, also, remembers her by looking at gardens; La Luc is soothed by walking in the mountains he used to visit with his wife.<sup>9</sup> In all these cases, the characters engage in a pensive reflection and attach the memories of the people they love to places which, in this case, are mostly natural. According to Malpas, the binding of memory and place is an integral part of humans' identity and sense of self (176) and therefore we are emplaced creatures on earth. This implies that if

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<sup>9</sup> Terry Castle discusses the appearances of the haunting images of the dead people in Radcliffe as demonstrating a changing attitude towards death, as such appearances become a sign of "the continuity and stability" (135) of the subject during Romanticism.

we are separated from our dwellings, it would mean a loss or separation of a part of our self or identity (184). This is the reason that Radcliffe's heroines such as Emily, Adeline, Ellena, and Julia all return to their place of dwelling at the end of the novels when the threat of a malignant patriarchy is annihilated. Emily returns to La Vallée for the wedding; Ellena goes back to her own hometown from which she was abducted; Julia also returns to her father's castle after she finds her mother and the threat of patriarchy is eliminated; the married Adeline chooses her residence in her rightful paternal estate as well. All the displaced heroines return to their emplaced identities.

### 3.2 Emplaced Self: The City and the Country

The idea of inhabitation, where the traditional binary relationship between nature and culture is dialogically unified in order to synchronize humans' relation with nature, is one of the highlights of ecocriticism. This concept has the potential to alleviate humans' alienation from nature and afford them a different notion of their identity as embedded in their physical environment. Indeed, ecocriticism also maintains that life in modern societies has severed humans' bond with nature and that reuniting with it can modify our environmentally damaging ways of life (Goodbody, "Nomad" 82). Lawrence Buell makes the same argument that the search for a politically active agenda to resist modernism can be fulfilled with a return to place (Buell, *Future* 65). In other words, celebrating a sense of place invites us to reconsider how humans perceive land and nature; by conceiving one's mode of being as part of the earth and nature, we can relate more meaningfully to the natural world and develop an ethics of care in which damage to nature can be construed as damage to oneself. Heidegger's idea of a poetic dwelling follows a similar logic which offers environmental implications (Toadvine 85) as it provides a shelter against modernity and the technologization of our lives.

In this context, the binary between city and country in Radcliffe assumes greater environmental significance once the reactions of city people and country people to landscape are measured against each other. As mentioned earlier, landscape is an index for people's moral integrity where the more benevolent characters manage to relate to nature, whereas the diabolical characters remain oblivious to it. More interestingly, the more responsive characters' relation to nature emanates from their attachment to the simplicity of nature in the country rather than the attraction of life in big cities. The country still imparts a Rousseauian vision which brings harmony between people and nature as opposed to the alienated city people. The dichotomy of the city and country is poignantly presented in *Udolpho* in several ways. The first sign is Emily's displacement caused by her father's death. She moves away from La Vallée where her emplaced identity is embedded with nature and landscape, adorned

with the memories of her parents and her happy days. Her stay with her aunt entails a change of place from La Vallée to Venice, which is a shift from the natural harmony of the country to the artificial spectacle of the city. Before Emily and her aunt move to Venice with Montoni, Emily takes temporary residence at her aunt's place in Toulouse where "the surrounding objects, the straight walks, square parterres, and artificial fountains of the garden, could not fail . . . to appear the worse, opposed to the negligent graces, and natural beauties of the grounds of La Vallée, upon which her recollection had been so intensely employed" (*Udolpho* 115). The gardens in Madame Cheron's place do not resemble the natural harmony of La Vallée in the least, but only bring to mind the overwrought artificiality of an urbanised taste. More importantly, Emily feels out of place because her memories are still stored in La Vallée which shapes her emplaced self and subjectivity. She is the product of a Rousseauian upbringing and being uprooted from her dwelling creates a sense of loss.

Her stay in Montoni's house in Venice does not fare any better as it stands in stark contrast with La Vallée. The convergence of education, aestheticism, and nature in La Vallée is supplanted by the theatricality and artificiality of Montoni's mansion in Venice, a change which is echoed by the shift from the happy dancing peasants in Garonne to masked groups of dancers in Venice (Otto 303). The artificial spectacle and lack of taste also hint at the materialistic disposition of both her aunt and Montoni. Venice also becomes the place where she first encounters future oppressors such as Count Morano who attempts to abduct her in *Udolpho*. Although La Vallée is in perfect synch with culture and nature, Venice "parodies La Vallée as an image for a false sublimation of nature into art" (Kilgour, *Gothic* 119). The working balance between science and art, or nature and culture, is replaced by a spectacle of artificial urban taste in the form of dances and masques in the city of Venice. Apart from the change of space from natural serenity to urban artificiality, Emily's altruistic companions such as her parents and Valancourt are replaced by selfish acquaintances in the form of Madame Cheron, Montoni, and Count Morano.

The binary of the city and the country is indeed a continuation of Rousseau's critique of the state of man in modern societies who is detached from nature. Radcliffe, in effect, sets up a binary between "nature and civilization" (Kröger 17), but of course does not eulogize either of them in isolation from one other. The stability of human civilization can only be achieved if it is realized in concert with nature. After all, nature in isolation cannot bring about the desired cohesion and Radcliffe always imbues her nature with elements of culture such as appreciative scientists or perceptive artists like Emily who creates poetry inspired by nature. On the other hand, the city in isolation can only have a disruptive influence on people which will lead to their separation from nature and the resultant corruption of sensibility.

The immoral spectre of the city is also conveyed through the character of Valancourt whose first appearance in the novel is marked by his sensibility to nature which initiates his links with both Emily and St Aubert. He is a figure in and of nature, a person who seeks refuge from city life in the sublimity of the Pyrenées and enjoys the simplicity of a rural life, a counterpoint to the decadence of urban space in gothic literature. However, when his hopes for marrying Emily are shattered, he sinks into a life of debauchery, gambling, and women in Paris. His loss of his connection with nature, which triggers Emily to note that Valancourt "used to be a great admirer of landscape", an inquiry to which he responds: "'Yes,' . . . I had once a taste for innocent and elegant delights—I had once an uncorrupted heart" (*Udolpho* 473). It is only a return to nature that can save him. Eventually the inherent goodness of his heart is restored by his return to La Vallée with Emily and his reunion with nature.

Urban spaces such as Paris or Venice represent an oppositional, codified structure that stand in direct contradistinction to the life of harmony represented in La Vallée or Lenoncourt. Readers are presented with the circle of a happy family who benefit from a reciprocal and balanced coexistence with the beauty of their natural surroundings which allows them to cultivate their own virtues, in turn. Urbanite characters are blind to such virtues and impervious to the subtleties of place and nature. When Emily and De Villefort family enter

Chateau-le-Blanc, the only character who is incapable of appreciating the beauty of this magnificent chateau is Count De Villefort's second wife whose taste and mindset have been shaped by "gay assemblies of Paris" (438). Unlike other characters, she only sees a "dismal place" in a "barbarous spot" which is tantamount to "savage art" (441, 443). On the other hand, Count De Villefort is invested in this place on account of his past memories, thereby his emplaced identity at Chateau-le-Blanc.

Gothic literature is so rife with such examples which connect city life, especially Paris, with demoralization and debauchery.<sup>10</sup> The same attitude is demonstrated in *The Romance of the Forest* where La Motte and his family have to flee Paris because of the debts they have run up due to La Motte's overindulgence in the luxuries of the city and his licentious lifestyle over years by which "his fortune and affection were equally lost in dissipation" (*Forest* 3). At the same time, the countryside and an intimacy with nature not only remedies the ills of society, but also tempers an urban sensibility. This is exemplified by the change in the urbanite La Motte who encounters an edifice in a forest while he is on the run. He decides to choose his temporary residence in nature where he finds a different life:

La Motte arranged his little plan of living. His mornings were usually spent in shooting, or fishing, and the dinner, thus provided by his industry; he relished with a keener appetite than had ever attended him at the luxurious tables of Paris. The afternoons he passed with his family: sometimes he would select a book from the few he had brought with him, and endeavour to fix his attention to the words his lips repeated (33).

The shelter of the forest and a simple life of harmony with nature provides for La Motte and his family a respite from their vicissitudes and urges La Motte to rethink his ways and take up an alternative course of life which is more moral and temperate compared with his libertine

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* also portrays Paris negatively by depicting the influence of the city on Don Raymond, a character in the novel, who indulges in the luxuries of life in Paris until he realizes that Paris and its people "whose exterior was so polished and seducing, were at bottom frivolous, unfeeling and insincere. . . . [and he] turned from the Inhabitants of Paris with disgust, and quitted that Theatre of Luxury" (28).

and unrestrained debauchery in Paris. This short episode demonstrates that life in the city detaches people from nature and also adversely affects them. A dialogic reunion with nature and an experience of a more organic life, as opposed to the artificiality of Paris, can initiate a positive change in humans' disposition and help them to recover the lost innocence and regain their sense of self (Kröger 18). La Motte is not an inherently evil character, but is temporarily marred by a total detachment from nature by being in Paris. Therefore, Radcliffe's forest functions as a moral anchor, a place where humans and nature are reconnected meaningfully and stability is restored. This is a balanced position that dialogically merges culture with nature in the sense that La Motte's skills and cultural interests, like reading books, are revived by his stay and reflection in nature.

The most revealing illustration of the binary of the city and country is the arrival Monsieur and Madame Quesnel at La Vallée which is a menace to the integrity and stability of the estate. Unlike St Aubert and his wife, they are both Parisians, mesmerized by the glamour of city life. M. Quesnel is a materialistic person whose taste is marked by grandeur and who considers St Aubert's love of simplicity and humbleness to be a sign of weakness. His wife shares the same disposition and is more engrossed with "the splendour of the balls, banquets, and processions" (*Udolpho* 15) rather than what nature offers at La Vallée. Monsieur and Madame Quesnel are the polar opposites of St Aubert and his wife who are featured as the guardians of an ideal community with a rapport between nature and culture which is idealised through a refined and cultured character like Emily. M. Quesnel's incompatibility with this environment is signalled by his plans for the improvement of the estate to make it suit his urban taste. Among these plans is one which is aimed at felling some trees including an old chestnut tree<sup>11</sup>, against which St Aubert reacts strongly:

'Good God!' exclaimed St Aubert, 'you surely will not destroy that noble chesnut, which has flourished for centuries, the glory of the estate! It was in its maturity when the

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<sup>11</sup> This section of the novel is similar to Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* where Fanny Price quotes William Cowper's *The Task* upon hearing Mr. Rushworth's plans to improve his estate by cutting down some trees. Jonathan Bate has discussed this part of the novel in *The Song of the Earth*.

present mansion was built. How often, in my youth, have I climbed among its broad branches, and sat embowered amidst a world of leaves, while the heavy shower has pattered above, and not a rain drop reached me! How often I have sat with a book in my hand, sometimes reading, and sometimes looking out between the branches upon the wide landscape, and the setting sun, till twilight came, and brought the birds home to their little nests among the leaves! How often—but pardon me,’ added St Aubert, recollecting that he was speaking to a man who could neither comprehend, nor allow his feelings, ‘I am talking of times and feelings as old-fashioned as the taste that would spare that venerable tree’ (16).

There are several important environmental implications in St Aubert’s opposition and the way he describes the significance of the tree. The section of the house that is ‘encumbered by trees’ forms an essential part of La Vallée as it becomes the ‘cultural landscape’ of the place. A cultural landscape reflects a history or story of a place and its inhabitants; it is a product of nature and culture in conjunction with each other that can reveal something about the past of a place and humans as well (Drenthen 231). This place is a reminder of St Aubert’s past and present as he remembers spending his childhood days in relation with the trees. He also reminisces about reading books and broadening his intellect in the branches of the tree. Another important ecological implication of St Aubert’s objection is that the meaning of family and nature begin to transform once he perceives his identity as being embedded in land, or in what I earlier referred to as ‘emplaced’ identity or self. The concepts of identity and family extend to nature and the notion of a personal family changes to an ‘ecological family’, as described by Salmon, through which we develop a kinship with environment; as a result, everything in an environment constitutes a part of our family (qtd. in Utsler 131).<sup>12</sup> The idea of an ‘ecological family’ constructs a more egalitarian perspective towards the world, which even construes the nonhuman elements of nature to be one and the same with humans. St Aubert’s

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Sommer has carried out empirical research about the relation of humans with the trees in their neighbourhoods. He concludes that people merge a part of their identity in trees with which they grew up and often the loss of a tree is met with almost the same grief as the death of a family member (180).

anger at M. Quesnel's plans is rooted in his emplaced self, or ecological idea of family where he even thinks of the birds which have nested in the chesnut tree. This perspective was also hinted at earlier in this chapter when St Aubert mentions that he would have wept at the fall of the trees which obstructed the view of his chateau. In the same vein, cutting the old chesnut is damage not only to nature, but also to his body, family and identity. The identification of the world with the body (Thomashow 21) is an essential component of a green identity. The broadening of self to include the world is also an integral part of ecological thinking which conceives of humans as one of the many parts of the ecosystem or nature.

This expanded sense of self mitigates the selfishness of humans whose environmentally damaging actions are justified by a human-centred vision which excludes nonhumans from its perspective. It can indeed create an ethical consciousness or a "non-anthropocentric ethic of care and connectedness" (Brown 145) which serves as an anodyne to humans' detachment from nature. Axel Goodbody also takes up the same position which argues that the attachment to place and nature can help humans assimilate into 'biotic communities' (*Place* 56) as connection with land and place is a fundamental part of an environmentally aware consciousness, hence its importance for ecocriticism. The sense of dwelling that is created by connection with land is a preservationist one too, as a sense of collective care is established which does not prioritize entities into binaries such as human/nonhuman, culture/nature, or animate/inanimate. An ecological consciousness is, in fact, a product of a deep bond between humans and nature (Beyer 131) which generates stability and harmony between nature and human society as is the case in La Vallée. The chesnut tree embodies the connection of humans with the spirit of a place where all the past images of a happy childhood are stored in nature and a sense of continuity and empathy with both human and nonhuman world is created.

### 3.3 Agentive Heroines and Spatial Practice

Radcliffe's heroines are mostly the product of a Rousseauian upbringing whose sensibilities have been formed by a nature-oriented education. Their engagement with their place of dwelling and their surrounding environment lays the groundwork for the creation of a stronger sense of self and agency which they will employ as a weapon against dominating patriarchal figures. The significant aspect of this act of empowerment is that the heroines exercise their will and agency once they are on the road and out of the patriarchs' safe houses like La Vallée. This is most clearly manifest in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* where the heroines' sensibility, once they are on the road, ceases to be equated with passivity and acquiescence and becomes an expression of their will and strength. This stands in stark contrast to the male characters' sensibility which is mostly an expression of excessive emotions, rendering them powerless. For instance, both St Aubert and Valancourt are subject to outbursts of emotion and sensibility, the very danger that Emily is advised to refrain from by her father in his deathbed. Yet, St Aubert is unable to avoid succumbing to such excess as he is often moved to tears when his wife is gravely ill or when he encounters the sublime scenery in nature. Valancourt is equally subdued by his passions and emotions which are beyond his control, especially when Emily announces to him that she has to leave for Venice and end her engagement with him:

Valancourt. . . . lamented again this cruel separation, in a voice and words so impassioned, that Emily could no longer struggle to repress her own grief, or to sooth his. Valancourt, between these emotions of love and pity, lost the power. . . . [and] in the intervals of convulsive sobs, he, . . . exclaimed, 'O Emily—my heart will break!—I cannot—cannot leave you!' (*Udolpho* 146).

Emily realizes the necessity of keeping her emotions in check in order to maintain her rational and cognitive ability. As a result, she always maintains "the calm dignity of mind . . . which Valancourt found it utterly impossible to attain" (145). The balancing of emotion and reason is a mode of agency and empowerment for Radcliffe's heroines. For instance, Emily's first

decisive act is her refusal to agree to a clandestine marriage to Valancourt as she deems it important to uphold her code of propriety out of respect for her father and aunt. She could have obviated many future calamities and ordeals; however, she needs to assert her own will in order to preserve her sense of self and also her sanity while encountering the vicissitudes in the castle of Udolpho. In effect, Valancourt is akin to a weak and inept character who later falls into a life of debauchery in Paris and is left helpless, only to be redeemed by Emily at the end. In fact, Radcliffe's formula for female empowerment is the heroine's "cathartic experience of surviving the onslaught of overwhelming affective upheaval in order to achieve a synthesis of passion and reason" (Ahern 154). A balanced combination of passion and reason in heroines becomes the site of their sense of self and autonomy which is lacking in male characters such as Valancourt or Vivaldi who is equally rendered as a powerless character compared to Ellena in *The Italian*.

Similarly Ellena must also learn to negotiate her agency and will when faced with patriarchal threats. When she is abducted by Schedoni's ruffians, she experiences a sense of transportation when viewing the sublime landscape on the way to San Stefano. She passes through the Alps among high cliffs and mighty rivers and views "the gloom and vastness of the precipices" with "the amazing force and uproar of the falling waters" not with "indifference but with calmness" (*Italian* 63). She is momentarily subdued by the sublime scenery but "experience[s] somewhat of a dreadful pleasure in looking down upon the irresistible flood (63). The sublimity transports her feelings and mind and she soon forgets her plights as she crosses a hanging bridge which she construes as a "passage through the vale of death to the bliss of eternity" (63-4). The scenery affords her an equanimity of mind that reinforces her sense of self and power and strengthens her to challenge the ordeals awaiting her in the convent: "She had expected something terribly severe, and had prepared her mind to meet it with fortitude" (84). Ellena's first act of defiance is challenging the evil abbess's demand that she must either marry someone except Vivaldi or take the veil for good. Ellena's

refusal to capitulate marks the assertion of her sense of self and agency as a result of her negotiating the sublime scenery in which she “found temporary, though feeble, relief in once more looking upon the face of nature” (62). Therefore, the landscape becomes a site of empowerment for the responsive female characters which is attained once they are situated on the road and placed in the public sphere. Their agency and power of reasoning would not have been possible had they remained in the domestic sphere.

A similar scene of empowerment and agency in *The Italian* is Ellena’s response to threats once it is compared with Vivaldi’s reactions. After her escape from the convent she and Vivaldi constantly engage in a mutual appreciation of landscape which is triggered by Ellena rather than Vivaldi. The scenery has a transformative influence on Ellena as she becomes increasingly vocal and active. Conversely, Vivaldi’s role as a male saviour gradually diminishes. The most pivotal expression of Ellena’s acquired agency on the road is her decision not to marry Vivaldi when he proposes while they are still on the run from the convent. She turns down Vivaldi’s offer of a speedy marriage to foil their enemies’ plans; the matrimonial bond would have placed Ellena under the protection of Vivaldi and prevented her from being taken to a monastery against her or Vivaldi’s will. Nevertheless, she chooses not to flee to the protection of a benevolent patriarch but, instead, to rely on her own resources. This transformation is brought about as a consequence of her adventures on the road from her home to her forced stay in a convent and her subsequent flight from there.

Her interaction with landscape has made her an enlightened subject who is not meek and helpless, but is able to exert her own will over others. She controls the situation just as she gains mastery in the feminine sublime and relates to nature while on the road. In effect, Ellena “acts as a sublime agent herself” (Bondhus 21) who negotiates the scenery by garnering power from it. At this stage, Vivaldi is the person who is captured and sent to the Inquisition prison. He is rendered quite weak and, according to Robert Miles, adopts a “feminine role” (151). This process parallels Emily’s agency in *Udolpho* when she also exercises her will by refusing

to marry Valancourt in an act to redress the balance between emotions and reason. Men are rendered weak once they are overwhelmed by their emotions and sensibility,<sup>13</sup> while women's relational bond to the sublime scenes bolsters their power and agency. This is a part of Radcliffe's proto-feminist project in which female characters are placed in the public sphere and engage with other characters which leads to the creation of a more forceful and agentic self on the part of heroines (Heiland 60). Bondhus also maintains that the feminine cult of sensibility is subverted by Radcliffe in order to empower women against figures of patriarchy (19), whether they are compassionate or brutal.

Radcliffe's project of female empowerment is also realized through her reappraisal of the patriarchal sublime by adding a feminine perspective to it. The very first Radcliffean twist is expressed through a critical shift in which sublime horror emanates from the domestic home and human culture rather than its traditional source, nature. Radcliffe refashions the concept of the sublime, purging it of the masculine idea of horror and terror promulgated by Burke and Kant. In Radcliffe's sublime, horror does not lie in nature but in culture or in elements that are external to nature. John Muir also observes that nature, in and of itself, is beautiful and the anomaly or ugliness comes from humans' incursion in nature (qtd. in Carlson 35). In the same fashion, Radcliffe's sublime nature does not pose any portentous sense of threat or menace to the female characters, but the real danger arises from men, in the form of banditti or ruffians, who disrupt the beauty of nature or the formation of the female aesthetic experience. The displacement of the source of horror in the sublime is a calculated strategy employed by Radcliffe which is most evident in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. In one illustrative scene, both Emily and St Aubert become overwhelmed by the magnificence of nature, but not threatened by it:

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<sup>13</sup> Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* indicates that men's manifestation of their emotions is a sign of their "effeminacy" (qtd. in Delucia 107).

The scene of barrenness was here and there interrupted by the spreading branches of the larch and cedar, which threw their gloom over the cliff, or athwart the torrent that rolled in the vale. . . . St Aubert, impressed by the romantic character of the place, almost expected to see banditti start from behind some projecting rock, and he kept his hand upon the arms with which he always travelled (32).

The introduction of banditti overshadows the serene melancholy of nature and perturbs St Aubert's peace of mind. In a later part of the novel, Emily and her father are, once again, threatened by a gang of gypsies who are feasting around a campfire which reveals that horror emanates from men residing in nature, rather than in nature itself. Similarly, Emily and Count de Villefort are trapped and attacked by assassins and banditti in the sublime mountains of the Alps, but nature is painted as a protective source, whereas the men in the Alps become the terrorizing elements. Emily's appreciation of the aestheticism of landscape is sometimes disrupted by a sense of menace at which the female characters are more alarmed. Emily, who feels stifled in the castle, finds temporary respite from Udolpho when she is sent away to Tuscany. The journey is marred by the presence of Bertrand and Ugo, two banditti sent by Montoni to guard her. Emily feels threatened to the extent that she is unable to take in the picturesque scenery of her surrounding as she constantly feels her life is jeopardized by Montoni's banditti:

It was afternoon, when they had left the castle. . . . Towards evening, they wound down precipices, black with forests of cypress, pine and cedar, into a glen so savage and secluded, . . . To Emily it appeared a spot exactly suited for the retreat of banditti, and, in her imagination, she already saw them lurking under the brow of some projecting rock, whence their shadows, lengthened by the setting sun, stretched across the road, and warned the traveller of his danger. She shuddered at the idea, and, looking at her conductors, to observe whether they were armed, thought she saw in them the banditti she dreaded! (379).

Emily is rendered incapable of interacting with her surroundings as she is still guarded, not by the walls of the castle, but by the reflection of the same patriarchal mechanisms which have dominated both the domestic and public space. *A Sicilian Romance* also abounds with the pestilence of banditti in the forests and mountains and the heroine, Julia, is kidnapped and attacked by them on several occasions.

The displacement of horror from nature to men is a significant Radcliffean modification of Burkean and Kantian articulations of the sublime. For Radcliffe, nature remains constant and it is culture that becomes the repository of horror incarnated as banditti which agitate the harmony between humans and nature. Additionally, the myth of the domestic space as a safe shelter for women is also debunked as her heroines' incarceration is not limited to gothic castles and dungeons, but includes external spaces as well. This act brings the tension that is associated with the female domestic space to male public spaces too and thus destabilizes this spatial binary. The presence of villains and banditti on the road is the extension of the oppression of women from the interior to the exterior. While it is true that Radcliffe conforms to certain aesthetic conventions of the sublime, still she manages to modify it by underlining the fact that the elements of terror and horror in nature are extraneous to it and come from culture. As I will discuss in the next section, the female characters form a bond with the sublime nature to achieve an expanded idea of self. Therefore, Radcliffe's sublime does not reduce the observers into submission and weakening awe. Instead, they feel empowered and are able to resist oppression.

The male sublime as a means of male empowerment and also a symbol of oppression is inexorably tied with space. The predominant impression of the sublime landscape in Radcliffe is recognizably patriarchal, which is a register of the tyranny and oppression that women have to endure. Men possess the space and thereby control the power dynamic and sexual politics. The underground dungeons, locked rooms, and dark passages are all sinister to women only because such spaces are extensions of patriarchal means of control. The notable example is

Emily's room which has two doors, one of which can never be firmly secured and is connected to a secret passage which becomes the repository of her psychological fears and threats. It is from this passage that Count Morano initially enters Emily's room in an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap her from Udolpho. Count Morano's relative ease of access to Emily's room indicates how much a confining space is fluid to men, but solid, concrete, and impenetrable to women.

The most visible embodiment of the spatial sublime as an index of male oppression is the castle of Udolpho itself, whose first appearance is likened to a monster rising from the middle of a forest. The castle is to be a prison for both Emily and her aunt. This is suggested at by the way in which the castle is introduced to Emily and Madame Cheron by Montoni. Dorothy McMillan suggests that Montoni's introduction of Udolpho is similar to Ferrara introducing his dead Duchess in Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (McMillan 54). Upon seeing the castle Montoni, who has been quiet for most of the journey, utters the following words: "'There,' said Montoni, speaking for the first time in several hours, 'is Udolpho'" (*Udolpho* 216). Just as the brutal Ferrara kills the Duchess and preserves her in a painting, Montoni similarly schemes to incarcerate both Emily and her aunt in Udolpho. A sense of sublime horror is all-too-evident as Emily gazes upon the castle:

Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle . . . for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the Gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper, as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From those, too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely, and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity, and Emily

continued to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen, rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend (216).

Emily's picturesque journey from Venice is abruptly invaded by the phallic symbolism of Udolpho which consumes the brightness and colour of landscape and dominates it. The layout of the castle also makes it stand out like an "outlaw masculinity: patriarchal but illegitimate, an aberration within the proper order" (Markman Ellis 57). The castle is an anomaly in the forest as it is a banditti hideout, reinforcing the point that sublime horror is not an innate property of 'nature' but, instead, emanates from the intrusion of men.

Sublime darkness and gloom extends from the castle's exterior, penetrating the interior. Elizabeth Bohls makes the observation that this citadel of patriarchal sublime is marked by the contrast between light and darkness. Both literal and figurative darkness pervades the castle (219) as the occupants always walk with candles in hand which are often extinguished by wind. Therefore, women are kept in the dark which deprives them of their agency and even sanity. Udolpho is a place of mystery where questions are never answered and mysterious and eerie events are left obscure, only to be solved once the heroine is beyond its walls. Thus the darkness becomes a metaphorical manifestation of the patriarchal sublime, which daunts women, and the oppression which engulfs them. Indeed, Montoni and his gang "control both light and knowledge in the castle" (219). In the overwhelming darkness, Emily rightly feels she is losing her senses when she is deprived of landscape, light, and nature: "The dread of what she might be going to encounter was now so excessive, that it sometimes threatened her senses" (*Udolpho* 384). Udolpho, unlike La Vallée, does not revive the senses with expansive visions of nature which relieve inner turmoils and restore Emily's psychological health. Instead, it imprisons Emily, light, knowledge, and nature. This is manifested by Emily's inability to compose poetry in Udolpho as the patriarchal space cripples her literary imagination and this artistic stagnation parallels her physical incarceration in the castle

(Horrocks 511). Thus, Montoni employs space as an expression of his power reiterating the point made by Henry Lefebvre that space is indeed a product of social and power relations.

However, the concept of place is not a static and inert one. It is a product of different actions and operations which create it. It is, in reality, a multi-faceted phenomenon which is transformed on the basis of the actions that take place there. Michel de Certeau compares space to words in a language which change their meanings depending on the context where they are used. His axiomatic description of this quality of space is that “space is a practiced place” (117), which means that the function of space relies on the way it is used by its occupants. In the same fashion that Montoni uses space to exert his power, Emily also deploys space in a defiantly resistant manner in order to challenge the threat of patriarchy. The first time Emily sets eyes on Udolpho, she recognizes its sublimity and power as a threat to her identity and liberty; however, she also uses her Rousseauian upbringing and her aesthetic knowledge to tackle the overwhelming threat of Udolpho. Emily encounters the castle as if she is an accomplished artist who has well comprehended the artistic piece and encounters it with equanimity, confidence, and certainty. Therefore, the castle is enmeshed in the surrounding landscape through Emily’s controlling gaze as she “assimilates the castle in the landscape, effectively neutralizing its threat” (McMillan 54).

The description of Udolpho here resembles a landscape painting with frames around it where everything is accounted for and contained within the frame, thus dispelling any external threat (54). In fact, apart from the daunting and gloomy spectre of the castle, Emily also discerns plant life growing in the stones of the castle: “two round towers, crowned with overhanging turrets, embattled, where instead of banners, now waved long grass and wild plants, that had taken root among the mouldering stones” (*Udolpho* 216). Emily’s attention to plant life piercing its way through the stones of the castle signifies the battle between nature and culture as the castle is a human accomplishment (Albright 55) which is being taken over by greenery over time. Indeed, Emily is first consumed with horror at the sight of the castle,

but gradually exercises her sensibility and controlling gaze in an empowering fashion. According to Cynthia Wall, Emily's initial gaze, which is imbued with melancholy, becomes first "linked to dying [but] later translates consistently into 'awakenings'" (121). She gradually starts counteracting the male sublime which is inscribed in the castle through her own ways of engaging with space.

One of the ways in which Emily negotiates the stifling sublime of patriarchal space is by interacting with landscape through the windows of the castle. Windows are very significant symbols in Radcliffe's works as they provide an outlet for the heroines, enabling them to connect with nature even if they are under the scrutiny of patriarchal figures. Windows also become a framing device whereby the heroines construct a landscape (Quinteiro 85) from which they garner the endurance and resilience to cope with their ordeals. This is best exemplified by Emily's initial sense of confinement and passivity upon her first entry into the castle followed by her sense of transportation when she wakes the first morning looking out through her window:

She rose, and, to relieve her mind from the busy ideas, that tormented it, compelled herself to notice external objects. From her casement she looked out upon the wild grandeur of the scene, closed nearly on all sides by alpine steeps, whose tops, peeping over each other, faded from the eye in misty hues, while the promontories below were dark with woods, that swept down to their base, and stretched along the narrow vallies. The rich pomp of these woods was particularly delightful to Emily. . . . it was delightful to watch the gleaming objects, that progressively disclosed themselves in the valley. . . . and her mind recovered its strength (*Udolpho* 229-30).

Her revived faculties are empowered by the sublimity and harmony of nature as she constantly draws vigour, fortitude and faith from nature during her stay in *Udolpho*. The window actually juxtaposes the contrasting scenes of the interior of the castle with those of the exterior in nature. The juxtaposition of the two worlds revives Emily's spirit and endows her with greater

courage to handle her situation in Udolpho. In this respect, nature and landscape become a character, playing an ancillary role to Emily. In effect, the windows in Udolpho become a point of connection and hope for Emily. Even the mysterious light she sees and the music she hears at night, which she wrongly assumes to be from Valancourt, both come from a window which becomes her favourite spot at night to palliate the bedlam and agitations she is subjected to in the castle. Therefore, the window is a doorway between the inner and the outer world which ironically becomes Emily's source of solace and power too.

This also applies to Ellena in *The Italian* during her confinement in the convent of San Stefano. When she is being taken to the convent, she draws strength from the landscape she surveys through the window of her carriage and consequently decides to conduct herself with power during her imprisonment. Similarly to Emily in the castle of Udolpho, Ellena also finds refuge in a turret balcony located above her bedroom. Through the window, she can observe a sublime and soothing landscape which offers her solace and peace in nature as opposed to an oppressive space where she is detained. The window frame of the room

. . . presented an image of grandeur superior to any thing she had seen while within the pass itself...[and] to Ellena, whose mind was capable of being highly elevated, or sweetly soothed, by scenes of nature, the discovery of this little turret was an important circumstance. Hither she could come, and her soul, refreshed by the views it afforded, would acquire strength to bear her, with equanimity, thro' the persecutions that might await her (*Italian* 90).

Ellena also finds herself in the same situation as Emily and likewise, she finds the means to resist the dominating space of oppression. A window in Radcliffe is a threshold which provides a series of reconciling binaries. It is a place of attachment and also detachment, connection and separation, where the inside world meets the outside world and the heroines are capable of reconstructing and then experiencing a landscape they have been deprived of in oppressive spaces (Quinteiro 82). Therefore, the window marks the transition from interior to

exterior, from despair to hope, from death to life, and from darkness to light.<sup>14</sup> The window as a threshold or meeting of the two different worlds enables the characters to merge with the outside vista and identify with it as it reflects their mindscapes. This fusion of interior and exterior world resonates with an ecological view which states that the world is one interrelated phenomenon rather than a mass of atomized elements. Besides, “environment cannot be said to be absolutely isolated or distinguished from the mind” (Davies 77). The framing of landscape through windows bonds together the environment and the mental world of the heroines, highlighting the interrelatedness of humans and nature.

Emily’s stay in the castle of Udolpho exposes her to many psychological and physical dangers including rape and even death in the hands of Montoni. However, she gradually assumes a very active role in the castle exploring its mysteries, pleading for her aunt with Montoni, and finally escaping Udolpho with the help of her friends. Unlike the stereotypical helpless damsel in distress, she learns to navigate her way through the dark patriarchal castle and, although threatened with losing her sanity, defies the will of patriarchal figures. As I mentioned earlier, Montoni controls the castle and its flow of movements, activities, and also light and darkness which symbolically signify knowledge. Emily manages to maintain her sanity and vigour by the way in which she connects herself to the exterior world and nature. She also actively exercises her agency and confronts Montoni and other villains. The first time she challenges the forces of patriarchy is when Count Morano gains access to her room through its back door in order to kidnap her in an apparently good-will gesture to presumably save her from Montoni. Emily exhibits extraordinary power, agency, and equanimity upon seeing Morano as she commands him to leave her room immediately in an authoritative fashion and refuses the count’s offer of help and decides to “remain under the protection of Signor Montoni” (*Udolpho* 249). Emily understands that Montoni is not really protective of her but she prefers not to be moved from one prison to another one which is Count Morano’s

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Miles also makes a passing reference to the function of windows in Radcliffe’s novels including *The Sicilian Romance* where the window in the patriarchal house of Mazzini provides a mental escape for Julia and Emilia (97).

house. This scene echoes her refusal to secretly marry Valancourt to save herself from both her aunt and Montoni.

Emily's defiance continues as she actively explores the castle's hallways and chambers, seeks her incarcerated aunt, and constantly pleads with Montoni over her aunt's safety. Her agency comes to full force when she boldly refuses to give up her estate after her aunt dies: "I am not so ignorant Signor, of the laws on this subject, as to be misled by the assertion of any person. The law, in the present instance, gives me the estates in question, and my own hand shall never betray my right" (359).<sup>15</sup> Montoni, incensed by her remarks, reacts to her bold refusal with the following words: "I cannot believe you will oppose, where you know you cannot conquer" (359). The word 'conquer' signifies that Emily is not only bravely opposing the patriarchal tyranny but it also becomes a sign that Emily is actually conquering the tyrannical space of Udolpho. Montoni also mocks Emily by saying "you speak like a heroine" (360) which is, in reality, an admission that Emily has risen above her circumstances and is actively standing up for her rights. Ellena in *The Italian* also undergoes a similarly empowering process when she becomes more assertive and defies both the abbess of San Stefano and her lover Vivaldi following her adventures on the road and her interaction with nature. The female characters have enhanced their sense of self and recognized a new potential and agency in their interaction with patriarchs and their oppression.

Emily's agency is the result of how she chooses to deploy space in Udolpho. As mentioned earlier, the way in which a space functions depends on the practices and behaviours that occur within it. These practices can transform the space into a tool or instrument for wielding power or, conversely, turn it into a means of resisting domination. Emily, in effect,

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<sup>15</sup> Radcliffe usually draws a subtle association between women and land. The ordeals Emily and her aunt undergo are at core tied with the question of property and land. Madame Cheron is imprisoned in a dark room and is deprived of decent food in order to be coerced into surrendering her property over to Montoni. After she dies, Emily experiences the same horror for her estate. Annette Kolodny's seminal works, *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land before Her* are extensive explorations of the association of women with land and nature in American literature. The feminization of land is also finely hinted at in Radcliffe's works as the heroines are usually in danger because the discovery of their true identity entitles them to their rightful claim to their paternal property.

uses the same space in order to challenge Montoni. The dark passages and corridors fail to stop her in her search for her aunt or they fail to subdue her will as she constantly relates to the outside world. She creates hope for herself through visiting her favourite spot in the castle where she hears a mysteriously pleasing music or sees a light.

The change of space function is in line with Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of striated and smooth spaces. Indeed, Emily is transforming the castle from a 'striated space' to a 'smooth space'. A 'striated space' is rigidly defined in its function and also by its boundaries. Nomadic movements across this space breaks the fixity and rigidity of space, an act which Deleuze and Guattari call 'deterritorialization'. It is a nomadic or a travelling lifestyle, similar to that of Radcliffe's heroines, that enables this process. Deterritorializing a space is made possible through movements across "lines of flight" (3) which only a nomad is capable of. Emily and Radcliffe's other heroines are characterized by their non-stationary adventures which require them to be constantly on the move. Movement from one place to another is a process through which Radcliffe's heroines (particularly Emily and Ellena) expand their sense of self and agency; it is a process of empowerment or 'becoming' to use a Deleuzian term again. Their "nomadic practices are conceptualized as acts of resistance against the hegemonic control over space" (Ganser 169).

The heroines' 'lines of flight' are mainly constituted by their engagement with nature which offers them a view of an exterior to which they have no access but long to join with. As a result of such an engagement with nature, a smooth space is created which is non-hegemonic, more democratic and better allows for the substantiation of female agency. The way in which Emily and Ellena negotiate their space is characteristic of a form of nomadism which opens up the potentials to be subversive and defy the patriarchal sublime. This would not have taken place if the female characters were bound to their domestic space and had not set out on the road. Tim Cresswell's notion of 'heretical geographies' that I explained in

chapter one echoes with the same notions of nomadism and agency that are evident in Radcliffe.

### 3.4 Female Eco-Sublime

I explicated the implicit gender bias contained in the concept of the sublime, in the first chapter. Female writers in the eighteenth century, including Ann Radcliffe, subtly modified the concept of the sublime in their writing as an alternative to the way in which, more often than not, the masculine sublime construed women as weak or incapable of experiencing the sublimity of nature. The feminine sublime, by contrast, sought connection, closeness, and intimacy with nature which would ultimately lead to an ethics of care. The masculine sublime is, in part, defined by the interaction between the human and nonhuman world for the crystallization of aesthetic apperception of nature. The engagement of humans with the physical realm of nature allows for the interconnection of humans and nonhumans. Nevertheless, this engagement is not fully utilized, as the fulfilment of the sublime involves the assertion of human being's superior faculty of reason over the physical world, hence the reaffirmation of the dichotomy of mind and body or culture and nature. By extrapolation, one can veritably argue that this formulation eliminated women from realizing the sublime and thus the experience remained a 'vicarious one' for them (Pipkin 607). Therefore, the male sublime neither fully sanctions the female nor the physical nature to be participatory agents in the process of aestheticization.

On the other hand, the feminine provides an alternative which is more egalitarian in its treatment of both nature and women. The feminine sublime paves the way for the interrelation of the physical or material world with that of the human without one seeking to dominate the other. The main effect of this form of the sublime is that the material world is foregrounded while generating more ethical attitudes towards the environment whereby the lives and agency of *all* entities come to matter. The most significant aspect of the feminine sublime is the principle of connection whereupon humans feel an urge to dynamically unite or converge with nature. In this fashion, female characters' experience of the sublime leads to a reunion of lost lovers or companions, and also to the creation of art and poetry, a sign which denotes the

productive nature of the feminine sublime as opposed to the dominating and daunting quality of the male sublime in which the characters are driven to a debilitating and immobilizing awe. Additionally, contrary to the dominant aesthetic ideology of the eighteenth century, Radcliffe's heroines become fully capable of experiencing the sublime without being rendered passive or filled with paralyzing fear. This is realized through Radcliffe's 'domesticated sublime' or what Mellor calls "Radcliffean positive sublime" (*Gender* 95)<sup>16</sup> which is an empowering artistic mode prompting female agency, assertion, and recognition of the self. It can be inferred that the design of Radcliffe's sublime, which is "a calculated resistance to the patriarchal plots of the Burkean sublime" (Heiland 58), parallels Christopher Hitt's call for an ecological sublime in which nature is not hierarchically positioned as an instrumental, lifeless tool that merely enables human self-development. An ecological feminine sublime, such as Radcliffe's, construes nature as an integral part of the formation of the self through establishing a dialogical bond between nature and characters. Nature assumes a character and presence that is the foundation of the heroines' self-reflection, recognition and agency.

The bond between characters and nature often leads to reunion and the connection of lovers or long-lost companions. The positive sublime, to which women are more receptive and responsive, empowers them and expands their sense of self. The most cogent example of this empowering sublime occurs in *A Sicilian Romance* where Madame de Menon is reunited with Julia after her escape from Mazzini's house. Their reunion directly occurs after Madame de Menon feels a transportation of the self and an appreciation of the power of the sublime in nature:

Her thoughts, affected by the surrounding objects, gradually sunk into a pleasing and complacent melancholy. . . . She still followed the course of the stream . . . and the scene . . . yielded to her a view so various and sublime, that she paused in thrilling and

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<sup>16</sup> Apart from Anne Mellor, Barbara Claire Freeman's *The Feminine Sublime* also addresses the question of feminine sublime which is based on "respect in response to an incalculable otherness" (11). She also formulates the feminine sublime as being accepting of the other in accordance with the principle of connection and communion.

delightful wonder. A group of wild and grotesque rocks rose in a semicircular form, and their fantastic shapes exhibited Nature in her most sublime and striking attitudes. Here her vast magnificence elevated the mind of the beholder to enthusiasm. Fancy caught the thrilling sensation, and at her touch the towering steeps became shaded with unreal glooms; the caves more darkly frowned—the projecting cliffs assumed a more terrific aspect, and the wild overhanging shrubs waved to the gale in deeper murmurs. The scene inspired madame with reverential awe, and her thoughts involuntarily rose, ‘from Nature up to Nature’s God. . . . a voice of liquid and melodious sweetness arose from among the rocks; it sung an air, whose melancholy expression awakened all her attention, and captivated her heart (*Sicilian* 104).

Madame de Menon is transported by her receptivity to the scenery and feels a transition from the physical nature to the metaphysical state (Milbank, “Introduction” xviii). In other words, the newly gained sense of self makes her more alert and sensitive to nature and moves her mind and heart to transcend to the higher realm of the Divine. This moment of immanence is accompanied by music, a symbol of harmony between humans and nature<sup>17</sup>, which had an “effect like that of enchantment” (*Sicilian* 104). The music is actually from her lost pupil, Julia, who is now reunited with her after Madame de Menon opens herself up to the sublime nature. Clearly, the Radcliffean positive sublime is based on connection and appreciation as opposed to the male sublime. *A Sicilian Romance* is further marked by the union of other long-separated characters, especially Julia’s reunion with her presumably dead mother, who had been imprisoned in a dungeon by Julia’s father. Most of these unions occur after the acknowledgment of the power of the sublime which proves to be enabling for female characters. The longing for a dialogic union with nature is, in effect, indicative of a desire to reunite with a lost maternal figure as Radcliffe’s novels are characterised by the absence of mother figures. Alison Milbank interprets the connection of female characters with nature as a

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, poetry and music in Radcliffe’s fictions usually occur immediately after the descriptions of scenes which depict the harmony between humans and nature. The harmony empowers women to either gain more vigor and solace from nature or create art as a result of Radcliffean positive sublime.

manifestation of the ‘pre-Oedipal sublime’ of Patricia Yaegar (“Introduction” xx) who formulated a definition for the feminine sublime which accounts for the desire of women to reconnect with nature rather than dominate it.

A feminine disposition for connecting to others via relation to landscape is also a common trope in *Udolpho*. As I mentioned earlier, landscape is often inflected with the memories of others, such as an absent lover or deceased parents, whose remembrance is rekindled through Emily’s observation of landscape which produces a therapeutic effect in times of difficulty (Ahern 162). It is the same appreciation of the landscape that forms the basis of Emily’s relation with her future husband, Valancourt, who first appears to Emily and her father in the sublime landscape dressed as a hunter. The same healing effect of nature is portrayed in *The Romance of the Forest* where Adeline, embittered by Madame La Motte, seeks consolation in nature at the break of the day when the sunshine unveils the beauties of nature. The landscape “soothed her sorrow, and inspired her with that soft and pleasing melancholy, so dear to the feeling mind. . . . She mused and sighed, and then . . . she sung the following words: SONNET, To the Lilly (75).<sup>18</sup> The landscape relieves Adeline’s agitated mind and also prompts the creation of poetry. In this instance, poetry and nature are also coupled with the first encounter of prospective lovers, similar to Emily and Valancourt, as Adeline hears a voice which echoes her song: “A distant echo lengthened out her tones, and she sat listening to the soft response, till repeating the last stanza of the Sonnet, she was answered by a voice almost as tender, and less distant. She looked round in surprise, and saw a young man in a hunter’s dress” (76). It was the voice of Theodore who repeated her song and therefore, Adeline’s receptiveness to nature triggers her first meeting with him who becomes her future husband. In this scene, nature reinforces and emotionally empowers her to be creative (Miles 124) and it also functions as a basis for connection and relation that prepares

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<sup>18</sup> The scenery in this section of the novel is more conversant with the picturesque. However, the point in question is that landscape appreciation, whether the sublime or the picturesque, leads to union and connection in female characters and also becomes a site for the manifestation of creative power of art and poetry. Such qualities rarely apply to Radcliffe’s male characters.

her for her future ordeals with the Marquis. Female protagonists such as Adeline and Emily seek attachment to landscape through observing and appreciating nature in order to compensate for a lack, mainly that of the absent mother figure. It is for this reason that Milbank states that nature has a “communal effect” (“Introduction” xx) in Radcliffe. The connection of women to nature fulfils the maternal lack and also causes them to be reunited and empowered.

Additionally, relation to nature and landscape leads to an outburst of creative energy in the form of poetry or music. Julia, in *A Sicilian Romance*, sings a song in praise of the beauties of nature when she is reunited with Madame de Menon. Similarly, nature leads to the flourishing of Adeline’s creativity which connects her to Theodore. Emily is also moved by the sublime scenes of nature not only to create poetry, but also to eternalize nature in her landscape sketches as her “pencil enabled her to preserve some of those combinations of forms, which charmed her at every step” (*Udolpho* 23). Even her short respite in Tuscany is more noteworthy when one considers the fact that Emily is only able to receive the splendour of nature when Montoni’s ruffians are not present. She forms a perspective of nature through her room’s window - Radcliffe’s favourite trope of a threshold of inner and outer world.

By observing nature in Tuscany Emily “found some unfinished sketches of landscapes, several blank sheets of paper, with her drawing instruments, and she was thus enabled to amuse herself with selecting some of the lovely features of the prospect, that her window commanded” (394). Emily’s mental state aligns with a soothing view of exterior nature beyond her window. This induces a state of tranquillity and provides an outlet for creative activity in the form of scenery painting. Artistic creativity signals a form of transportation, creating a “liberating act that releases new energies and interests” (Dekker 107). Accordingly, nature serves as an emancipatory space that fosters the heroines’ sense of identity and agency by giving them an individual voice through creating their own art. Also, the diffusion of poetry in these texts creates a ‘cultural space’ where female identity can assert itself by its poetic

voice (Milbank, “Melancholy” 148) which at times contains Radcliffe’s implicit social commentary<sup>19</sup> as well. This is the result of Radcliffe’s contribution to the concept of the sublime that, according to Mellor creates love, affection, and caring which connects the female with others (*Gender* 97). This form of ‘domesticated sublime’ suggests parallels with an ecofeminist take which “define[s] the sublime in terms of participatory or integrational sublime” (Murphy, *Praxis* 63). Radcliffe’s sublime invites an active participation with nature with which the characters’ ethos and self are embedded. Ann Radcliffe, in this regard, is a proto-ecofeminist and ‘sublime poet’<sup>20</sup> whose dramatic reformulation of nature not only precipitates the emergence of female agency and provides her heroines with an expanded notion of the self, but also serves as a platform for the communion of characters governed by an ethics of care, which I will elaborate a bit further on in this section.

The relationship of heroines to nature affects their perception of themselves and their agency in the world they occupy. One’s personality and identity are intricately bound with one’s physical environment (Susan Clayton 50). In this manner, nature provides a respite from the negative anxieties and ordeals and additionally a chance for reflection and reappraisal of the self. In Radcliffe, the sublime plays this role for female characters who engage in a dialogic bond with it in order to seek moral guidance and fortitude which enhances the self. As a consequence, the positive sublime leads to the heroines’ transformation and elevation as, for instance, Emily is uplifted and moved by surveying nature: “Emily could not restrain her transport as she looked over the pine forests of the mountains upon the vast plains, that, enriched with woods, [whose] various colours melted in distance into one harmonious hue” (*Udolpho* 30). She neither feels daunted nor overwhelmed by the experience, but invigorated.

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<sup>19</sup> Two articles address the role of poetry in Radcliffe’s fictions. In “Deconstructing the Patriarchal Palace” Ellen Arnold reveals the implicit, but sustained ideological critique of patriarchy in Radcliffe’s poems especially in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Ingrid Horrocks’ “Re-membering Poetry in Radcliffe” argues that poetry creates a network of connection that is based on a “communitarian idea of self” (513). In other words, poems and quotations merge the narrator’s voice with those of characters and join with the voice of past poets such as Shakespeare or Milton. Consequently, a social community of voices is created which expands “the individual consciousness” (513). Horrocks’ argument is based on the fact that the creation of a feminine self is reinforced by the implicit sense of community created through the network of poems and quotations.

<sup>20</sup> I have borrowed this term from Jacqueline Howard’s *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach*.

Adeline, from *The Romance of the Forest*, similarly experiences the same enhancement of self through her engagement with nature: “The fresh breeze of the morning animated the spirits of Adeline, whose mind was delicately sensible to the beauties of nature. As she viewed . . . the varied landscape, rich with wood, and fading into blue and distant mountains, her heart expanded in momentary joy” (*Forest* 9). In fact, this relationship to the earth exerts a healing effect on people as the field of ‘ecopsychology’ advocates a bond with nature in order to preserve psychological health (Clayton and Opatow 7). Radcliffe’s heroines also maintain their sanity and mental strength through the very same bond that helps them to expand the restrictive sense of ‘ego’ by being connected with nature (Thomashow 17). The redefinition of self and ego requires construing nature as a part of self and identity (17). Nature, one’s body and identity are unified while any damage to nature is deemed almost as if it was an injury to the self. This level of intimacy is serendipitous of the feminine sublime based on connection and empathy.

The enhancement of the self through nature is, in reality, a call for greater acceptance and inclusion of other entities which humans do not habitually accept as a part of themselves. It is indeed an identification with the physical world, a letting go of the humans’ ‘egoic self’ which causes a transition from “a sense of alienation to an experience of wholeness and connectedness” (Beyer 134). In other words, establishing a dialogue with nature transcends our sense of being and begets an expanded self that views physical nature as residing on the same plane with humans. This dialogic self is, in effect, a part of an ecological identity as it provides a corrective to the dualistic hierarchy which deems human self to be the master of the world. In actual fact, what Val Plumwood calls the “master self” (*Feminism* 53) rejects any connection with nature or whatever that is outside the boundary of humans’ flesh. The ‘master self’ is the misconception that humans can claim sovereignty over the nonhuman world. On the contrary, the integrational model of dialogic self, makes little distinction between human and nonhuman, if any. Therefore, the dialogic self is rooted in an ecological paradigm which is

resistant to an anthropocentric view of the world that arranges entities into binaries of superior and inferior. Charles Brown's aphorism that "the ecological self is a dialogical self" (152) reverberates with the same idea of a relational self that manifests itself in Radcliffe's work. This form of relational self, which parallels with Anne Mellor's idea of a 'domesticated sublime', can contribute to sympathy and an ethics of care that are all essentially part of the ecological sublime. The ecological sublime, is non-dominating, relational, and democratic and is further attuned to "perceive other parts of the biotic community as speaking subjects with agencies" (Murphy, *Praxis* 70). A character's empathy with nature demonstrates that nature itself becomes an integral part of their community and identity while the existing bond also suggests equality between the two. Also, Radcliffe's nature is activated and enlivened when it is perceived and engaged with by responsive characters; the agency of landscape lies in its power to invoke and empower women to rise above their circumstances and gain a better recognition of their self and identity.<sup>21</sup>

Another manifestation of an expanded sense of self is the recognition of a metaphysical presence in nature which induces self-reflection and sympathy in humans. The fact that the physicality and materiality of nature becomes the basis for the self-recognition suggests that nature is not merely a dormant mass of inert matter. Instead, nature fulfils the position of a character which opens up the hearts and minds of Radcliffe's heroines to a higher realm of being. This new recognition of the physical and the metaphysical produces a liberating and empowering effect. As an example, Emily constantly seeks consolation in nature and she manages to have an epiphanic moment of seeing God by elevating her mind. When she is disturbed by her aunt before setting off for Udolpho, she strolls in the moon-lit garden:

She silently passed into the garden, and . . . was glad to breathe once more the air of liberty. . . . which renders the vexations of this world so insignificant. . . . while her

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<sup>21</sup> Jane Bennett and Karen Barad's ideas of thing-power and intra-action, discussed in chapter five, bear closely upon the way Radcliffe perceives landscape and her heroines engage with nature. However, the idea of a relational self, or 'relational ontology', does not fully come to fruition in Radcliffe as opposed to Mary Shelley's works, a point which I will address in the conclusion chapter.

thoughts ascended to the contemplation of those unnumbered worlds, that lie scattered in the depths of aether, thousands of them hid from human eyes, and almost beyond the flight of human fancy. . . . her imagination soared through the regions of space, and aspired to that Great First Cause, which pervades and governs all being (*Udolpho* 109).

The serenity of the garden restores Emily's morale in the face of the imminent troubles and also expands her vision of the world. The unity of the material and the metaphysical is realized by appreciating the spiritual properties of the world manifested in nature, 'that Great First Cause'. In fact, Emily's engagement with nature, especially the sublime scenery, inevitably "lift[s] her thoughts to the GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH" (10). The communion and connection between the two different realms is the resultant effect of the Radcliffean feminine sublime that enmeshes transcendence and the enhancement of self into nature. The most prominent descriptive passages that infuse landscape with religious invocations appear in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Romance of the Forest* which exhibit the presence of the other, the transcendental being, in nature. Adeline is continuously in a dialogue with the sublime and picturesque scenes throughout her journeys while the sunrise of the mornings embodies the triumph of light over darkness. In fact, Adeline reacts to the moment of the sunrise "as if Heaven was opening to the view" and the sublime scenery "swelled too [Adeline's heart] with gratitude and adoration. . . . the scene before her soothed her mind, and exalted her thoughts to the great Author of Nature (*Forest* 22). This passage is emblematic of Radcliffe's idea of the enhancement of self. The expanding horizon mirrors an accompanying shift in Adeline's heart and mind which causes her to appreciate the presence of a soothing entity, a spiritual being, residing in the landscape, who, in turn, increases her receptivity to nature and spirituality.

In fact, the dichotomy between light and darkness, which I discussed in relation to the interiors of the castle, plays out in nature as well. The observation of landscape is quite often

likened to the lifting of the veil<sup>22</sup> which obscures the grandeur of nature and thwarts the enhancement of self. The trope of the veil contains the imagery of patriarchal darkness which shrouds both nature and knowledge. Ellena's communion with nature, via her gaze through the window of her turret in *The Italian*, lifts the veil of obscurity and actualizes a realization of the grandeur of nature and the insignificance of humans in comparison to the vastness of nature:

Here, gazing upon the stupendous imagery around her, looking, as it were, beyond the awful veil which obscures the features of the Deity, and conceals Him from the eyes of his creatures, dwelling as with a present God in the midst of his sublime works; with a mind thus elevated, how insignificant would appear to her the transactions, and the sufferings of this world! How poor the boasted power of man, when the fall of a single cliff from these mountains would with ease destroy thousands of his race assembled on the plains below (*Italian* 90).

This realization and act of self-reflection concedes the fact that humans are but one small part of this universe in the face of nature's power. This moment of epiphany is also conflated with transcendence and the expansion of self through experiencing the female eco-sublime. Radcliffe's 'positive sublime' contributes to the formation of characters' communion with landscape and nature which, in turn, brings about a "sense of spiritual consolation through a reverent appreciation of natural phenomena" (Chandler 135). This is not to say that Radcliffe tries to prove the existence of God through the phenomenon of nature, but only to reaffirm the significance of nature in the formation of one's identity and a more mature recognition of the self. Another illuminating example is in *Udolpho* where Emily's friend, Blanche, is moved to feel the presence of God in nature after a few hours of a stroll around Chateau-le-Blanc, while years of confinement in a convent failed to do so; hence, her question as to "who could first invent convents!" (*Udolpho* 447). Blanche is immediately connected with God through nature and broadens her self-capacity by questioning institutionalized religion embodied by the

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth P. Broadwell and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have both discussed the significance of the veil and its different connotations in Radcliffe.

convent as well as other extensions of patriarchal power which are simultaneously predicated upon female confinement as well.

The enhancement of the self, along with a connection to, a communion with, and recognition of nature's metaphysics are the result of an exploration and reflection of one's identity and place in the world. This is a phenomenological perspective of life in which one reflects upon the relation between our lives as thinking subjects and the physical world we live in (Castrillón 2). The relation between sentient bodies and their world is couched in an ecological discourse since such reflections call for a revision of one's conception of humans' place in the world, which can no longer be that of domination and superiority. Radcliffe presents this understanding in her fiction by foregrounding the physicality and materiality of nature.<sup>23</sup> From this, the reader can deduce that humans are only a small part of a vast universe. The best expression of this philosophy is put forth by La Luc, in *The Romance of the Forest*, whose mind is tempered by his Rousseauian worldview, similar to other benevolent characters in Radcliffe. He calls astronomy the most apt science for the study of universe and broadening of one's mental horizons since by studying astronomy one "contemplates the innumerable worlds which are scattered through it, we are lost in astonishment and awe. This globe appears as a mass of atoms in the immensity of the universe, and man a mere insect" (*Forest* 275). The contemplation of universe and recognition of humans' miniscule place suggest parallels with the ecological philosophy of holism, underlining the interconnectedness of all entities in a non-hierarchical universe which manifests itself in the Radcliffean eco-sublime. In effect, dialogic the interconnectedness and reunion of humans and nature bolsters both a communal and a familial synergy amongst the characters, symbolized by the images of community and marriage at the end of Radcliffe's fictions.

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<sup>23</sup> Pipkin calls this phenomenon 'material sublime' which he defines as the moment when the 'materiality' of the experience of the sublime is highlighted rather than its dominating effect (600). His definition echoes the theoretical paradigms of eco-materialism which puts the material entities under the spotlight.

Radcliffe's conflation of sublimity with spirituality leads to a sense of connection and self-edification. These factors converge and form one of the most critical tenets of an ecological agenda – that of investing nature with relational value. As I mentioned earlier, nature and the nonhuman world were only construed as instrumentally useful as long as they served the anthropocentric needs of humans. The rise of the mechanistic philosophy of the sixteenth and seventeenth century literally rendered nature “devoid of intrinsic value” (Oelschlaeger 94). This idea was not an entirely unprecedented one as Christianity also subjugates nature to the dominance of Man as the crowning achievement of all creatures.<sup>24</sup> This philosophical view was the operating force that sundered the connection between humans and nature. The disconnection of humans from nature was addressed by Rousseau who argued that many social ills arise from man's detachment from nature. His ideas place him among the first environmental philosophers who addressed the roots of ‘modern environmentalism’ (Lafreniere 196). Similarly, Radcliffe also asserts a need for the dialogical reunion of humans and nature by foregrounding the significance of humans' integration in their surrounding environment. Benevolent patriarchs live a fulfilled life based on sympathy and care towards other human beings as well as the nonhuman world. Female characters also find themselves wiser and stronger by connecting with nature and finding solace and meaning in it. Radcliffe's nature forms the basis of what contemporary environmentalists call ‘ecological identity’ which is defined as

. . . all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and the sense of self. Nature becomes an object of identification. . . . The interpretation of life experience transcends social and cultural interactions. It also includes a person's connection to the earth, perception of the ecosystem, and direct experience of nature (Thomashow 3).

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<sup>24</sup> Lynn White's “The Historical Roots in our Ecological Crisis” is a cogent argument about the roots of environmental plights in the Bible and the role of Christianity in pronouncing Man to be the master of the world, hence his domination of its resources.

In such a conceptualization, nature is the fulcrum upon which one formulates one's identity, while a person's ethos, values, self, social life, and actions are all directed by their experience of nature. The prerequisite to form an ecological self is a relationship with and connection to nature. Landscape in Radcliffe forms a "locus of relationships" (Gillian Rose 112), a space for connection, communication, integration, and the development of an enhanced self by having a relational interaction with nature. The benevolent characters alongside Radcliffe's heroines all demonstrate this form of identity.

Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher known as the philosophical father of deep ecology, also has a similar definition of this sense of identity which he calls 'ecological self'. He defines it as a state of being in nature and of nature whose result is meaningfulness of life through "increased self-realization. . . . [and] a broadening and deepening of the self" (Naess 226) in connection with nature. This new realization, brought about by the concept of the ecological self, acknowledges the interconnectedness of humans and nature and the inextricably intertwined destiny of both. An ecological identity is an assortment of social and cultural values in tandem with a connection to our physical environment. An awareness that our physical and emotional attachment to nature can direct our actions towards both nature and others is a step towards recognizing the fact that humans are part of a larger whole who can never be separate and apart from it. Naess similarly associates the recognition of the self with identification with nature. In other words, one cannot understand his or her self as separate from the natural environment. This understanding corroborates environmental ethics which advocates an ontological reconfiguration of the relationship between humans and nature, acknowledging a degree of agency and value to the nonhuman world, thus restoring its rightful status as an equal to the human world. Nature is also invested with value as a "relational property" (Bonnett 81) of both humans and nonhumans. In other words, nature becomes a valuable entity, not for being instrumentally useful, but for its relationality and inseparability from humans who define their self-concept in connection with it.

The idea of interconnectedness with nature, as depicted by a Radcliffean eco-sublime, is an antidote to the masculine sublime of Burke and Kant which strives for humans' domination of nature. The eco-sublime broadens and enhances the self through attaching us to our physical environment which propels self-reflection. This sublime produces "a sympathy or love that connects the self with other people" (Mellor, *Gender* 95). Radcliffe's heroines' encounter with nature creates "love, reverence, and mutual relationship" (97) instead of horror, weakness and domination, characteristic of the masculine sublime. Radcliffe's eco-sublime triggers a spiritual revelation in nature and urges a strong attachment to the physical environment as if it is part of the self. The eco-sublime values collectivity and communion over solitary individuality. The communion with nature along with the resultant agency of the human and nonhuman worlds serve as a corrective to the ills of society as advocated by Rousseau.

The Radcliffean eco-sublime and her aesthetic mode, is but one example from several other female writers of the eighteenth century, that enabled the construction of a feminine subjectivity which is founded on "an experience of communion . . . [and] sympathy" (103), an acknowledgement of the embeddedness of humans in a larger system. It generates an appreciation and integration into landscape which is a token of "commitment to the welfare of others and an ethic of care" (105). In other words, her artistic mode created consideration and sympathy towards the physical environment. This is the reason many art critics believe that the eighteenth-century aesthetic theory forms the origin of the modern environmentalist and preservationist movements (qtd. in Hutchings, "Ecocriticism" 179-80). The sensitivity towards the plant life, environment, and nature evinces an emerging attitude in the eighteenth century which was many years later consolidated as environmental ethics.

In the end, it must be noted that Radcliffe's approach towards reconceptualising humans' relation to nature, while innovative, is not without problems. Radcliffe's focus on humans' connection with nature is mainly restricted to women who manage to establish a relational bond with nature upon which they rely as both a source of power and a locus for the

formation of an enhanced self. The relation between women and nature verges on an essentialist formulation which promotes the idea that women are inherently inclined to be closer to nature. This idea is based on both a cultural standpoint because of women's domestic roles, and also a biological one on account of their bodily functions. This is a highly contended view which many ecofeminists disagree with since an essentialist relation justifies the oppression of women and fails to lead to liberatory possibilities. Moreover, Radcliffe's conservative politics is also responsible for such apprehensions as her heroines return to patriarchal figures at the end. In comparison, Mary Shelley has a more radical vision of the relation between humans and nonhumans which I will discuss in the next two chapters.

#### **4. *Frankenstein*: The Humanized Monster or the Monstrous Human**

## 4.1 The Vitalism Debate

It is not an exaggeration to say that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has been among the few novels to have haunted the human imagination for nearly two centuries. *Frankenstein* has gained a proverbial status in the English lexicon and the word is recurrently used in political, economic, social, and environmental discourses. The widespread popularity of the term is evinced by the fact that quite often the fabricated creature, as an assembly of meat, is wrongly called by the name of its creator, Frankenstein. The creation of a so-called monstrous creature tapped into the unvoiced anxieties of Shelley's society, a fact revealed by the mixed reviews the novel initially received. Nevertheless, the moniker of a monstrous creature still resonates with many contemporary issues in modern societies. For instance, references to *Frankenstein* are abundant in medical practices where opponents of cloning evoke the creature in *Frankenstein* to object to the creation of cloned animals. Similarly, adversaries of Genetically Modified Food call the products of such industries 'Frankenfood' in order to conjure up Victor Frankenstein's tale of horror. In politics, rogue states which breed violence against their own supporters are also compared to Frankenstein. The list of references is endless and, perhaps, this is one of the reasons that *Frankenstein* is reproduced in numerous forms and shapes in all kinds of media.

One seminal issue that has often been discussed in relation to the novel is the role of science and technology, along with the ethical responsibilities of scientists towards their experiments. Although the novel is read as an allegory of the ambitious pursuit of science and its consequences, critics such as James Rieger deny that *Frankenstein* is even about science, on the basis that the novel's handling of it is frivolous and its "chemistry is switched-on magic, souped-up alchemy, the electrification of Agrippa and Paracelsus" (qtd. in Hindle 30). In spite of this shallow criticism, it is obvious that the novel was written at a time when there was an unprecedented interest and growth in science and new discoveries. These sciences were not always legitimate forms of science in the modern sense, but often included "the

spiritual sciences and their accompanying fascination with animal magnetism, somnambulism, clairvoyance, spirit apparitions, foreknowledge, trances, mediums, thought transfer, second sight, posthumous survival, and thought transferences between the living and the dead” (Kirby 100). Public enthusiasm for new accounts of science and the popularity of freak shows or public vivisections attest to the thirst to learn more about the secrets of the world which such fantastical sciences promised to uncover. These grand transformations and discoveries were not unnoticed by Romantic artists. Indeed, they were manifest in their arts as “their thinking and writing about art, poetry, and the imagination were greatly influenced by the developments in chemistry, biology, anatomy, and neuroscience” (Hogsette 534-5). The creation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is also concurrent with the same burgeoning obsession with science and technology. Influenced by the prevailing scientific zeitgeist of the day, Shelley’s novel is one of the most prominent works of fiction which portrays the workings of science and technology. It is not surprising that the novel still taps into our anxieties about the nature of science and its implications for humanity.

One of the scientific fascinations of the time was the controversy known as the ‘vitalism debate’ which took place from 1814 to 1819 between two renowned physicians: John Abernethy and William Lawrence. The debate was concerned with the origin of life, but had its precedent in the previous century in a series of experiments with electricity conducted by Luigi Galvani and Alessandro Volta. Galvani believed that he had brought dead animals, such as frogs, in his experiments, back to life by attaching electrical pins to their bodies and affixing them to plates. As a result, the muscles jolted and he coined the term animal electricity to account for the force which invigorated the dead animal. His nephew, Giovanni Aldini, even conducted the same experiment with the body of a deceased criminal to prove that electricity is the source of life:

On the first application of the process to the face, the jaw of the deceased criminal began to quiver, the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and one eye actually opened. In

the subsequent part of the process, the right hand was raised and clenched, and the legs and thighs were set in motion. It appeared to many of the bye-standers [sic] as if the wretched man was on the eve of being restored to life (qtd. in Stephens 276).

Following Galvani's experiments, Alessandro Volta repeated the same experiment with some changes and discredited Galvani's findings by claiming that the 'vital electrical fluid' emanated from the chemical reactions of the metals which were affixed to the frog's body rather than from an inherent force in the animal's body (Holmes 314).<sup>25</sup> Volta went on to invent an early antecedent of the battery called 'voltaic pile' which further proved that there is no such thing as animal electricity. The voltaic pile also played a significant role in the chemical experiments of Humphry Davy, a leading chemist of the time. Given that Mary Shelley was familiar with such scientific experiments, reading the novel as an "allegory of what happens when a man tries to give birth without a woman . . . acquires considerable irony when the woman is replaced by a battery created to refute Galvanism as animal electricity" (Sha 21). After all, Victor Frankenstein is a scientist who transgresses the boundaries of nature by creating life in the absence of a woman.

The vitalism debate was a relatively similar contention about the source of life which manifested itself in a series of debates between two renowned scientists: John Abernethy and William Lawrence. John Abernethy, a famous surgeon, was the advocate of vitalism, the idea that life can have metaphysical sources. Vitalism advocated the idea that the source of life is a force, a kind of energy known as 'vital spark' or 'élan vital'. This idea was accepted by the church as it was equated with the spiritual idea of a soul in living beings and was also accepted by classical accounts of medicine and alchemy. According to Abernethy:

. . . human life [was] based on a semi-mystical concept of a universal, physiological life force. Blood itself could not explain life, though it might carry it. This universal 'Vitality' was a 'subtle, mobile, invisible substance, super-added to the evident structure

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<sup>25</sup> The etymology of the words 'galvanize' and 'volt' goes back to the name of these two scientists to commemorate their scientific legacies.

of muscles, or other form of vegetable and animal matter, as magnetism is to iron, and as electricity is to various substances with which it may be connected (Holmes 309).

Abernethy also cemented his ideas by drawing on the authority of Humphry Davy who had experimented with the Voltaic pile and was interested in “‘animal magnetism’ and human animation” (309). Holmes explains that Davy’s experiments were for Abernethy the missing link for vitalism. His experiments in chemistry revealed that through chemical reactions the electricity that lay in the atoms of matter caused subtle motions and jolts (309) which proponents of vitalism related to the spark of life or the vital force that animates humans and animals. In the same way, the predominant belief in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was that a vague parallel or connection existed between the source of life and electricity (Oakes 63). Mary Shelley’s protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, also demonstrates familiarity with galvanism or the principle of life when he witnesses a thunderstorm:

As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner. It was not splintered by the shock, but entirely reduced to thin ribbons of wood. I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed. Before this I was not unacquainted with the more obvious laws of electricity. On this occasion a man of great research in natural philosophy was with us, and excited by this catastrophe, he entered on the explanation of a theory which he had formed on the subject of electricity and galvanism, which was at once new and astonishing to me (Shelley 42-3).

Electricity is the bearer and also the destroyer of life. Although there is no explicit sign in the novel that the creature was brought to life with electricity, there is enough reference to ‘élan vital’ or that vital spark that animates humans and animals.

On the other side of the vitalism debate was William Lawrence, Percy Shelley's personal physician, who happened to be a student of Abernethy as well. Lawrence turned against his own mentor after becoming a professor of anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons and gave a series of public lectures as a part of his job. He was under the influence of the French anatomist John Cuvier and, as a naturalist, could not believe in any modicum of vitalism. Alternatively, he advocated a belief in materialism which posited that the notion of a 'life force' was not at all metaphysical, but a physiological result of the assemblage of body parts as a living organism. Therefore, life is an emergent property which springs from the harmonious workings of the constituents of an organism. There is little doubt that Mary Shelley was familiar with the 'vitalism debate' and also with Humphry Davy's ideas and experimentations. It is highly probable that Shelley attended his public lectures as evidenced by a passage in the 1818 version of the novel<sup>26</sup> where Victor Frankenstein narrates that, encouraged by his father, he went to a series of lectures on natural philosophy where he became familiar with different chemical substances (Hindle 32).

The 'vitalism debate' played a significant role in the inception and also the reception of the novel as it is similarly concerned with the act of creation and source of life. The novel also features two scientists modeled after John Abernethy and William Lawrence. At the University of Ingolstadt, Victor meets Professor M. Waldman and M. Krempe. Professor M. Krempe exemplifies the materialist-oriented Lawrence whose bitter contempt for the scientists preceding him echoes Lawrence's disapproval of Abernethy and his revered predecessors. Professor Krempe harshly reprimands Victor after learning about the branches of natural philosophy he is interested in and the outdated books he has read. As a result of this encounter, Victor comes to disdain natural philosophy until he is saved by Professor M. Waldman, Abernethy's voice, who acknowledges some degree of value in the works of earlier scientists who laid a solid scientific foundation for the posterity to follow. Like Professor M. Waldman,

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<sup>26</sup> The references to *Frankenstein* are from the 1831 edition. However, there are two quotations from the 1818 version that have been used in this chapter since they more explicitly reflect the argument. These passages all deal with the representation of animal imagery in the novel.

Abernethy similarly cherishes the precursors of science and revives the young disillusioned Frankenstein's hope. He acknowledges the legacy of these obsolete sources and praises their grand plans. Victor resolves to use the applications of modern science in favor of his ambitions and curiosity regarding the structure of life in both humans and any other entities which house life. It is his passion to tread upon unfamiliar paths that leads to the creation of his monster.

There are mixed views regarding Mary Shelley's stance towards vitalism. With the exception of Marilyn Butler, who vehemently believes that Shelley was a supporter of materialism, others are neutral since Shelley's own writings, whether fictional or nonfictional, do not explicitly address the debate nor adopt any stance towards it. Also, there is a balanced amount of reference to both vitalism and materialism in both versions of the novel. Indeed, the critical scene of creation remains equally vague in both editions as Shelley never fully clarifies (Esposito 29) as to which side of the debate she actually supports. Sarah Marsh believes that Victor's portrayal is that of an 'ambivalent vitalist' who turns to materialism as he first does not deem his creature to be worthy of life and seeks to destroy its anomalous body (106). The question of whether Mary Shelley supported her husband's physician, William Lawrence, or his opponent John Abernethy remains a matter of conjecture. Still, Shelley's novel does deal with the ultimate question of life and death as the story is an allegory of "human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (qtd. in Butler 405) as stated by Shelley herself in the preface to the 1831 edition. In this vein, an ecocritical lens reveals fresh insight into the nature of what constitutes life<sup>27</sup> and also the ontological status of the creature himself as he remains a nondescript who oscillates between being an animal, composed of pieces of dead meat who comes to life and also a rational and logical human being who can read, write, and reason with an astonishingly polished rhetoric. In this fashion, the creature

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<sup>27</sup> I will not present an in-depth discussion as to what animates the creature in this chapter. In the following chapter, I will draw upon the theories of New Materialism and Material Ecocriticism to elaborate this point by arguing that what animates the creature is the configuration of the pieces of meat and matter inside him. Indeed, life springs forth from the assemblage of matter which he is composed of. This approach is closer to William Lawrence's take on the vitalism debate.

erases the taxonomical boundaries of living beings, bringing humans closer to their animal counterparts in an attempt to question humans' anthropocentric assumptions about the world and nature.

## 4.2 The Creation of the Human/Monster

Recent trends in ecological scholarship on *Frankenstein* verge on animal studies to a great extent. Timothy Morton highlights the uncomfortable position of ecocritics towards this novel as animal studies mainly focus on animal liberation and rights, rather than ecology (“*Frankenstein*” 144). Ecocriticism is, at its core, a reaction against constructionism. It promises to return attention to the physicality of the world, as opposed to post-structuralism which considers every entity and phenomenon to be a social construct. Philosophy’s privileging of constructionism goes back to Cartesian dualism which creates binaries such as human/animal and natural/artificial. According to Morton, many Romantic writers sought to dismantle such binaries by delineating the conflation of humans and nature (146). Victor’s creation is the ecocritical epitome of the dismantlement of the binaries as it is both natural and artificial. It is comprised of organic pieces of human and animal flesh; at the same time, it is a man-made creation, the ultimate product of science. It is both human and animal in the sense that it kills voraciously and dwells in nature, but still possesses the cognitive abilities of humans. Indeed, it is only his looks and misshapen figure that deny him his human status. The creature is a phenomenon that does not eradicate the differences between humans and animals or nature and culture, but amplifies them (147). The creature is ensnared in an endless web of representation as it unsuccessfully attempts to define its place in the world and establish a foothold in human society. It is both legitimately a part of this community and, at the same time, apart from it. The same ambiguity applies to his status in the animal community, as the creature legitimately holds both insider and outsider status and unsettlingly resides as a border creature. Thus, his ontological status in the novel is an uncanny condition of both presence and absence. Morton argues that the very state of being in flux is what associates the creature with environmentality. He maintains that environmentality is not something that we can point to; it is not a presence. It “is a manifold of things and certain ways of experiencing those things”

(149).<sup>28</sup> In this sense, the creature is also a way of experiencing nature and relating to it as humans come to question their anthropocentric prejudices about themselves, animals, and nature through interacting with the creature. Therefore, *Frankenstein* is a novel about ecology and humans' presence in nature and their relation to it.

There is another aspect of the novel that bears closely on the question of ecology and nature. Ecofeminism seeks to lay bare the patriarchal 'logic of domination' which has oppressed both nature and women. One of the seminal binaries that ecofeminists identify is that of the gendered human/animal binary. Traditionally, the human side of the binary is exclusively masculinized while the animal side of the binary is, predictably, feminized. This idea is rooted in the belief that the exploitation of animals is essentially an integral part of the male psyche which sanctions the abuse of nature as well (Adams, "Ecofeminism" 126). This notion also originates from a patriarchal perspective in which men are superior to both women and nature as men, unlike women, possess a rational mind and knowledge, which is also indicative of their obsession with control. Furthermore, the domestication of animals and nature as properties of men set the stage, according to Fisher, for the future domestication and exploitation of women (qtd. in Adams and Gruen 17). Therefore, the patriarchal mindset stripped women and animals of their voice and agency and animals have been reduced to "absent references" (Adams, "Ecofeminism" 140) in the Western world. These ideas are akin to the depiction of the creature in *Frankenstein* as Victor, the embodiment of an Enlightenment scientist, creates a nameless monster half-human, half-animal. In the course of his scientific endeavors, he also neglects his domestic duties to his family and his fiancée. His obsession with his scientific quest leads to the destruction of the very object of his scientific research, his family, and himself. The creature's plight is, in some ways, similar to that of Victor's fiancée, Elizabeth. She is also marginalized and temporarily abandoned by Victor. Victor's return to

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<sup>28</sup> Morton makes a distinction between Nature with capital 'N' and environmentality. Being a Heideggerian ecocritic, he draws on Heidegger's motto "being is not presence" to argue that Nature is a physical presence like mountains and all the animals in it; you can see and touch it. In contrast, environmentality is not something you can pinpoint, but you know it is there. It is an absent presence. It is a state of being and experiencing things, hence his axiom 'ecology without nature' ("*Frankenstein*" 148-9).

Elizabeth marks her death, a destiny that Victor had seen in a nightmare before. Thus, in terms of alienation and marginalization the creature and Elizabeth share the same fate.

One of the significant ecological aspects of the novel is the collapse of the boundaries of representation. Victor's creation raises important issues as to the status of what constitutes a human or otherwise, a nonhuman entity. It also presents an ethical conundrum where humans' responsibilities towards the nonhuman world are underscored and the ominous consequences of overlooking such responsibilities are presented. This scenario is presented in the novel through the depiction of the dialectic between Victor and his nameless creation who is addressed by different monikers, such as vampire, brute, wretch, monster, animal, creature, daemon, and fiend, just to name a few. This lack of a nominal identity draws attention to the anthropocentric bias at the heart of the text where the creature is even refused a representational identity due to his marked difference from a normal-looking human subject. The preeminence of humans is extremely apparent in *Frankenstein*. Nancy Armstrong asserts that "human beings are what count in *Frankenstein*" (69), suggesting that the nonhuman other has been disregarded and discarded simply because it does not fit into the clearly defined category of humans. As an outsider, the creature is cast away and demonized because it reminds humans of the fluidity of the ontological boundaries of the thinking 'I' and the mindless matter. To further explain this point, it is necessary to discuss the role that animals occupy in fictions, and why Frankenstein's creature oscillates between the two categories of human and nonhuman without being able to squarely fit into either one. I will analyze the creature first as an entity that is designated as animal and then go on to explain how this classification becomes an untenable one.

Human history has always been entangled with that of animals. In spite of humans' dependence on animals, the rise of industrialization and urbanization pushed animals to the margins of human society to be used mainly as a food source. Their representation in fiction is also mediated through the cultural norms of human societies which only reinstate the

superiority of humans over animals and nature. Keith Tester explains that “a core activity of human civilization [is] an attempt to say what it is to be properly human; to establish human uniqueness in contradistinction to the otherness of the natural environment” (qtd. in Kenyon-Jones 1). In other words, humans are whatever animals are not. Therefore, whatever falls outside the realm of human culture is either represented and embraced if it can be subjected to human laws, or ignored if it falls outside of the humanistic domain. In fact, the process of humans’ maturation entails a distantiation from animals since residing in human society requires a careful conformity to existing social norms of behavior and education. Humans must learn to define their place and identity in relation to their fellow beings in a community. This process is akin to a “kind of dying. . . . the body becomes acceptably human; it must suppress its animality and mold itself appropriately” (Steeves 1). Such a process accounts for the absence of animals in humanistic discourses. This absence of the other is even more noteworthy when one considers that animals have rarely been given their due, as the impossibility of having a voice prevents them from asserting an ontological status independent from that of humans. Thus, they have often been utilized as an ancillary to the humanistic project of the Enlightenment to reinstate the unique position of humans in their great chain of being. The instability of animals’ representation is aptly described by Philo and Wilbert who believe there is a general impression that animals function as humans’ *tabula rasa* upon which their perceptions are inscribed (5). They go on to argue that looking at animals from humans’ constructed point-of-view can draw attention to the unsettling possibilities of nonhuman agency, including that of animals, as it can enable them to move beyond the roles and designated categories we have built for them. This has important implications for us as human subjects since our construction of identity and humanity is based on negotiating the animality of the other nonhuman subject. Frankenstein’s creature is the perfect epitome of this process as it demonstrates “the extent to which humans can assume sovereignty over all other creatures” (Palmeri 1). *Frankenstein* serves as a double-edged weapon whereby the nonhuman creature

resists classification and designation by the human subject and rigorously asserts its own agency.

Victor Frankenstein is the embodiment of an Enlightenment scientist whose ambition for knowledge and grand goals becomes the sole purpose of his life. Since progress was the ideal of the age, anything which served this purpose was a legitimate tool to be utilized to enhance the Enlightenment project. The eighteenth century witnessed the unprecedented instrumentalization of the nonhuman world for the greater good of humans. As a result, the beginning of the nineteenth century coincided with the emergence of a growing awareness about issues such as the mistreatment of animals. Richard Martin, an Irish Member of Parliament, who was a landowner and a farmer himself, proposed a bill in 1822 for the protection of domestic animals, whose provisions were extended in 1825 to include even “those [animals] involved in public displays such as bear-baiting, rat-catching and animal fights” (Guerrina 79). Mary Shelley also wrote her novel in the context of such discourses where there was significantly more sensitivity towards animal (mis)treatment. She was quite sympathetic to this issue as she and her husband, Percy Shelley, were both well acquainted with works pertaining to animal cruelty and the virtues of a vegetarian diet. According to Stephanie Rowe, Mary Shelley grew up in a vegetarian family and was also married to a vegetarian. Her father, William Godwin, had become a vegetarian when Mary was around seven years old. Joseph Ritson, her father’s close friend, published *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food as a Moral Duty* in 1802. John Frank Newton, Godwin’s friend, also published *The Return to Nature* in 1811 and Percy Shelley himself wrote *A Vindication of Natural Diet* in 1813. It is true that vegetarianism emanated from a concern for humans’ health rather than from a direct concern for animals. Still, it did generate some awareness of the utilitarian view towards animals as a source of food only. This degree of regard for nonhuman life demonstrates a shift from the conceptual framework of the Great Chain of Being which establishes a system of hierarchy by subordinating animals to human beings. This fact is

evidenced by Percy Shelley's poetry which "complicates the same chain of being by observing a single creature such as worm in both the lowest and highest positions along a moral hierarchy" (Palmeri 3). Similarly, Mary was quite well versed in such discourses and she definitely had the issue of animal (mis)treatment in mind when she wrote her seminal text.

Sympathy for animals did not originate from a direct concern for animals per se, but rather an indirect one for them. Benevolent animal treatment was considered to be an index of humanity, not a sign of a direct care for animals as an end in itself. The most vocal proponent of this attitude was Immanuel Kant who believed that humans "have no direct duties to animals as sentient beings and only indirect duties regarding them; animals lacking rational wills cannot themselves obligate us" (O'Hagan 531). Indirect duties are intended to elevate us as humans because any mistreatment of the nonhuman world might inure us to the sufferings of our fellow species. Accordingly, he prescribed an ethical principle which prevented humans from animal maltreatment since such behavior may undermine humans' direct moral responsibilities to their fellow beings (Svoboda 312). This view emanates from Kant's anthropocentric vision that renders humans as an end in themselves with moral obligations only towards one another. Patrick Kain quotes from Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* where he states that "every human being has a legitimate claim to respect from his fellow human beings and is *in turn* bound to respect every other but animals are 'things,' not persons, and 'respect is always directed only to persons, never to things'" (210). Therefore, animals are not entitled to an ethics of care since they are mere things rather than rational sentient beings capable of reasoning. This view is an outcome of a hierarchical system of values which only applies to humans rather than nonhumans.

Victor Frankenstein also evinces such a disregard for those that fall outside of humanity. He is consumed with a fervent passion to uncover the secrets of life and death. He devotes the entirety of his time and attention to the pursuit of his goal in order to "banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (Shelley 42). His

egotistic anthropocentric intention, in caring only about human life, is consistent with the common eighteenth and nineteenth century outlook on animals. This view dates back to the sixteenth century when René Descartes established the duality between the rational ‘I’ and other objects of being in the world incapable of rationality. Australian ecofeminist philosopher, Val Plumwood, also described such disregard as a form of

. . . exclusion from the master category of reason which in liberation struggles provides and explains the conceptual links between different categories of domination, and links the domination of humans to the domination of nature. The category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of nonhumans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature (Plumwood, *Feminism* 4).

Nature, in this definition, is whatever is on the other side of the male human binary including animals and women. The excluded other is under the sway of emotion rather than the judgment of rationality. Therefore, they are not deserving of human sympathy and their exploitation is justified.

Victor’s anthropocentricism and his lack of sympathy towards animals is subtly referred to and challenged several times during the course of his experiments and afterwards as well. The 1818 text contains a passage where the young Frankenstein observes a visitor conducting experiments on an airpump which was a device that took oxygen out of birds and then resuscitated them again. The experiment piqued Victor’s curiosity and wonder (qtd. in Rowe 138). This passage indicates Frankenstein’s fascination with science but he reveals no sign of sympathy for the suffering bird, whatsoever, as the scientific study itself is what counts, regardless of the means. His curiosity and ambition, coupled with his apathy towards animals, lead him to discover the secrets of life, and thus Victor decides to observe the process of a human body’s decomposition in vaults and charnel-houses: “A churchyard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm. Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay

and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel-houses” (Shelley 52-3). A human body, to Victor, is the crowning achievement of creation and an epitome of beauty as long as it is the seat of life, but once the vital force of life departs the body it merely turns into lifeless matter that is only fit to be worms’ food.

Victor’s insensitivity towards animal suffering is further evinced when he procures raw materials for his scientific experiment. He fabricates his creature by collecting different pieces of meat from both human and animal parts. In a sense, he creates a hybrid or a composite creature, half human and half animal. He gets hold of his materials from “the dissecting room and the slaughter-house” and “collects bones from charnel-houses” (55). Stephanie Rowe names the animals that were commonly found in such places back then:

The materials collected from slaughterhouse are those of animals other than humans. Most likely cows, sheep, pigs, birds, or horses; those collected from the dissecting room might be the remnant of pigs, rabbits, birds, dogs, cats, or apes and other primates including human – given the creature’s generally hominid form, this last certainly must have been included in its composition (137).

The process of creating the creature involves inflicting pain upon the animals as Victor speaks of the “horrors of [his] secret toils” as he “dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay” (Shelley 55). This is the result of his childhood fascination with science as an end in itself regardless of the process or the consequences it might have. His lack of empathy for the animals emanates from an “institutionalized mentality of speciesism that makes it possible for these experimenters to do these things without serious consideration of the interests of the animals they are using” (Singer 42).<sup>29</sup> This is a common feature of a scientific endeavor which renders the subject of study inert and turns it into dead matter, devoid of any feeling or agency. Such a mindset

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<sup>29</sup> Lori Gruen, with reference to Carolyn Merchant, also points that the mechanistic world view accompanied with the growth of ‘experimental methods’ led to the exploitation of both animals and women. She observes that “a majority of the experiments are conducted to satisfy curiosity rather than to improve anyone’s health” and “while much of the rhetoric employed to justify such experiments is cast in terms of altruistic researchers devoted to the promotion of human health and longevity, the bottom line is often obscured” (Gruen, “Oppression” 65).

tacitly upholds humans as a superior species amongst all the other living creatures. Victor is cognizant of the ghastrliness of his experiments and its ensuing horrors as his “human nature turn[ed] with loathing from” his experiments: “My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless and almost frantic impulse urged me forward” (Shelley 55). The frantic impulse is the culmination of his scientific experimentation which he expects to lead to the discovery of the secret of life. This grand mission justifies his abhorrent utilization of animals in his scientific pursuit for the sublime cause of serving humans by rendering them invulnerable to death. The sole purpose of Victor’s quest is to benefit the human world by making them immortal and he evinces no qualms about the means to achieve his goal or the consequences of his pursuit.

The cruelty he has committed towards animals is more explicitly hinted at through a nightmarish dream Victor has. His “dreams presented a thousand objects that scared me [Victor]. Towards morning I was possessed by a kind of nightmare; I felt the fiend’s grasp in my neck and could not free myself from it” (188). In fact, he is caught and enslaved by the very object which was intended to liberate humans from the tyranny of death. The account of this dream is more vivid in the 1818 text which is quoted by Rowe: “Can you wonder that sometimes a kind of insanity possessed me, or that I saw continually about me a multitude of filthy animals inflicting on me incessant torture, that often extorted screams and bitter groans” (qtd. in Rowe 142-3). The nightmare, in reality, is an “inverted vivisection” which “constitutes the scientist’s imaginative identification with the animal sensations and suffering voiced by his experimental subject” (Philip Armstrong 69). It is a vicarious revenge of the lifeless animals that are torturing Victor in a scene which depicts the reversal of Cartesian duality. It is now the animals who are the agentive subjects experimenting on Victor, the rational Enlightenment scientist. He experiences the erosion of his rationality as he is possessed by insanity and loses a hold on the security and certitude that is offered by his Cartesian identity. At this pivotal moment, he becomes more alert to animal suffering as in a dramatic reversal he is

nightmarishly repositioned as the object of their study. The loss of his Enlightenment subjectivity is an intense and traumatic moment of rapprochement between the human and the nonhuman, a moment of identification which Victor is not yet ready or willing to embrace.

Rowe makes a thoughtful comparison between this scene in the novel and John Oswald's *The Cry of Nature* published in 1791. According to Oswald "the language of nature . . . [is] read and heard by the body's senses and recognized according to the logic of identification" (qtd. in Rowe 143). Frankenstein shudders at thought of what he has done to animals in the course of his scientific pursuit. At the moment of "loss of rationality . . . his body recognizes the suffering of the other in its own capacity for suffering" (Rowe 143). This moment is the perfect example of the inversion of the subject/object duality; Victor feels tortured by the very creatures he deemed passive objects for the benefit of his irresponsible creation. The dream topples the privileged position accorded to man in the hierarchy of creation. It also raises important ethical questions regarding animals. As animals have been denied a voice and identity similar to those of humans, we have become inured to the suffering that we have subjected them to. Sympathy is possible only at the moment of identification with animals when we realize that our duties towards them are not secondary or indirect, but rather direct, similar to the manner in which humans deserve sympathy. To achieve this degree of sympathy, Lori Gruen offers her theory of 'entangled empathy' which she defines as

. . . a process whereby individuals who are empathizing with others first respond with a precognitive, empathetic reaction to the interests of others. . . . From these reactions, we move to reflectively imagine ourselves in the position of the other. . . . The empathizer is also attentive to both similarities and differences between herself and her situation and that of the fellow creature with whom she is empathizing. She must move between her own and the other's point-of-view ("Empathy" 226).

This process of identification is the closest humans can come to dismantling the Cartesian boundary between themselves and animals. It is the moment of recognition of nonhuman's being in the world.<sup>30</sup>

This epiphanic moment of recognition is accompanied with uncertainty, horror, and shock for the human. After all, the awareness that humans are no longer the self-proclaimed sovereigns of the nonhuman world and nature is a disconcerting one. This realization is embodied by the look of the monster after the task of his creation is completed. The creature asserts its being and presence, although tacitly, at the moment when Victor looks at him in his workshop for the first time. He is filled with a chilling horror and disgust at the sight of the still monster on the table of his laboratory. In an epiphanic moment, Victor realizes the horror of his creation and flees:

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. . . .

Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room (Shelley 58).

The description of Victor's horror is mainly focused on the body of the creature and his physicality. It is, in fact, the yellow skin, muscles, arteries, and eyes that shock Victor, the very same ingredients of which his body is composed. He experiences an unsettling identification with the monster. Indeed, according to Jay Clayton, Shelley is "revers[ing] the

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<sup>30</sup> The significance of sympathy is even more prominent when one notes that Mary Shelley was familiar with Adam Smith's account of sympathy in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), which maintains that the foundation of morality is humans' capacity for sympathizing with one another.

terms of monstrosity” (qtd. in Mossman 176). Victor identifies himself in the creature or monster. He is made equally aware of the same visceral substances that turn some into animals and others into humans. We are all embedded in a “network of nonhuman (animal, vegetable, viral) relations” (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 122) and therefore we are one with and the same as animals in many respects. The reason Victor was oblivious to this fact was that his human self and identity was protected by his human skin. Once the skin is removed, he is all flesh and bone like the creature which is similar to the “blood and guts oozing from the fissure in his skin . . . exceeding representation, and hence appearing to others as a chaotic spillage from his own representational shell” (Gigante 566). Therefore, to Victor, what represents the security of his human self is the flimsy container of his skin, situated on the surface of his flesh. Apart from that, he shares everything with the creature, not to mention the fact that the creature excels in rhetoric and reasoning when compared to Victor. The animal is shocking because he is the unmasked human who reminds us of our constituents. In actual fact, humans always encounter a moment of shock when, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, the surface is scratched and “the actual depth of skinless flesh dispels the spiritual, immanent pseudo-depth” (22). In other words, the skin gives us an illusion of our immanence and superiority over others. The illusion is shattered when we come face-to-face with a figuratively skinned human, similar to what Victor experiences.

The encounter with the naked creature destabilizes Victor’s identity and sense of self. He has been stripped of his own agency and humanity upon facing the creature’s still gaze. This indicates that the creature is no longer an assorted assemblage of dead matter, but a coherent, animate and living being who is not only Victor’s kin but is, in fact, his progeny. The fact that he is monstrous is but a reflection of Victor himself who has created him by transgressing the boundaries; therefore, it is Victor who is the true monster in *Frankenstein* as he irresponsibly abandons his own creature upon realizing that he shares the same corporeality with him. In fact, Victor’s horror is “the fear of objectification, the fear of being on the other

side of subjectivity” (Feder 70). Victor comes face-to-face with his own ‘meat’ as it were, which threatens the boundary of the self. The monster, as I will argue in the next section, exists in a liminal zone, an in-between state of belonging and unbelonging. Prior to this moment, Victor was safe and secure in the supposed superiority of the human domain. This, however, is an illusion that he can no longer contain when confronting the creature. This is the moment of abjection, according to Julia Kristeva, when the self and other are no longer distinguishable and the borders collapse: “the fragile border . . . where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject” (qtd. in Martin 70). Victor is fazed by the same unnerving cognizance that he no longer is the ‘master self’ and his own creature’s gaze heralds the collapse of his myth of rational subjectivity.

The creature’s unsettling gaze upon Victor is thus an index of the instability of the binary of human and animal. This episode of the novel is reminiscent of Derrida’s account of his encounter with his cat, while he was naked in the bathroom, and how unsettling it was for him to be gazed at by his cat: “It can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me. The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat” (Derrida and Wills 380). Derrida becomes aware of the existence of a different subjectivity, or ‘an alterity’ precisely when he realizes that ‘his’ cat actually possesses its own point of view. He continues to describe the cat’s gaze as one “that is vacant to the extent of being bottomless, at the same time innocent and cruel perhaps, perhaps sensitive and impassive, good and bad, uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret” (381). The creature’s eyes communicate the same message to Victor, but he expresses horror and revulsion, rather than acceptance, because he cannot acknowledge the alterity of his creature on its own terms. To him, the creature is a threat to his Enlightenment subjectivity which distinguishes him from the moving pieces of meat he has created. Consequently, he

turns away with disgust from this reminder. However, he fails to realize that there is no flight from the reality that is clearly manifest through his own work. He is haunted by the ubiquitous monster which constantly reminds Victor of his alterity, his material identity. Victor's life is embittered by the same bottomless and abysmal eyes he fled from:

The cup of life was poisoned forever, and although the sun shone upon me, as upon the happy and gay of heart, I saw around me nothing but a dense and frightful darkness, penetrated by no light but the glimmer of two eyes that glared upon me. Sometimes they were the expressive eyes of Henry, languishing in death, the dark orbs nearly covered by the lids and the long black lashes that fringed them; sometimes it was the watery, clouded eyes of the monster, as I first saw them in my chamber at Ingolstadt (Shelley 186).

He is even haunted by the monster in his dreams. The day after creating the monster, Victor dreams of Elizabeth whom he kisses, but the kiss turns her into a lacklustre corpse. He starts from his sleep and “beheld the wretch—the miserable monster. . . . He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me (59). The dream is another reversal of his vivisection. After he discovers the spark of life, he bestows it on lifeless matter, pieces of bone and meat from humans and animals. Frankenstein's decaying pieces of meat come to life, only to seek revenge. Victor's first kiss on Elizabeth's lips, in lieu of reviving her, deprives her of the vital force of life and he sees those very eyes of the monster he tried to avoid in his laboratory. The monster is a product and harbinger of death rather than life and this is the message that the dream conveys to Victor, similar to the dream of animals torturing him in the 1818 text.

Victor's moment of horror is an embodiment of the gradual unraveling of his identity and his vicarious identification with the nonhuman other. His agitation is indeed an indication of his “anthropocentric anxiety at being looked at or addressed by a nonhuman” (Petsche 102). Victor's self is built upon suppressing “the question of nonhuman subjectivity” (Wolfe 1),

similar to that of the creature, which enables him to suppress his guilt and maintain his sanity. The boundary of the skin becomes a flimsy marker of our identity and at the same time a barrier to connection and empathy. Once we accept our own corporeality/materiality as coextensive with that of animals, then we are able to “relate to animals as animals ourselves” (Braidotti, “Animals” 526). Otherwise, animals, similar to Victor’s creature, need to be relegated to the realm of the nondescript other, devoid of agency and identity. This is the reason the creature is accorded no nominal identity and name apart from that of the monster, animal or the thing. The phenomenon of the creature’s being brings humans closer to the concept of “threshold of species-being” (McLane 98), which is that indeterminate zone where the representational notions of animals and humans are blurred beyond distinction. The creature is actually “a new species that threatens to supplant the supremacy of man, not out of evil intent, but simply by enacting the natural process” (Hunter 134) of nature. The fear of such a reversal leads to the marginalization and vilification of the creature at the hands of humans in an attempt to retain their illusory dominion over the nonhuman. The creature, a new species, is accepted as long as it is lifeless matter, a pile of meat; however, the moment it asserts its agency and being, he must be avoided or, if possible, eradicated to maintain the myth of human sovereignty over the animal other. Nevertheless, once the nonhuman has asserted itself, the denial of his agency is not easy. I will explain, in the next chapter, how the agency of the nonhuman manifests itself and the ways in which the creature exemplifies the power of resurrected nature to reclaim itself from the grasp of human exploitation.

### 4.3 Human/Animal Markers

The creature is aware of the barriers between him and the other humans. He acts as a floating signifier of humanity and animality, constantly shuttling back and forth between the two taxonomies. One characteristic that brings the creature closer to human taxonomy is his ability to speak, for language is often used as a benchmark to distinguish between humans and nonhumans. Commenting on language, Agamben considers it an “anthropological apparatus” whereby humans distinguish themselves from their animal counterparts who are incapable of communication on humans’ terms (qtd. in Cimatti 19-20). On this basis, Descartes makes a radical claim and relegates animals “to the most inhuman level: machines, mere mechanical devices, automata” (Roberts 7) and, accordingly, denies them the possibility of “intentional, reasoned speech” (7). The fact that they are incapable of communication similar to that of humans, renders them devoid of soul and they become mere things. Therefore, communication on human terms is an unfeasible act for animals as they may only be able to mechanically produce a sound without any reasoned intention. This account does not fittingly describe the creature as he undergoes a process of maturation quite similar to humans as he comes to understand different feelings, sensations, light, darkness, hunger, and music. Shelley draws on French philosopher Etienne Bonnot de Condillac’s ideas of how humans’ acquire knowledge through their sensory experiences (Cimatti 16). Frankenstein’s creature also uses his senses to acquire knowledge of his surroundings: “A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses” (Shelley 105). His account is quite similar to that of a child learning to differentiate between different senses. The process of differentiating between his senses is carried out in nature, away from the influence of humans. Philip Armstrong maintains that this Rousseauian education “is necessarily conducted in dialogue with the natural environment: the moon, a stream, trees, and then an animal life” (64) which is the singing of birds. It is at this stage that he first tries to imitate the sounds of nature, his first attempt at learning language:

I was delighted when I first discovered that a pleasant sound, which often saluted my ears, proceeded from the throats of the little winged animals who had often intercepted the light from my eyes. I began also to observe, with greater accuracy, the forms that surrounded me and to perceive the boundaries of the radiant roof of light which canopied me. Sometimes I tried to imitate the pleasant songs of the birds but was unable. Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again (Shelley 106).

He is not yet aware of the significance of language as a means to bond with humans. However, he is cognizant of the fact that a phenomenon called language is common between both humans and animals as he longs to express his feelings either in the form of imitating birds or through his own mode.

He desperately seeks to belong to the community of humans as he was created by one and feels that he has been wrongfully abandoned by his creator. His first attempt to approach humans is a failure as those who set eyes on him shriek in fear and panic. Later in the novel, he is violently expelled from village and subsequently fails to settle in any of the havens that he seeks refuge in. Eventually, he manages to sneak away and stay in a sty next to the De Lacey's family cottage. He comes to appreciate the domesticity and the kindness of the family members and also helps them with their daily chores secretly. Yet, despite a strong desire to make himself known, still he cannot summon enough courage to do so. In the meantime, he makes an astounding discovery that these people are able to communicate:

I made a discovery of still greater moment. I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it. But I was baffled in every attempt I made for this purpose. Their pronunciation was quick, and the words they

uttered, not having any apparent connection with visible objects, I was unable to discover any clue by which I could unravel the mystery of their reference. By great application . . . I discovered the names that were given to some of the most familiar objects of discourse; I learned and applied the words, 'fire,' 'milk,' 'bread,' and 'wood.' I learned also the names of the cottagers themselves. The youth and his companion had each of them several names, but the old man had only one, which was 'father.' The girl was called 'sister' or 'Agatha,' and the youth 'Felix,' 'brother,' or 'son.' I cannot describe the delight I felt when I learned the ideas appropriated to each of these sounds and was able to pronounce them (114-5).

The creature is aware that the only way in which he can approach human beings is through learning their language and decides to wait until he has mastered their mode of communication. Peter Brooks also underwrites the significance of language learning at this stage of the novel when Safie arrives and the creature benefits from the language lessons provided to her (374). This is an early tacit admission on the part of the creature that in order to belong to the community of humans he must know how to communicate on their terms. His mastery of language is exceptional as he excels and "speaks and reasons with the highest elegance, logic, and persuasiveness. As a verbal creation, he is the very opposite of the monstrous" (371). His eloquence affords him so strong a sense of logic and rationality that he surpasses the brilliant Frankenstein as well. On his first encounter with Victor in the Alps, the creature tries to keep the young scientist calm and reason with him. He reminds him of his duties towards his creation and expresses his frustration at being abandoned. He skillfully deploys an array of literary allusions drawn from great works of literature, all of which attest to his high level of rationality and his ability to exercise the faculty of reason. By contrast, Victor is the one who is constantly enraged, childish and over-emotional and is ultimately unable to converse or exist on the same eloquent plane as his own creature. Regardless of the perfection of his rhetorical skills, the speaking, reasoning creature is still unable to move beyond the category of an animalized other to which he is consigned. Nevertheless, he

manages to blur the rigid boundaries set by humans by excelling at the human skill of language.

Apart from language, the appearance of the monster is the second barrier to his assimilation into a human community. It is also an index of the reality that he can never fully break free from his taxonomical designation, no matter how much he learns and mimics human behavior and experiences human thought, emotion and sensibility. The first time he truly apprehends his visual difference from humans is when he beholds his own reflection in the water and discovers the stark contrast between his own appearance and those of the De Lacey family:

I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers—their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions; but how was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity (Shelley 116-7).

His awareness of his anomalous appearance is a legitimate anxiety as it taps deep into the cultural context of the time. The creature is the embodiment of the fact that “classification of species is an aesthetic activity, a simple matter of specter” (Heymans 1) and therefore how he looks determines who or what he is. Upon such a manifestation, he justly decides to approach the De Lacey family after he has mastered their language which can compensate for his deformity. Interestingly, the only time he is able to establish a communication with a human being without frightening them is when he walks into the cottage and talks to the blind De Lacey. He introduces himself as an ‘outcast’ that people’s prejudice renders “only a detestable monster” (Shelley 136). De Lacey comforts him by responding that he is blind and cannot judge his “countenance”, but he finds sincerity in the creature’s voice. The emphasis on vision and sound is a significant one here because it is De Lacey’s blindness that enables him to

connect with the creature, a connection which is founded on an auditory sense. Once De Lacey's children return to the cottage, they are filled with indescribable horror upon seeing the creature who is, then, battered with Felix's punches. The creature needs to handle this "contradiction between the verbal and the visual" (Brooks 371) in order to be able to exist since it is only his appearance that aligns him with the domain of the animals. The implication of this fact is that the determining factor in biological classifications was traditionally mainly the visual qualities. François Jacob explains that before the rise of modern science, observable aspects of humans and animals were studied (44) for scientific and taxonomical research. In the same vein, Michel Foucault argues that "natural history is nothing more than the nomination of the visible" (144). Therefore, the creature is categorized as an animal or a monster based on the normalizing eyes of the humans which disregard the fact that the monster is indeed the same as them with the same eyes, arteries and muscles, the very same mutual components that alienate humans. In this context, it is only the blind De Lacy who is capable of communication with him until he is interrupted by the visual perception of his children when they walk into his cottage and drive away the monster.

The creature is subjected to several other bitter experiences of rejection when he is reduced to a base condition solely due to his deformity rather than his innate goodness and benevolent actions. For instance, upon saving a girl from drowning, he is shot by her companion as he perceives him to be a monster. Suffering from the agonizing pain, the creature is driven towards violence and rage against humans. He is even an animal in the eyes of a young innocent boy, Frankenstein's brother, William, who covers his eyes upon seeing him and letting out a loud shrill and calling him 'a monster', 'an ugly wretch' and an 'ogre'. The creature's vow to seek vengeance on mankind is a sign of his inability to belong to their community in spite of having everything in common with them except for his deformity. Heymans argues that the Romantic period evinced "an increasing sense of unease about the influence of aesthetic perception on the taxonomisation of animal species" which is of no

surprise when in the same period “taste was also frequently used to define the species identity of the self and the other” (3-4). This, according to Heymans, is what Mary Shelley’s novel is about; it is the manifestation of how the aesthetic principle alone is the primary determining factor in distinguishing between human and nonhuman domains. Victor, himself, is also shying away from the creature because he does not look as he should. When making the creature, Victor made sure that “his limbs were in proportion” and he carefully “selected his features as beautiful” (Shelley 58) in order to create the perfect normal human being. Nevertheless, the outcome is a ‘filthy mass’ whom he cannot even bear to look at, let alone sympathize with.

Victor also reinforces the anthropocentric bias that sympathy is only the rightful due of humans, rather than animals. Upon encountering the creature, Victor demands to be relieved “from the sight of [the creature’s] detested form”, a wish which was granted by the creature: ““Thus I relieve thee, my creator,” he said, and placed his hated hands before my eyes. . . . thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor. Still thou canst listen” (104). The creature again shifts from a visual mode of communication to an auditory one to be able to maintain a conversation with his creator. The creature’s appearance had little altered from the shapes of the ‘beautiful’ and proportionate limbs painstakingly chosen by Frankenstein. It is Victor’s attitude, nonetheless, that has changed. Victor tried to employ the Romantic era’s notion of “aesthetic recycling” whereby “the romantic sublime . . . integrate[s] the filth of material reality into a clean social and aesthetic teleology” (Heymans 124) yet, his creation remains an unbearable eye-sore. Timothy Morton, draws on Darwin and cogently argues that the evolution of life forms is all about deviation from one form to another. Different parts of our bodies have all evolved and deviated from what they originally were, such as our lungs which evolved from the swim bladders of fish. This deviance is what guarantees the successful course of evolution. Therefore, life itself is an aberration, a deviation from the norm (“*Frankenstein*” 153) which serves a useful function. Consequently, the monstrosity of the

creature is also a normal step in his evolution and need not be feared and avoided. However, Victor cannot imagine monstrosity in normalcy and is not willing to accept that he too is also an evolved aberration from an evolutionary perspective.

The creature shares enough with humans to be one of them, while at the same time he is very different from them, which brands him as 'other'. Victor's selecting his creature's components from both human and animal organs proves the fact that there was "this growing understanding of human-animal similarities" (Heymans 2). However, this similarity did not stipulate sympathy with animals in Victor's eyes. He refuses any similarity with the beast he has created and this is a poignant reflection on the fact that "the monster exists in an in-between zone, a paradox that is both like us and not like us" (Purcell-Davis 149). This paradox is essential to building a coherent idea of a human and partly explains the repugnance triggered by the specter of the creature. The creature does become a nameless monster because, as Derrida argues, a monster "shows itself in something that is not yet shown and that therefore looks like a hallucination, it strikes the eye, it frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure . . . [it] is a species for which we do not yet have a name" (qtd. in Heymans 124). This is precisely the nature of Victor's nameless creature. It does not fit in one clear-cut category as it belongs to both human and nonhuman domains; it looks like a specter that oscillates between the two, exposing the anthropocentric anxieties of the humans. The creature highlights that the "boundary of the flesh need not mark the boundary of the self" (Steeves 7) as the creature in many respects appears to be more human than Victor. It is only his bare flesh and looks that mark him the other.

The creature can also be considered to be the other side of Victor. After all, Victor is not entirely innocent and, in many respects, behaves quite similarly to an animal. Heymans makes a fitting observation that when Victor's health deteriorates, he begins to look like the monster he has created himself and resembles "the shadow of a human being. . . . a mere skeleton" (Shelley 187). During the course of his experimentations, he also "associates vivisection with

a marked deterioration in his sensibility” (Philip Armstrong 69). While he is creating the creature, he even neglects his emotional commitments to his beloved Elizabeth, his filial responsibility to his father, and his social responsibility to his friend. He isolates himself from his family and becomes an outcast who experiences little in the way of joy and who views himself as equally miserable as his own creation. The admission that his situation is as dismal as that of the creature betokens an acknowledgement that “brings home the structural similarity between his anthropocentrism and his rhetoric of monstrosity” (Heymans 129). Victor experiences a dawning realization of his animal self which gradually erodes away his anthropocentric vision of his identity. Arguably, Victor’s dark descent into animality is the polar opposite of the creature’s expansive venture into humanity. The creature endeavored to be accepted in humans’ community by learning their ways of life, their language, and approaching humans. Nevertheless, he failed.

On the other hand, Victor veers away from humanity and approximates the domain of the animal he once vehemently rejected. After Victor loses his loved ones, he begins to be consumed by a raging passion for revenge. Several of his dogs die of fatigue while he pursues the creature on his sledge probably because he flogged them too harshly. He resorts to eating dead hares that are hunted by the creature and placed on his way while the creature himself maintains a vegetarian diet. Victor, consumed by rage, becomes a ferocious hunter/predator who must capture and kill the creature:

I created a rational creature and was bound towards him to assure . . . his happiness and well-being. This was my duty, but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and I did right in refusing, to create a companion for the first creature. He showed unparalleled malignity and selfishness in evil; he destroyed my friends; he devoted to destruction

beings who possessed exquisite sensations, happiness, and wisdom; nor do I know where this thirst for vengeance may end (Shelley 219-20).

Victor fails to acknowledge the high level of rationality possessed by his creation and abandons him without fulfilling his parental duties towards him. Furthermore, his rhetoric is steeped in anthropocentrism as he draws a distinction between the creature and ‘the beings of’ his ‘own species’ who are deemed worthier of his attention. The creature’s poignant request for a partner poses, for Victor, a taxonomic threat to the human species. Granting his request equates with a tacit acceptance of his biological normalcy as it entitles him to a partner. On this basis, Victor denies the creature the ability to escape his isolating singularity and become a normal biological being. Tragically, the creature is fully cognizant of the fact that he is not an animal by ‘birthright’ but has, instead, been consciously degraded to the level of one as is evident in his bitter lamentation: “I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animal” (223). It is the injustice done to him by humans that instigates his violent behavior in spite of the Rousseauian education he receives during his secret stay with De Lacey family. Mary Shelley creates a blurred ambiguity around categories of human and nonhuman in her novel. On the one hand “from the perspective of the Creature, it is Frankenstein who proves inhuman, failing to display the affection proper to humanity by repeatedly rejecting his offspring. Conversely, from Victor’s point of view, his refusal of the claims of the Creature is precisely what turns him to the path of human virtue” (Philip Armstrong 67). This is interesting in the light of the fact that “‘our’ relation to ‘animals’ will be from ‘our’ point of view” (Wood 20). Whether one is human or animal is a matter of attitude and thus animality and humanity are only constructs with no insurmountable boundaries to keep the two securely apart. Indeed, Frankenstein’s monster, like many of its descendants, “end[s] up seeming more ‘human’ than the people” (Jay Clayton 85) around him. In this regard, flesh and aesthetics fail to squarely determine the taxonomies and “being human [becomes] a matter of degree rather than kind” (Curtin 43). In

the end, there is no telling whether the creature or Victor Frankenstein is the monster as they come to possess a degree of both humanity and animality.

The creature also drives home another significant idea about the roles of humans regarding science and the nonhuman world including nature. He feels he has been irresponsibly abandoned by his creator: “Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed” (Shelley 103). He makes a legitimate request to secure a partner and an equal and even promises to live far away from human society. Victor, however, initially grants but then callously denies his request. Frankenstein creates a being that excels beyond him in terms of logic, argument, rhetoric, and human empathy that he ultimately cannot control. Despite his initial good intentions to serve humanity, the only impetus which drove him forward was to enter the unexplored realm of science, to accomplish what his predecessors were not able to achieve. He becomes an alchemist to whom science is “a goal or product-oriented activity rather than a process-oriented activity. For Frankenstein, the scientist’s objective is to transform one thing into another, rather than to investigate the ontological relationship between things” (Rauch 234). Victor did not have any foresight about his creation or how his monster child would live or fit in the community of humans. His goal was only to turn death into life like a magician. In this light, the novel gives voice to the fact that “a precarious lack of responsible foresight characterizes our culture’s valorization of progress” (Knellwolf 62) regardless of the consequences it might entail. Uncurbed progress and exploitation and the transgression of nature’s boundaries will not necessarily lead to humanity’s well-being. Victor is totally at a loss once his scientific ambition comes to fruition and he is faced with the question of his duties for which he is not yet prepared; he chooses the easiest path which is to shirk his responsibilities. Knellwolf convincingly argues that science must be a contextual phenomenon from which both humans and the natural world can benefit (65) rather than a one way goal-oriented enterprise that could be detrimental to both. This is Victor’s failure as he “does not

fully understand what life is in a holistic sense” (Economides 624) and therefore fabricates a monster out of dead inert matter that was once a human or an animal; the creature, however, is neither.

The creature becomes a pungent manifestation of Victor’s sin because the monster was created to fulfill Victor’s ambitious curiosity but Victor fails to fulfill his consequent role towards him. Thus, the creature, similar to Victor himself, becomes an alienated animal or monster repelled by society. Nevertheless, the creature “demands of his creator . . . a new understanding of justice—one that would embrace the rights of the ‘monster’ along with the newfound rights of the universal man” (Cooper 96). The question of the responsibility of humans towards their scientific endeavor carries strong environmental overtones which I will discuss in the next chapter. Suffice it to say, the hybridity of the creature highlights the frailty of the human/animal duality. Considering the creature’s taxonomy and his position towards humans, the treatment he receives from them also accentuates that humans should “be on a *horizontal* plane . . . instead of *being above* other creatures and inanimate beings” (Mazis 9). In reality, “human nature [in all its myriad forms]”, as noted by Anna Tsing, “is an interspecies relation” (qtd. in Van Doreen et al. 2). The recognition of our interrelatedness with the world around us is the first step in becoming ecological. Ecological responsibility exacts an ethics of care from humans which can be realized once we admit that “we are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down. Response and respect are possible only in these knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories” (Haraway, *Species Meet* 42). Victor and the creature are entangled in the same ‘knot of species’, but Victor’s anthropocentric prejudice and his irresponsible scientific pursuit render him incapable of appreciating his conflation with the nonhuman world. He fails to afford the creature the due sympathy he is rightfully entitled to and instead seeks to destroy his own creation. This is the story of the

earth and the rampant progress of science that has created an unsustainable and critical situation.

The creature that Victor Frankenstein brings to life is a multidimensional phenomenon that weaves together several observations regarding the role of humans in nature and how they regard their nonhuman counterparts. The creature comes to life from an assortment of human and nonhuman pieces of meat and confronts his creator in order to demand the rights he has been denied. Victor reacts vehemently and irresponsibly as he cannot accept the extensiveness of his body with that of the creature. In this respect, both Victor and the creature become ambivalent symbols of what should be counted as nature, or natural. If Victor is considered to be a natural being, then the same privilege should be extended to the creature. Alternatively, if the creature is deemed to be artificial or unnatural, then the same applies to Victor as they share the same flesh, arteries, and skin. This ambivalence deconstructs the idea of nature and what is generally considered to be natural or unnatural. Timothy Morton calls this phenomenon 'dark ecology' and considers *Frankenstein* to be the apt novel for manifesting this kind of ecology. Dark ecology does not seek to impose the idea that humans and nonhumans are the same. It even highlights or magnifies the differences, but it does seek to underline the point that the other or the so-called unnatural need not be feared or avoided. Morton believes that humans must embrace the filthy and shapeless materials that are presumed unnatural or even monstrous since humans themselves are composed of the same ingredients. The ethical aspect of dark ecology is to love the other, the monstrous, the unnatural, or the thing. Unlike Romantic aesthetics, dark ecology does not recycle the ugly into the beautiful. Instead, it embraces inert matter as it is (Morton, *Nature* 196). This means that the ugly other or artificial matter is also as (un)natural as humans and it can become a participant agent in the world. This is what Mary Shelley does in *Frankenstein* as the monster, an unbeautified combination of matter, takes the stage and asserts its agency as one who is

both similar to and different from its human counterparts. It blurs the line between natural and artificial and makes us reflect on our own anthropocentric assumptions of the 'natural'.

The Rousseauian haven of De Lacey is similar to Radcliffe's patriarchal utopias in one way. De Lacey's abode is a human-centred one in which both men and women partake of the blessings of nature and an ideal of domestic bliss is achieved. It is more in tune with nature as it runs like a pastoral setting which is even self-sufficient ecologically. However, De Lacey's abode is not accepting of the non-human other and is incapable of overcoming its anthropocentric bias. The creature's entry into De Lacey's family marks the end of this domestic haven as they simply disappear from their abode and their house is burned down by the creature. This episode marks the unconquerable anthropocentric line between human and nonhuman which is still upheld by human community. Radcliffe's utopias are akin as they are also a human-centred sanctuary where the nonhuman has only a supplementary role to enrich humans' prosperity; the other is rarely accorded an independent status.

Still, there is a radical difference between Mary Shelley and Ann Radcliffe as well. Radcliffe depicts a picture in which humans need to be a part of nature in order to have a fulfilled life. Women can also be empowered and elevated by nature. She maintains the borderline between the self and the other, humans and nature, but argues for their rapprochement in order to sustain a domestic harmony. The idyll of a blissful life is realized once humans retrieve their lost connection with nature as Rousseau and many other Romantic writers had advocated for. Nature is different from the self, from humans, but we cannot afford to detach ourselves from it. Therefore, Radcliffe maintains a dichotomy, but encourages connection with nature which can enable a better life in harmony with it. On the other hand, Mary Shelley's radical politics is closer to modern environmentalism. She admits to the (un)naturalness of the human body. We are also dirt, filtered or unfiltered, who have everything in common with the creature, the thing, or the monster. This monster is an active participant in conjunction with humans. In Radcliffe, nature or the nonhuman world is not a

passive backdrop to the events; nevertheless, it does not assert its being or power as actively as Shelley's nonhuman agents. Shelley's monster, the nonhuman, becomes the main agent which influences the world on a large scale to draw attention to the unrecognized potentials of what has generally been ignored by humans. Shelley does not try to reconcile us with nature as long as we come to this groundbreaking recognition that we are animals as much as animals are us. Bliss cannot be achieved by a return nature, but through accepting the other as (un)natural as it is.

## **5. *Frankenstein's* Material Nature**

## 5.1 Eco-Material Creature

Frankenstein's creature resembles a recycled product – an animated recycled product, to be exact. He is composed of discarded pieces of meat from humans and animals ranging from pigs and horses to cows. Such a biological make-up carries several important philosophical imports, one of which is to challenge the presumed 'purity' of taxonomical classifications. It also hints at the question of whether or not a disparate pile of lifeless matter, that has cohered and become animate, can have a separate identity, voice and agency. After all, concepts of agency and identity are traditionally the exclusive preserve of humans; indeed, the application and extension of these ideas to nonhumans can imperil the self-proclaimed sovereignty of humans over the nonhuman and natural world. Nevertheless, Victor's nameless creature is a precursor of what future scientists and biologists predicted: the dissolution of biological boundaries between humans and animals and, by extension, the interconnection of humans and matter. To better understand the phenomenon of Frankenstein's creature as a body of heterogeneous substances which can carry environmental significance, it is necessary to explain how the 'material turn', with a focus on inert matter, emerged and replaced the 'linguistic turn' in cultural studies, and how it intersects with ecocriticism.

The inert world of matter is endowed with life and agency. However, the poststructuralist obsession with the abstraction and theorization of constructionism blinds us to the vitality and life of matter. Ecocriticism, from its very outset, constructed an agenda in order to react against such tendencies. Particularly memorable is Kate Soper's pithy comment that "it is not language that has a hole in the ozone layer" ("Idea" 124). Kate Rigby's definition of ecocriticism as an attempt "to restore the significance to the world beyond the page" ("Ecocriticism" 154) also resonates with Soper's remark. This new trend returns our attention to the physicality of the world and what it is made of, and moves away from constructionist tendencies which consider every phenomenon to be a linguistic construct; hence, the abstraction of nature and the world we live in. Arguably, ecocriticism is a reaction

against abstractions. Similarly, the world of matter has generally been either overlooked in cultural theory or relegated to a human construct. As a result, recent feminist and ecocritical scholarship calls for a resurgence of the world of matter in theory which is better suited to address a range of socio-political issues including environmental ones. The resurgence of materiality in cultural studies is owing to

. . . a period of abandon or dismissal of matter and materiality, which was the main result of the so-called ‘linguistic turn.’ One of the key points of the ‘material turn’ is in fact its reaction against some radical trends of postmodern and poststructuralist thinking, which it regards as “dematerializing” the world into linguistic and social constructions. In these fields the new attention paid to matter has, therefore, emphasized the need of recalling the concreteness of existential fields, with regard to both the bodily dimension and to non-binary epistemological object-subject structures (Iovino, “Posthuman Ethics” 52).

The significance of materiality lies not only in distancing theory from abstraction, but also in the reconceptualization of inert matter and focusing on a new definition and ontology of material bodies that allows for matter to come to life. This new reformulation radically reshapes the long-held subject/object binary which has stripped matter of life and agency. Materiality focuses on the interrelation of different bodies and how they affect and define the surrounding bodies. The new focus on materiality seeks to define a theoretical framework for matter and agency as well as theorize the interconnection of bodies and nature and how meaning emerges from their interaction (Iovino and Oppermann, “Dyptych” 450). Therefore, this new outlook can establish a dialogical interaction between nature and culture in a manner that brings back the critical emphasis to our material body and its kinship with other physical bodies in nature, rather than their constructionist representations.

New materialism is a reaction against the ‘dematerializing’ tendencies of the ‘linguistic turn’ which has yet to yield much useful insight about the modern world in terms of its most critical crisis of ecological disasters and environmental plights (Coole and Frost 3). New

materialism acknowledges that “as human beings we inhabit an ineluctably material world. We live our everyday lives, surrounded by, immersed in matter. We are ourselves composed of matter” (1). Acknowledgement that our organic body is also a compilation of matter is a huge step in adopting an environmental approach to life. It is a modification of the rigid dichotomies which have provided humans with *carte blanche* to dominate and possess the physical world which they assume to be different and separate from their own physical bodies. After all, *Frankenstein* is also the story of the isolation of a creature, composed of a pile of meat/matter, from the humans who are themselves composed of the same mass of meat and matter, yet fail to accept the reality of their kinship with the creature.

The humans in Shelley’s novel cannot admit their oneness with the creature, for they are indoctrinated with the myth of human exceptionalism, as they still cherish a hierarchical mode of thinking which sanctions their domination over the other. The idea that we also share our bodies and materiality with the world around us is a new materialist precept. This precept actually posits an “antipathy toward oppositional ways of thinking” (8) and also highlights the question of agency. In new materialists’ terms, materiality is not only a dormant mass, but is actually “an excess, force vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-assertive, productive, unpredictable” (9). New materialism urges us to consider that every phenomenon is “caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of agency” (9). The implication is that humans are not the only species entitled to agency and intentionality, but matter and objects are similarly entitled as well. Thus the border between sentient and non-sentient beings has the potential to collapse. Such a conceptualization grants matter “modes of self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness [and this] disturbs the conventional sense that agents are exclusively humans who possess the cognitive abilities [and] intentionalities” (10). This view is quite ecocentric as it entitles objects and matter to agency and life. It also places all creatures, whether animate or inanimate, regardless of their status in the cycle of life, on an equal level. This is the dilemma

Victor faces when creating the ‘thing’. The creature is as agentic as Victor. It is a mass of inert matter that has come to life and subsequently demands recognition of its being and agency, which Victor refuses to accept. As a result, the creature becomes the symbol of the vitality of matter and its agency, which I will elaborate a bit further ahead.

The vitality and life force of the inanimate and nonhuman world is perceptible during a walk in a jungle, such as Jeffrey Cohen’s account of the walk of a hiker who witnesses a rock jump from under his feet or the wriggle of twigs and leaves, described in the introductory chapter. Animate and inanimate objects are all enmeshed in a network of relations in the world. Even a stone or a small seemingly insignificant tree can be the indices of life and agency which humans are traditionally averse to seeing. The reason for this aversion is the self-proclaimed privileged position of humans which classifies all forms of life on earth into hierarchies and thus leads to a disregard for the life of the nonhuman (ix). Therefore, Oppermann asks for “a new relational ontology” (“Feminist Ecocriticism” 25) that emphasizes this interconnectedness of different types of matter and their resultant agency. The new ontology must acknowledge that all the bodies in the world are interrelated and interdependent. Frankenstein’s creature is an embodiment of this ‘relational ontology’ which reminds us of the dire need to rethink anthropocentric stories of life and matter. It reminds us that our bodies are related with a host of other so-called lifeless and dormant dirt from the earth. Victor’s blunder was that he created a monster, but failed to define a place of being for him in the cycle of life. Victor’s failure to see the life of things is a sign of his blindness to the vitality of matter.

The new concept of matter which celebrates the vitality of ‘things’, and acknowledges their agency and enmeshment with the human world is best explicated by Jane Bennett’s alternative tale of things. She uses the term “vitality” to refer to the inherent ability of things to exert their agency. Bennett defines vitality “as the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as

quasi agents or forces with trajectories, properties, or tendencies of their own” (*Vibrant* viii). The concept of vitality of matter demystifies the myth that agency is solely the property of humans’ minds who will to effect a change. If Victor had been receptive to the idea that agency and life are not the sole preserve of humans, he would have fared better in both his domestic life and scientific career.

The significance of the revival of vitality of matter lies in the fact that numerous detrimental habits or acts are sanctified on the basis of humans’ inability to couple the idea of agency with matter. As a result, the assumed lifelessness of the world of matter construes it as fertile ground for despoliation. This is what fuels humans’ “fantasies of conquest and consumption” which “prevent[s them] from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” (ix). This paradigm shift is not so much focused on epistemology as it is on ontology. In other words, vitality defines a new category or mode of being for the nonhumans, an “alter-tale” (Bennett, *Enchantment* 4). Bennett’s ‘alter-tale’ is an alternative ontology or story for appreciating the power and significance of the nonhuman world, akin to Oppermann’s ‘relational ontology’. It has the potential to shatter the binaries and dualities perpetuated by the very anthropocentric mindset that has stripped matter of its capacities. It is no wonder that vitality of matter is assumed to be posed against the anthropocentric mores of humans (Bennett, *Vibrant* xvi) as it no longer allows the world to be merely an exploitable resource for humans.

Donna Haraway has a similar agenda when she calls for a new regime of knowledge of representation. Haraway, whose focus is on the male-dominated field of science, believes that the western tradition of analytical thinking reduces the object of study to a single category which is simply observable and intelligible. This reductionism is meant to produce a regime of meaning and knowledge which is sanctioned and perpetuated by the ruling ideology, hence the myth of scientific objectivity. In other words, scientific knowledge is claimed to be objective

and faithful to a 'real world'. The fruit of such scientific endeavours is "reduced to resource for instrumentalist projects of destructive western societies" ("Situated Knowledges" 591). Haraway continues to illuminate how nature is rendered as a thing, or an object that is then reduced to a 'resource' for the benefit of a "White Capitalist Patriarchy" (592). This type of reductionism is a unilateral enterprise which only feeds and empowers the producer of that knowledge and leaves the object of study to be exploited. One imperative advocated by Haraway is "for the object of knowledge [to] be pictured as an actor, as an agent, not as a screen or ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master" (592). Elsewhere she argues that "ecofeminists have perhaps been most insistent on some version of the world as active subject, not as a resource to be mapped and appropriated in bourgeois, Marxist, or masculinist projects. Acknowledging the agency of the world in knowledge makes room for some unsettling possibilities" (*Simians* 199). This is an account that neatly applies to Mary Shelley's ecofeminist agenda, as she depicts a 'thing' which refuses to be passively exploited by a male-dominated scientific regime of knowledge. The creature rightfully seeks to reclaim his position and refuses to be silent. The creature is actually the natural environment, the physical nature that defies being plundered and unilaterally defined by humans. It is a conduit for the affirmation of the agency of the nonhuman and the unsettling possibilities it can materialize.

Jane Bennett also offers a highly analogous story pertaining to the vitality of matter. She recounts an extraordinary moment of epiphany when she is struck by the sight of a pile of trash: a plastic bottle cap, a dead rat, a stick of wood, a plastic work glove, and a mat. These inert bodies and objects exert their affect on the observer, inducing feelings of dismay and disgust. The observer is awed by the "'excruciating complexity and intractability' of nonhuman bodies" (*Vibrant* 4). Through the enchantment of their presence, each one of these objects becomes irreducible to mere things; yet, they also become active agents of an effect and also form a semiotic body, a text, which hints at a society's "materialism, which requires

buying ever-increasing numbers of products. . . . [and] the hyperconsumptive necessity of junking them to make room for the new ones” (5). This is the vitality of matter or “Thing-power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (6). This appreciation of ‘thing-power’ is unattainable without acknowledging its enmeshment with other organic and inorganic bodies, a phenomenon called assemblage by Deleuze and Guattari. The agency of ‘thing-power’ emanates from the harmony and cooperation of other bodies which affect and alter one another. Assemblages “are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within” (23-24). Thus, an assemblage is not a random pile of objects, but is “a whole of some sort that expresses some identity” (Wise 91), agency and affect.

Jane Bennett also analyses an actual power grid and a blackout that occurred and affected millions of people in the US in 2003. In such a state, one cannot identify a single human agent who was solely responsible for the disaster. Yet, the incident can be accounted for if the operation of the power grid is perceived as an assemblage of bodies, human and nonhuman, a meshwork, that triggered the calamity. Humans were only one among many agents such as machines, cables, and generator which were the culprits for the power outage. All the agents were interrelated, with no divide, and all had an agency, distributed across the bodies in the assemblage. There is no intentionality in the sense of a willed intentionality which is the index of human agency; instead, there is a ‘doing’, not a ‘doer’, “emergent properties, emergent in their ability to make something happen” (Bennett, *Vibrant* 24). In other words, agency is not the sole property of one person or thing, but it is an effect that emerges from the cooperation and interaction of different agents or bodies in the assemblage. A similar claim can be made about Victor’s creation as it is not only an individual monster that ruthlessly asserts its power by killing people. The monster is also an assembled body which weaves together different stories about environmentalism, science, humans’ obsession with

domination, and the flimsiness of a subjectivity called the rational human subject. If the presence of the monster is a disconcerting one for the human community, it is because the monster is the result of their own actions and assumptions regarding the nonhuman world and nature.

The agency of the monster cannot be attributed to one single subject since it is the work of an assemblage. In a similar fashion, the agentive power that begets an event, such as the blackout, cannot be traditionally called a human agent or a doer that is “posited in isolation from the nonhuman” (Iovino and Opperman, “Introduction” 3), but it is, in reality, “a material-semiotic network of human and nonhuman agents increasingly generating the world’s embodiments and events” (3). The best way to describe the dynamo behind such events is, to use Bruno Latour’s term, an actant which is a “term from semiotics covering both humans and nonhumans” (*Politics* 237). Actants are neither subjects nor objects but “intervener[s]” (75). Actants, in an assemblage, operate in the network between human and nonhuman beings to create an event which is a semiotic field of meaning, such as a pile of trash. In effect, actants blur the boundaries of dichotomies because the focus is on the agency that emerges from the interaction of the participating bodies in an assemblage. Therefore, it is an agency which operates in concert with other agentive bodies. This definition of agency is similar to Karen Barad’s account of agency in what she calls ‘agentive realism’ which is an epistemological and ontological framework to describe how reality is shaped:

On an agential realist account, agency is cut loose from its traditional humanist orbit. Agency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity. Nor does it merely entail resignification or other specific kinds of moves within a social geometry of antihumanism. Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. Agency cannot be designated as an attribute of “subjects” or “objects” (since they do not preexist as such). Agency is not an attribute whatsoever—it is

“doing”/“being” in its intra-activity. Agency is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity (“Performativity” 144).

The key point in her definition is the detachment of agency from its humanistic axis of subject and object. Agency is defined as an effect of the subject/object interaction. Also, the seminal aspect of this agency is intra-action which refers to the co-constitution of agencies from within. In other words, agency does not exist in a vacuum, but emerges from actions within the involved bodies. Intra-action conceives of the world as comprised of numerous dynamic bodies of matters which are all implicated in emerging agencies. It is through the intra-action of these agencies that reality or phenomena are conceived and discursive processes are created. It is through intra-action that we come to make sense of the world around us. Barad also argues that the world, as we know it, exists as a dynamic process of ‘mattering’ that manifests its latent agencies to us which emerge as a result of intra-action (135). Barad defines matter as “phenomena in their ongoing materialization” (*Meeting* 151), which means that the world is not composed of inert matter but of phenomena that are ceaselessly engaged with each other. The world is a “doing, a congealing of agency” (151) rather than a mishmash of things. Intra-action also redefines the concept of matter from a static object to a dynamic process. This is an ontological conceptualization through which matter and meaning become co-constitutive, and they mutually define one another. The intra-action of matter and the world is what creates Victor’s monster as ‘the creature’ becomes an emergent meaning that is produced from the engagement of humans with the nonhuman world and vice versa. Victor creates the monster and the monster, in turn, creates Victor. Their presence is co-constitutive of each other as they complement one another in their battle for an ontological status; the creature fights for defining a new place for himself, and Victor fights for maintaining his Enlightenment subject position. I will explain the environmental significance of the creature through intra-action further on in this chapter.

Intra-action creates a whole new perspective towards the world and recasts our relationships with each other, matter, discourses and nature. When everything is situated in a network of relationship, like the power grid, responsibility becomes distributed across the network. This is where agency comes in. Agency does not pre-exist, but emerges as a result of intra-action; agency becomes “not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurations of the world” (135). Therefore, the world’s phenomena are constantly made, remade, and reconfigured. Intra-action calls into question linear causality, individual agency, and dichotomies such as subject/object, nature/culture, and human/nonhuman. Such a conceptualization reformulates matter from passive objects to vital and active actants in constant reconfiguration or becoming. Matter is not a given that simply exists, but is a phenomenon that ‘becomes’ what it is through intra-action. This dynamism also stipulates that “nature is agentic” (Alaimo and Hekman 5) which contests the duality of nature/culture that conceives of nature as raw matter awaiting to be exploited, used and cultivated. Indeed, thinking in terms of intra-action creates a new story about being, a new ontology, an “onto-tale” (Bennett, *Vibrant* 117) in which everything is alive. The ontology tale confirms the relationality of humans and nonhumans in an assemblage which is a knot comprised of the entangled and emerging agencies of actants. This new story tears down the artificial boundaries and dichotomies we have set up and aids us in thinking more ecologically and responsibly towards the environment and its inhabitants, whether human or nonhuman.

Ecocriticism has also found common ground with new materialism, and argues for the recognition of vitality in all matter, as well as the entanglement of all animate and inanimate entities. Indeed, this underscores the principle of the holism of ecology where all the entities in nature intra-act with each other and meaning and agency emerge as a result of this interconnection. Material ecocriticism focuses on matter in the texts and explores the emergence of meaning from their material compositions and their entanglement in their networks. The significance of this trend in ecocriticism is even further highlighted when one

notes that with such a view towards matter, the focus goes beyond physical nature, which is more or less an anthropocentric concept. Instead, nature becomes “equated with substance . . . and a continuing process of dynamic materialization and differentiation over time and space” (Iovino, “Posthuman Ethics” 56). In other words, the intra-action among components of nature, or matter, constitutes a new concept of nature which is less anthropocentric and more inclusive of other entities, hence resulting in a more ecocentric worldview. The shift from nature to matter highlights the fact that substances are the “meaning-producing embodiments of the world” (Iovino and Oppermann, “Dyptych” 454). Matter has a historicity and a story to tell which taps deep into numerous discourses because it is part of a wider network of matter which is all infused with a narrative.

The focus of material ecocriticism on “storied bodies, and on the agentic capacities of matter” (Phillips and Sullivan 447) necessitates a novel perspective towards the world we live in. *Frankenstein* is an apt metaphor for ‘storied matter’, an amalgamation of things which has a distinct ontology and historicity. I have already discussed how Victor creates a creature from pieces of dead humans and discarded animals; these elements, matter, or objects are all voiceless and inert. However, once they cohere together they form a mesh with a narrative that is transmitted through matter, be it of human or nonhuman composition, animate or inanimate. The interchange between such matter is actually indicative of the fluidity of ontological boundaries in the world. It is also a semiotic body with a history, a story which results from the intra-action of human (Victor) and nonhuman (pieces of dead flesh) which forms an agentic body with a distinct identity. The first time Victor encounters the creature after fleeing from him is on the Alps where he is revolted and enraged by seeing him again. The creature, composed of matter, has a story to tell and begs of Victor to be allowed to speak of his sufferings: “I intreat you to hear me. . . . hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me” (Shelley 102-3). The story is, in reality, the story of inanimate matter which has come to life,

but is denied its due voice and the right to narrate its experience as its ontological status is perceived to be lower than that of humans. The monster is indeed the same as a 'rock' or a 'tadpole'; it is a 'storied matter' which has been neglected on account of humans' anthropocentric classifications and prejudices. However, this 'storied matter' has agency to speak and make his story heard.

The creature is desperate to tell his story, but to Victor he is only a monster "a no-thing, just grotesque and meaningless matter, merely an experiment gone horribly wrong" (Hogsette 553). He is undeserving of compassion, love, and attention; it is not before several entreaties from the creature that Victor agrees to hear him. Indeed, the repeated pleas of the creature, especially when he prophetically declares "Hear my tale" (Shelley 104), speaks of his ardour to be heard by the human community, to be recognized as an entity which/who has been wronged, misunderstood, and vilified from the outset. The creature's incessant pleas to converse and to narrate, and his insistence on speech, are resonant with John Oswald's solicitation in *Cry of Nature* to "listen to the voice of nature" (qtd. in Rowe 142). Indeed, the creature's story is not the story of his personal ordeals, but it is the voice of nature, the inert and passive substances, like the discarded pieces of meat in charnels, that cries out to be heard.

The creature comes to life with a message that the community of humans is apathetic about. He, as an amalgamation of things, is "material, specific, non-self-identical, and semiotically active" (Haraway, *Species Meet* 250) and therefore its voice is silenced by the human community which rejects the slightest kinship with him. The creature is indeed the conveyer of an environmental message which is only manifest through the hapless creature's intra-action with the human community. Petsch cogently argues that the creature is born from animal pieces, meat to be specific, which were the remnants of butchered animals' carcasses discarded in charnel houses. Therefore, the creature is a "by-product of meat-eating" (98) born from the leftovers of human carnivorism. Carol Adams also argues that a slaughterhouse "was one of the consequences of the fall from vegetarianism" (*Politics* 218). Vegetarianism was

perceived to be a habit more attuned to nature and also humans' original state. In contrast, Adam argues, carnivorism was a deviation from the state of innocence and hence indicated humans' alienation from nature. The creature is the remnants of unconsumed flesh, and becomes a "commodity of industrial animal food production that was not consumed but resurrected only to reject the human practice of meat-eating" (Petsche 99). Thus, Victor creates the monster from unconsumed pieces of discarded meat gleaned from places which are the producers of humans' meat-eating habits. Therefore, the creature is a product of humans' carnivorous habits. It is an unconsumed piece of meat that has come back to haunt humans. This is also evidenced by the horror and disgust that is invoked in humans by the sight of the monster. It is the fear of being eaten or mutilated by the monster, as the child who sets eye on the creature cries out "monster! Ugly wretch! You wish to eat me and tear me to pieces. You are an ogre" (Shelley 144). The threat of being mutilated by the monster is actually an inversion of what humans have done to animals, arguably in excess, to please their appetite.

Petsche's reference to the monster as a product of humans' meat-eating habits is even more convincing when one notes the binary of meat and vegetable that Mary Shelley creates. The dichotomy between meat and vegetable is evidently one of the criteria that separate the creature from other humans, and he deliberately highlights his vegetarian diet when asking Victor to make him a partner:

My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment. My companion will be of the same nature as myself and will be content with the same fare. We shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on man and will ripen our food. The picture I present to you is peaceful and human, and you must feel that you could deny it only in the wantonness of power and cruelty (148-9).

To the creature, his dietary habit both distinguishes him from and elevates him above humans and their pernicious way of treating nonhumans. It denotes his refusal to partake in the

violence that humans have committed against nonhumans (animals) by utilising them as a source of food. Even after the discovery of fire, a reference to the Prometheus myth, the creature refuses to adopt a standard human diet. He discovers a fire, left by some travellers, and some roasted meat which “tasted much more savoury than the berries” (107) that were his main staple. He tried cooking his vegetarian food in the same manner by “placing it on the live embers” (107), and discovered “that the berries were spoiled by this operation, and the nuts and roots much improved” (107). Upon the discovery of fire, he still continues his herbivorous diet because he is cognizant of the common composition of his body and the roasted meat; he is of the same matter as the meat. Indeed, to him “diet becomes a way of expressing the difference between natural instincts and environmental influences (nature and nurture). The creature is canny about the discourses of consumption” (Morton, *Revolution* 47). He also comments on De Lacey’s family’s food whose “nourishment consisted entirely of the vegetables of their garden and the milk of one cow (Shelley 114). De Lacey’s family seems to be the only functioning family in the story who enjoy the domestic bliss in their own organic microcosm. The creature, himself, holds a simple diet of berries, acorns, milk, coarse bread, and water and abstains from wine which “was tabooed by Romantic vegetarians as well as meat” (Adams, *Politics* 127). Being carnivorous is to be implicated in the inhumanity to which the creature himself has been subjected. His “vegetarian diet is not only a rejection of the speciesist treatment of nonhuman animals but a challenge to the human-animal binary that underscores the human-animal relations” (Petsche 105). Thus, he dignifies himself by abstaining from eating meat, and descending into savage barbarity. When he is chased by Victor, he hunts a hare and puts it on his pursuer’s way which is a subtle message of destabilization of humanity which excluded him from their circle. In fact, humans have far more in common with beasts than the creature, but their humanistic bias blinds them to this fact. Humans have excluded him from their circle on account of his animality but he does not blind himself with the biased dualities that have shaped humans’ minds; hence, his herbivorous diet since it is the sign of a higher morality code. Through his diet, he wishes to

“achieve in human intercourse, [the idea of] breaking through the concentric circles of *us* and *them*” (Adams, *Politics* 123). The creature’s diet becomes a challenge to anthropocentrism as it refuses to partake of meat, the main source of humans’ food. Either breaking the boundaries or making humans realize their enmeshment with nonhumans can enable the monster to be entitled to the privilege of a human existence. Otherwise, he continues to be a doomed creature.

On a deeper semiotic level, the phenomenon of *Frankenstein* can also be extended to the current state of our societies distraught with problems created by scientific pursuits which were intended to solve those very problems. The recklessness of scientific progress wreaks havoc on the environment and society. This, according to Hammond, echoes with Ulrich Beck’s idea of a ‘Risk Society’ which is a state where tradition has ended and uncertainties prevail. A risk society transforms “the epistemological and cultural status of science” which, in turn, changes the society into a “laboratory with no one responsible for the outcomes of experiments” (Beck, “Politics” 257). A “risk society begins where nature ends” (256); in such a society, the traditional binaries such as nature/culture collapse and the resulting “man-made hybrids” (257) become problems and risks. The society is the cause of its own problems and engenders uncertainties, which is the genesis of the loss of distinctions. Beck’s example is the phenomenon of climate change and global warming caused by human activities and their detrimental effects. The drastic effects have afflicted large numbers of people and areas and have, thus, eroded the distinctions between races, nations, classes, humans, and nonhumans as all are invariably, but not equally, affected. *Frankenstein* also creates the same risks, but on a smaller scale, and gives rise to a hybrid creature which makes classical distinctions meaningless. It is an irresponsible product of science let loose and abandoned with foreboding consequences for posterity, which runs the risk of creating “a race of devils” (Shelley 170). The phenomenon of *Frankenstein* weaves together several discourses such as technological, environmental, and biological practices. Evidently, lines of distinctions are weakened and

even wiped out, and this accounts for Victor's refusal to create a partner for his creature, as he is an advocate of the pure race of humans, uncontaminated by hybrids. This phenomenon is the result of intra-action of different bodies and discourses which affect their surrounding bodies or subjects. Every character in *Frankenstein* is affected by this phenomenon in one way or another and the most significant implication of this intra-action is the erosion of the solid boundaries defining ontologies of being.

Frankenstein's assemblage also foregrounds another point about vital materiality, which is the material essence of our bodies, debunking the myth of humans' autonomy. This idea also sheds light on the flimsiness of bodily boundaries and distinctions between humans and nonhumans. An assemblage is composed of numerous disparate bodies which all congeal into a network. The human body as a congregation of flesh and matter is no exception to this. Vital materiality highlights the "alien quality of our own flesh" (Bennett, *Vibrant* 112) and the fact that Victor employs pieces of human and animal flesh substantiates his acknowledgement that he is made up of the same alien flesh, a fact he vehemently dismisses as he refuses to accept the reality of his own creature and denies him the status a human deserves. Vital materiality teaches us that our "body is material, and yet this vital materiality is not fully or exclusively human. My flesh is populated and constituted by different swarms of foreigners" (112). Biologists have also proven the fact that our body is populated by numerous foreign agents. For instance, Neil Evernden puts forth the example of mitochondria which provide energy to the cells. Mitochondria live inside a cell and have a completely different genetic makeup from that of the host cells, but cannot live independently of them. We as humans

. . . cannot exist without them [Mitochondria], and yet they may not strictly be "us."

Does it mean that we must regard ourselves as colonies? . . . Where do we draw the line between one creature and another? Where does one stop and the other begin? Is there even a boundary between you and the non-living world. . . . In short, how can you make any sense of the concept of man as a discrete entity? (qtd. in Iovino "Steps" 141).

The shared territories between human and nonhuman organisms and their permeability generate the agency of the self but it is not an agency that is anchored in one being. Rather it is one that is distributed across the assemblage and thus blurs the boundary of the self and the other. It is empirically and biologically validated that most foreign agents in a human's body are natural. Consequently, the attempt to demarcate what is essentially natural and what is not, is a challenging, even vain task as what was once assumed to be wholly external to human beings may, in fact, prove to be an essential part of us. The artificial is natural and the natural is artificial. Victor is the monster and the monster is Victor as well.

The cohabitation of natural and non-natural, human and nonhuman in one body is a phenomenon, similar to intra-action, which is appropriately termed trans-corporeality by the American ecofeminist Stacy Alaimo:

I'm calling "trans-corporeality"— the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from "nature" or "environment." Trans-corporeality, as a theoretical site, is a place where corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in productive ways. . . . Crucial ethical and political possibilities emerge from this literal "contact zone" between human corporeality and more-than-human nature. Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from "the environment." It makes it difficult to pose nature as a mere background for the exploits of the human, since "nature" is always as close as one's own skin. Indeed, thinking across bodies may catalyze the recognition that the "environment," which is too often imagined as inert, empty space or as a "resource" for human use, is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings, with their own needs, claims, and actions. By emphasizing the movement across bodies, trans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human. But by underscoring that "trans" indicates

movement across different sites, transcorporeality opens up an epistemological “space” that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors (“Trans-corporeal”238).

This ground-breaking ecocritical concept opens up a whole new way of conceiving of the world, body, nature, matter, agency, and our position in relation to other creatures. There is actually an interplay among different agents in the assemblage, alternatively called trans-corporeality, which foregrounds the matter and nonhuman agents as much as their human counterparts. The inseparability of substances or matters from a human body is emphasized along with the permeability of the borders between nature and culture. Trans-corporeality stipulates that our human body does not end where our skin begins. Dossey similarly argues that humans are merged not only in their physical environment, but also in the bodies of other humans and animals as we all inhale and exhale the same air and atoms which enter our blood and form and feed our limbs. The root of life on earth goes back even to supernovas which released carbon into the atmosphere of the Earth. Therefore, we are all composed of foreign matter (qtd. in Martin 73). It is absolutely impossible to draw a dissecting line between the self and the other, inside and outside, or natural and unnatural. Humans and nonhumans are all inextricably intertwined in the web of life. Indeed “humanity and nonhumanity have always performed an intricate dance with each other. There was never a time when human agency was anything other than an interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity” (Bennett, *Vibrant* 31). This interconnection of agency is called the “dance of human and nonhuman agency” (95) by Andrew Pickering who also emphasises the performative and emergent nature of agency as a mutual phenomenon resulting from the amalgamation of humans and nonhumans.

The idea of trans-corporeality, whose embodiment is Frankenstein’s creature, is also commented on by Nancy Tuana, who accentuates the undermining of the rigid borders between binary opposites. According to her, the world, as a phenomenon, emerges not only

from human practices but also from a torrent of other forms which are all in relation to one another, underlining the impossibility of a clearly-cut division between nature and culture. The phenomenon of blurring these boundaries is called ‘viscous porosity’<sup>31</sup> by Tuana:

There is a viscous porosity of flesh—my flesh and the flesh of the world. This porosity is a hinge through which we are of and in the world. I refer to it as viscous, for there are membranes that effect the interactions. These membranes are of various types—skin and flesh, prejudgments and symbolic imaginaries, habits and embodiments. They serve as the mediators of interaction (199-200).

This concept, akin to the idea of trans-corporeality, recognizes the distributed agency of a body of matter which is seamlessly intertwined. The example of the creature is an apt one for the idea of ‘viscous porosity’ as the creature exists as a floating signifier which slides across animal and human boundaries. Besides, this movement enables the creature to be an active participant and agent and despite being an outcast, his agency and presence hover over the life of Frankenstein and his family.

The phenomenon of the monster’s agency unites the animate and the inanimate, human and nonhuman in order to resolve the differences between the two categories. The creature’s agency also returns to matter its denied and long overdue vitality and vibrancy. Nature, composed of such matter, is no longer a passive and inert background. This sets the ground for a framework that places humans and creatures on a horizontal rather than vertical plane. Such a reconceptualization, which is evident in *Frankenstein*, enables humans to “take a step toward a more ecological sensibility” (Bennett, *Vibrant* 10) by acknowledging the interchangeability of people and matter, human and nonhuman, which is what Frankenstein failed to accept.

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<sup>31</sup> Tuana’s example of ‘viscous porosity’ includes a brilliant analysis of hurricane Katrina which struck New Orleans in 2005. She argues that the catastrophic phenomenon of Katrina was due to a conglomeration of agents and discourses such as racial politics, global warming, poverty, federal government, and Army Corp of Engineers. Tuana’s concept is actually an illustration of intra-action and assemblage which involved a body of human and nonhuman agents and thus weakens the boundaries between them. This is very similar to the concepts of assemblage and intra-action.

However, Frankenstein's own creature, a product of the coupling of humans and matter, comes back to life to assert the agency of matter with an ecological message.

## 5.2 Becoming a Rhizomatic Cyborg

Frankenstein's composite creature is constituted of natural authentic materials which have been manufactured artificially. His unique process of birth and his identity as a hybrid human/animal stigmatize him as a villainous outsider. His pleas for a sense of belonging, even his desire to have an analogous partner are continuously frustrated. He turns into a wandering creature, weak, hopeless, and despondent, who only vows revenge on humans for the agonies they have caused him. However, this long-established view of the creature does not do justice to him as an emergent phenomenon, since it replicates the inherent weakness and futility of his existence. This view tends to ignore the enabling potentials of being a nondescript, an outcast which is in a state of transition in the world of collapsed boundaries. The creature actually constitutes a "middle space" where culture and nature become one (Adamson 48) and the old categories of distinctions are rendered obsolete. The creature's liminal ontology resonates with Donna Haraway's figure of a cyborg which is her trope for the collapse of borders.

Cyborgs are a product of the unprecedented scientific breakthroughs in recent decades which have radically transformed conceptions about human and nonhuman worlds. Accordingly, there is a demand for a new ontology that can incorporate the emerging new species, products of science and biology, which cannot fit into traditional dichotomies. Frankenstein's creature was also a nineteenth-century prophecy of science and technology and a call for a reformulation of hierarchies of beings. Victor's creature is the embodiment of a cyborg figure "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality" (Haraway, *Reader* 7). This metaphor enables us to conceive of beings in fresh ways and, as a result, "the cyborg [becomes] our new ontology" (7), like the creature which reminds us of our own hybridity and the need for a reconsideration of the binary of human and nonhuman. He is precisely the cyborg figure which starts "where the boundary of human and animal is transgressed" (10) and signals the precariousness of ontological statuses. This transgression does not signify rejection, but only an acknowledgement of our kinship with animals,

machines, and matter, or of their identity and agency. This is indeed the conundrum of a cyborg; it is a fluid identity which is constantly reconfigured as animal, human, or even a hybrid of both. The cyborg figure of the creature also features “a mesh, a nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environment” (Morton, “Queer” 275-6). A teleological status is an unattainable one for the creature on account of his liminal position, as he shuttles between dead and living, human and animal, or nature and culture. He is the sum of the matter and ingredients he is composed of. The body and the environment are intermeshed and become one. In other words, in biological terms living creatures and their environments are constantly transformed for ideal adaptation (Birke and Parisi 63), and in the course of the process there is a connection, affinity, or liaison between bodies and their environments that renders the quest for purity and essentiality of identity futile. We are all the components of the world, space, and the environment we inhabit. The creature is the personification of trans-corporeality where our bodies become tied to the environment, or the physical nature, from which they originate.

A cyborg figure, like Victor’s creature, is a reminder of this nexus of incongruent matter and relations, or the permeability of boundaries, bodies, and their environment. Through Victor’s ambition and curiosity, the creature is fabricated in a scientific experiment which conjoins human and nonhuman. However, it is the product of this experiment, the creature himself, the cyborg, who becomes the ultimate sign of trans-corporeality, serving as a bridge between the natural and the unnatural, the human, and the nonhuman. The creature is composed of matter and meat and is eventually decomposed again to signify the cycle of connections. At the end of the novel, after Victor dies, the creature states his intention to set himself on fire: “I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds” (Shelley 225). By burning himself, he will be decomposed and the

“particles of his being mix with those of the larger environment” (Philip Armstrong 70), the vast arctic sea. Armstrong maintains that the creature, by burning himself along with the body of Victor, enters a new mode of existence, a “nonhuman, and non-humanist state of being, free from shackles of rational consciousness” (71). His demise is actually a reversal of his story of creation, which liberates him from the debilitating humanist discourse which cannot recognize human lineage being directly related to their environment. The creature’s birth and death is a telling example of trans-corporeality, the embeddedness of living and non-living, human and nonhuman. He was composed by Victor in a laboratory and ultimately decomposes himself, along with Victor,<sup>32</sup> to be a reminder of the fact that humans and animals are from a physical environment, nature, to which they will eventually return. Thus, the discourse of trans-corporeality obliterates the fabricated distinctions between humans and animals.

The creature’s lack of a nominal identity is another feature of his cyborg status. The creature exemplifies the tale of creation with no origin, or ending. A cyborg figure “has no origin story in the Western sense. . . . an origin story in the “Western” humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by a phallic mother from whom all humans must separate” (Haraway, *Reader* 9). Victor’s creature is grotesquely stitched together from pieces of meat and there is no creator in the sense of a mother figure to bestow unity and continuity on him. His plight is actually the lack of domestic unity and familial circles that he witnesses among human communities to which he is denied access. The account of his death is also similar to his birth: he is borne away on an ‘ice-raft’ and disappears in the dark, just as he was born in a dark workshop. His existence makes him a fluid signifier of the fragmentation of the humanist myth of unity and wholeness, a product of the Enlightenment. He is a patchwork or an “illegitimate offspring . . . unfaithful to [its] origins” (10) and thus subverting the notions of essentialism and humans’ unity with nature.

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<sup>32</sup> Gigante argues that Victor’s loss of identity, or his decomposition as I put it, is a gradual process. He loses the family members and his friend, Henry Clerval, and he eventually announces his intent to leave his hometown, Geneva, for ever. Therefore, the loss of his familial and social ties is the beginning of the process of his being ‘unmade-up’ (582).

Apart from the story of origin and unity, the creature also obfuscates the representational concepts of gender. Gender confusion also suggests parallels with the cyborg as “it is a creature in the post-gender world” which defies gender classification. Obviously, the creature is referred to as a male creature who yearns to unite with a compatible female partner. Nevertheless the creature obscures gender binaries and is comparable to the cyborg figure who “subvert[s] the structure and modes of reproduction of ‘Western’ identity, of nature and culture” (34). He occupies a vague space in regards to gender as he is both masculine and feminine. He has been interpreted to symbolize “a woman in a patriarchal society” (Poovey 352); he is a killing machine, a monster who is actually a “Medusa woman” (Brooks 389) annihilating men. He kills Elizabeth, a woman who is equally ignored and marginalized by Victor as he himself is. Victor symbolizes the ultimate patriarchal figure, a rational scientist, not only transgressing nature and science, but also seizing women’s reproductive system. The Medusa-like creature, symbolizing the silenced women, is the outcome of Victor’s nightmarish visions turning the tables on him. He is a cyborg figure who “eludes gender definition” (389). This obfuscation can be best described by Adorno’s idea of ‘nonidentity’ which encapsulates the schism between a phenomenon and its representation (qtd. in Bennett, “Force” 349). Nonidentity is a cyborg condition which is a state of ambivalence, a liminal space, a moment of gender transgression and fragmentation of identity which never attains unity.

The non-representational identity and gender of the creature also evokes a state which can open up venues for the reconceptualization of new modes of being in liminal spaces. Adorno’s nonidentity is the cyborg’s “simultaneity of breakdowns that cracks the matrices of domination and opens new geometric possibilities” (Haraway, *Reader* 32). In this manner, the nonidentity of the cyborg ceases to be a sign of passivity and indolence. A cyborg possesses empowering potentials on account of the fact that it cannot be categorized, limited, and defined. The unleashed potentials of a cyborg figure, similar to that of the creature, can

transform the conceptual paradigms of domination. W. J. T. Mitchell coins the term 'biocybernetics' to account for this phenomenon where the unintended consequence of an experiment asserts its own agency. He defines biocybernetics as "the sphere of living organisms which are to be subjected to control, but which may in one way or another resist that control, insisting on 'a life of their own'" (484). Victor's cyborg creature is an example of biocybernetics which is created to be of service to humanity, to be subjected to their means of control and oppression. However, from the very first moment of its inception, it asserts its own agency by its dormant power which sends Victor away in a state of absolute horror. The creature turns out to be the very opposite of what it was originally intended for, a panacea to end humans' inevitable submission to death. Instead, he becomes the harbinger of death and is labelled the other, an anomaly to be feared and avoided. This is why he takes the power to inscribe his identity and agency akin to a cyborg which "is [all] about the power to survive . . . on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (Haraway, *Reader* 33), or in Latour's words, "to object" ("Things" 115) to being subjected to a false narrative. Having been rejected, mistreated, and struck numerous times, the creature wields his tremendous power to reaffirm himself and also avenge his being marked as the other. In the course of this affirmation of his being, he exposes that the self is equally the other as he reveals that he is coextensive with humans as much as they are with him. Therefore, the line between the self and the other is eliminated.

The reassertion of the creature's power occurs when he is resuscitated with a sense of identity and agency, but not in the traditional humanistic sense. His identity and agency arise from the recognition of his being as a cyborg, or as a member of a "race of devils" (Shelley 170) in Victor's words. Victor's figure of the 'race of devils' is akin to Haraway's description of cyborg as a "bastard race [that] teaches us about the power of margins" (*Reader* 34). The cyborg creature refuses to be marginalized and demands his true place and due of Victor. The expression of this dormant power is the agency of the creature which inscribes instability into

the supposedly fixed categories. The creature and Frankenstein become one and the same towards the end of the novel and the biological categories of human and animal become untenable, as it is difficult to distinguish between the monster and human in both of them. They even both die together and their ashes return to the sea; the ultimate sign of the permeability of the dualisms, the collapse of binaries marked by the emergence of the cyborg. The creature's cyborg power expedites the demise of Victor who stands for the indomitable and impenetrable human boundaries. Cyborg's encroachment upon these boundaries makes them blurred and feeble. This becomes the ultimate manifestation of the cyborg's power.

A cyborg identity also augments the thingness and the materiality of identity and self. In other words, the unclassifiable entity, which hovers on the borderline, assumes a sense of being through a transformation. The example of Jane Bennett's pile of trash is one such case where the assorted matter ceases to be a pile of objects but becomes a conglomeration of affective bodies able to influence and change their surroundings. The transition is a part of the process of becoming a cyborg which revitalizes matter, affording it subjectivity on its own terms. Mitchell lucidly explains this process by distinguishing between objects and things:

Objects are the way things appear to a subject—that is, with a name, an identity, a gestalt or stereotypical template. . . . Things, on the other hand, . . . [signal] the moment when the object becomes the Other, when the sardine can looks back, when the mute idol speaks, when the subject experiences the object as uncanny and feels the need for what Foucault calls 'a metaphysics of the object, or, more exactly, a metaphysics of that never objectifiable depth from which objects rise up toward our superficial knowledge' (qtd. in Bennett *Vibrant* 2).

The creature is a combination of objects before being assembled together by Victor who assumes the role of the humanist subject, an Enlightenment scientist who glues together a mass of raw objects gleaned from places where the remnants of humans' food and garbage were dumped. The moment of creation turns the creature or the object into a 'thing' whose

dormant look horrifies the human subject. The birth of the creature turns inert matter into a ‘thing’ similar to the sardine can or trash pile. This assortment of garbage now looks back at Victor and reverses the subject and object binary as he speaks and wills to do things of his own volition. This power is what Jane Bennett calls ‘thing-power’ which is the power and affect of both organic and inorganic bodies (6) in an assemblage. According to Spinoza, the power in such an assemblage derives from the interaction and connection of the participant agents and bodies within the assemblage (qtd. in Bennett, “Force” 353). Pieces of humans and animals in the assemblage of the creature also intra-act with each other which is what awakens and stirs up the creature to manifest its vibrant thingness, its thing-power and its resistance to being passively objectified. This account, resonant with Alaimo’s trans-corporeality, highlights the frailty of the constructed gap between the human and nonhuman, that state of nonidentity, which can offer new ethical paradigms for reformulating the falsely fabricated distinctions by reimagining matter, thing, and bodies. This new ethical paradigm is what is missing in *Frankenstein* resulting in the plight and misery of both Frankenstein and his illegitimate offspring.

The new paradigm also calls for a new rubric that can account for the creature who is an empowered ‘thing’, beyond a subject’s gaze. The instability of the binaries, evinced by the agency of the creature who is a trans-corporeal assemblage, is an admonition for the inability of the terms culture and nature to operate independently of one another. Marilyn Strathern also reminds us that nature and culture are “highly relativized concept[s] whose ultimate significance must ultimately be derived from its place within a specific metaphysics. No single meaning can be given to nature or culture in Westernized thought; there is no consistent dichotomy, only a matrix of contrasts” (qtd. in Latimer and Miele 11). Donna Haraway’s cyborg is a manifestation of a similar recognition of the inseparability of the two concepts. Haraway uses the term “emergent naturecultures” (*Manifesto* 1) to describe the cyborg phenomenon, a term which unites incongruities and binaries such as “the human and

nonhuman, the organic and technological . . . freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion” (4). ‘Naturecultures’ accentuates the non-existent binary between nature and culture, indicating the fact that both humans and animals are both natural *and* cultural. Victor’s creature, as such, is a cyborg figure who is “attentive to the naturecultures of mundane practices, opposed to the dire myths of self-birthing, embracing mortality as the condition for life” (11). He is also a figure that asserts a hybrid identity constituted by natural or unnatural matter and substances. He is actually “a product of nature—his ingredients are 100 per cent natural—yet by the process and the very fact of his creation, he is unnatural. . . . he lacks cultural as well as natural context. . . . [he is] postnatural and precultural” (Brooks 386-7). The recognition of the cyborg nature of the creature, which is in line with other concepts such as assemblage, vital materiality, and transcorporeality, opens up new avenues for the interaction of humans with one another and with their natural world as well.

The sense of horror that the creature evokes in others taps into human anxiety regarding the perils of breaking falsely presupposed and fixed boundaries. Nineteenth-century readers were not unfamiliar with what new progenies could come about as a result of the collapse of binaries. According to Ritvo, a dire need for more food in the face of a growing population expedited the production of meat and encouraged farmers to devise new methods of food production, one of which was that of ‘hybridization’, a technique employed by farmers and stock breeders to produce new forms of animals and plants, which met with a growing unease both on the side of the public and the politicians (qtd. in Philip Armstrong 74-5). In this vein, Armstrong notes that the source of horror or even the appellation of the monster is the fear engendered by the “intersection of the two forms of generation: one organic and one technological” (74). Therefore, in such a social context, Victor and other people’s reactions reflect “the horror of posthuman non-integrity, of an assemblage that refuses to cohere into a totality” (Sheehan 247). There was a sense of unease about hybrids in the animal world which

humans regarded as unnatural. They would then extend the same sense of discomfort to the human world. Even in modern times, the question of cloning a human being engenders the same anxieties and concerns, similar to the creation of the monster by Victor. The novel lives up to Haraway's formulation of cyborg narrative which redefines the concepts of nature and culture so that neither of them can be exploited by the other (Haraway, *Reader* 9), in an attempt to bring about a holistic unity.

A cyborg reformulation of ontologies establishes a new ethical framework which embraces the rights of men and nonhuman entities. Developing such an ethical outlook necessitates an all-embracing ontology which can reject the established hierarchies. The Deleuzian concepts of 'assemblage' and 'becoming' lay the ground for this new ontology founded upon the recognition of a non-hierarchical system of relations. An assemblage is not only a constellation of different substances or matter, but it is actually a semiotic body composed of heterogeneous entities which are all interrelated. It is defined as "every constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow—selected, organized, stratified—in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially and naturally" (Deleuze and Guattari 406). The emphasis here is based on the mobility of constituents and their relation within the assemblage. It is a "body without organs" (4) which signifies a totality, but with no organizational principles; it is "a body that is not organized in accord with Oedipal relations, biological functions, organized forms, or cultural-historical values" (Sotirin 119). The creature is the same 'body without organs' that has the potential to bring about an ontology based on horizontal relations rather than hierarchical ones. The power of assemblage also emerges from its totality rather than the individual constituents. According to Hallward, "whatever genuinely acts, thinks or creates is less the work of an individual than of forces that work through the individual" (qtd. in Bowden 61) in an assemblage. It is not a single teleological/individual human or animal in the creature that challenges the traditional binaries, but it is the combination of both human and animal that has the power and agency to do so. Therefore,

action is dependent upon the relational contiguity of the components, both human and animal, in the body.

An assemblage has another feature which is the creation of territories, not fixed physical spaces, but forms of distinct expressions or identities which “are always being made and unmade, reterritorializing and deterritorializing” (Wise 93). In other words, an assemblage is in a constant flow which creates new identities over and over again via constant transformation. Deterritorialization is the breakdown of the old boundaries and reterritorialization is the creation of new ontologies and boundaries, which is what the creature symbolizes. He dissolves the old taxonomies and creates new ones which are mixtures of the old and new.

The transformational quality of the assemblage gives rise to a new non-hierarchical ontological system referred to as the ‘rhizome’ by Deleuze and Guattari. Following the same logic of trans-corporeality, assemblage, and intra-action, the rhizome also accentuates the concept of multiplicity. A rhizomatic model is a system that resists the traditional hierarchic and organizational thinking similar to a ‘tree’ of knowledge which categorizes and compartmentalizes our mode of thinking. A rhizomatic ontology is based on “connection and heterogeneity” (Deleuze and Guattari 7), dismissing notions of head or bottom, higher or lower, and therefore connects all the disparate constituents together in an assemblage which “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains” (7). The rhizome is a shapeless conglomeration with “no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (25). As a middle-place, to use Adamson’s term, a rhizome disrupts the binaries and manages to flow through the borders that demarcate hierarchies. It questions the essential fixity of the constructed borders and lays bare the inefficacy of a tree-of-knowledge like paradigm. This is why it is also referred to as a ‘body without organs’ since it is the process and interconnections that matter rather than the essential form. The result of a rhizome and the endless flow of its constituents is a form of transformation or becoming. It is the “processes of interchange with environments and of ‘making them over.’ It is about the

creation of change” (Birke and Parisi 85). Becoming is actually a form of affiliation “in the domain of symbioses that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation. . . . it is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree” (Deleuze and Guattari 238-9). Therefore, a rhizomatic model is closer to the horizontal model of an alternative ontology, onto-tale, which is more ecological rather than traditional ones.

Victor’s creature is also a non-classificatory creature, a new form of becoming that is the repository of a multiplicity of entities both human and nonhuman. The creature effects a ground for heterogeneity and connection between humans and animals which resists the binary clichés of humanistic proclivities. This symbiosis is the starting point of a new ‘onto-tale’ which underpins the shared ground between humans and nonhumans that can lead to a horizontal, and collective identity rather than a hierarchically essentialist one. The rhizomatic creature undeniably undermines the obsession with a pure form of individual identity and reveals our enmeshment and interchange with our environment. The death of the creature and his creator at the end is also a testimony to the inseparability of human from the nonhuman world, as well as a symbolic demise of the boundaries between Victor and the creature.

The creature’s rhizomatic becoming is also an empowering one, since the rhizomatic nature of his assemblage affords him the chance to enter the “zone of indiscernibility or undecidability between man and animal” (qtd. in Heymans 130). He is modelled after a human, yet he is treated like an animal and indeed lives like one. On the other hand, Victor, obsessed with his work and then revenge, degenerates into an animal state preying on dead rabbits. The creature is an exemplary rhetorician and a Rousseauian epitome of humanity’s affinity with nature, but he also succumbs to his ravaging animalistic power to seek revenge. Similarly, Victor shifts from humanity to animality without fully belonging to either. Indeed, both Victor and the creature shuttle back and forth between the two poles of being. This incessant transition brings to the surface the trans-corporeality of our bodies and our selves. To be more attuned to the nonhuman aspect of our trans-corporeality, we need to “reconceive of

ourselves as more animal and embodied, more ‘natural’, and that we reconceive of nature as more mindlike than in Cartesian conceptions” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 124). In this way, people become conflated with their surrounding environment and the inhabitant bodies. The creature is an embodiment of the non-anthropocentric trans-corporeal onto-tale which is way ahead of its time and is doomed to annihilation as people have not yet welcomed trans-corporeality as an option to end the binary poles of existence and their Cartesian privileges. The only way to develop the ecological sensitivity is to “apprehend the environment disanthropocentrically, in a teetering mode that renders human centrality a problem rather than a starting point” (Cohen, *Prismatic* xxiv). Decentring anthropocentrism enables us to cut across the boundaries and recognize our continuity with other bodies in a rhizomatic network of equal interrelation and connection.

### 5.3 Feminized Nature, Naturalized Female

Mary Shelley's novel is a cogent account of technology gone awry and the ill-fated destiny of unchecked ambition. The implicit connotation of this narrative is that nature, which in this novel is a multi-faceted representation, is apathetic and depicted as a passively receptive receptacle of man's exploitation and hubris. However, a more meticulous look at *Frankenstein* proves the opposite to be true. In point of fact, this is an environmental narrative of how nature emerges victorious in the face of the human domination epitomized by Walton and Frankenstein, both reminders of the zeitgeist of the Enlightenment project of knowing, exploring, and conquering the world and nature. However, nature, embodied by different actants including the creature, resists being dominated or mapped and rises above human factors.

The agency of nature is revealed after a series of events initiated by humans, represented by Robert Walton and Victor Frankenstein who represent the ultimate Enlightenment values. Robert and Victor are explorers, of geography and science respectively, who are consumed by the desire to transgress the known boundaries of their realm of expertise. Robert can only satiate his curiosity by exploring a part of the world, the Arctic, where no man has trodden before. His endeavour to find a new path in the Arctic is a "geographic metaphor for the ultimate extreme of human aspiration" (Knellwolf 56) in line with the injunctions of the Enlightenment. In a letter addressed to his sister, Walton boasts of his potential discoveries in the Arctic: "You cannot contest the inestimable benefits which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation by discovering a passage to the pole" (Shelley 16). Victor is a similarly ambitious scientist who has already amassed a great deal of knowledge before entering university at Ingolstadt where he aspires to walk upon untrodden paths by discovering the secrets of life and creation. He also exhibits undercurrents of arrogance while at university, especially when he approaches the culmination of his endeavours to create a new form of life: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures

would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs” (55). Both Robert and Victor are prompted by the same anthropocentric passion verging on selfishness, to the point that Robert risks the lives of his companions for the sake of his enterprise. Likewise, Victor sacrifices his family, friends and domestic bliss in the pursuit of a futile goal. Victor and Robert signify the anthropocentric ambitions of humanity which utilizes nature for the sole benefits of humans regardless of the consequences it might entail.

In their pursuit of absolute knowledge patriarchy proclaims itself unabashedly in a way that not only victimizes women, but also feminizes nature in the hope of harnessing them both. It is a sexist truism that “men represent reason and rightfully control the world as well as the dangerous emotionality, irrationality and reproductivity of women, who are ‘closer to nature’” (Plumwood, *Ecological Crisis* 21). The process of domesticating nature goes hand-in-hand with domesticating femininity in *Frankenstein*. Victor, a hard-core scientist, has a patriarchal rhetoric towards understanding the world by excavating its secrets in the womb of nature. He is taught in lectures in Ingolstadt to “penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places” (Shelley 49). This sentiment echoes Francis Bacon’s supplication asking true scientists to “penetrate further, to conquer . . . Nature herself in action [in order to] pass by the outer halls of Nature . . . to where at length the way into her inner chambers shall be revealed” (qtd. in Knellwolf 61). Bacon’s sexual language bears close resemblance to both Walton and Frankenstein’s ambitions; Walton’s goal is to find a path to cut through the pristine Arctic ice and Frankenstein’s mission is to take the role of God and make humans invulnerable to death by digging out the secrets of life and death from charnel-houses and slaughterhouses. Both of them employ a “language that legitimizes the exploitation and ‘rape’ of nature” (Merchant, *Death* 171). Kate Soper also argues along the same lines that nature has been conceived of as a “spatial territory . . . which is tamed and tilled. . . . Nature is allegorized as either a powerful maternal force . . . or as the site of sexual enticement and ultimate

seduction. Nature is . . . also the potential spouse of science, to be wooed, won, and . . . forced to submit to intercourse” (“Naturalized Women” 141). Historically, nature has been conflated with feminine qualities which sanctioned its exploitation and domination in the hands of patriarchs whose goal was to elevate humans above the nonhuman world. Women have similarly been naturalized and domesticated which paved the way for their exploitation and oppression by the same patriarchal mindset which conquers nature. The gendered language towards nature reiterates platitudes of a passive nature with raw materials to serve patriarchal domination. Apart from the anthropocentric overtones, this rhetoric also feminizes nature and excises its essential agency. Frankenstein’s passion and ardour in pursuing nature are redolent of its fetishization to the point that he is even more excited and aroused while making the female monster than by the prospect of his own marriage (Butler 413). He totally ignores and marginalizes his family and especially his fiancée, Elizabeth, who is eventually murdered by the creature, the very product of Victor’s transgression of nature. Walton also wishes to penetrate the virgin Arctic to set a path for posterity; however, he has alienated himself from both his crewmen and his sister. In this vein, *Frankenstein* is an ecstatic culmination of the masculine conquest of the bodies of women and nature together.

The creation of the creature is synonymous with the death of femininity, as Victor takes the role of the mother, in that “without submission to the fecundity of a woman’s womb, he symbolically kills mother nature” (Bate, *Song* 51). The death of fecundity is reflected in Victor’s nightmare following the birth of his progeny, as the monster’s kiss turns Elizabeth, who is supposed to be the bearer of life, into a corpse. Anne Mellor’s excellent essay, “Possessing Nature”, on women’s roles in *Frankenstein*, is a brilliant analysis of how women are subdued, domesticated, and marginalized in the novel. There are several examples of how Victor crusades against women in his scientific experiments as what he actually “fears is female sexuality” (Mellor, “Possessing” 360). His refusal to create a partner for the creature is also rooted in the same dread “of the spectacle of woman’s uncontrollable materiality”

(London 394) as Victor fears that the female partner might be “ten thousand times more malignant than her mate” (Shelley 170). Therefore, Victor’s anxiety over a super-powerful female creature prevents him from granting the monster’s request. In this fashion, Elizabeth is treated with a degree of nonchalance and indifference which reaffirms the hypothesis that to Victor, Elizabeth is merely a material being in whom he is not wholeheartedly invested. Elizabeth is viewed as a possession rather than a companion, since her first entry into Frankenstein’s house, when she was a little child, was framed as if she was a gift brought into the house by Victor’s mother as “a pretty present” (37) for Victor. Also, the culmination of Victor’s scientific endeavour is prioritized over his domestic responsibilities towards Elizabeth, as he decides to “procrastinate all that related to [his] feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of [his] nature, should be completed” (56). Therefore, Victor’s family and domestic bliss are ranked lower than his pursuit of science in his order of priorities. Mellor also draws a germane analogy between Elizabeth’s murder on her wedding night and Fuseli’s famous painting, “The Nightmare”, with which, she claims, Shelley was also familiar. The depiction of the murder reverberates with Fuseli’s painting, indicating the potential threat femininity poses for Victor (Mellor, “Possessing” 361). This fear leads to the domestication and naturalization of Elizabeth which puts her on the same ontological level as nature. She exists to be possessed by Victor just as nature is only an instrument to be utilized by him for the fulfilment of his great goals. Victor’s fear of domesticity is equal to his fear of the power of the creature that he intends to avoid.

Another significant contrast exists between men’s and women’s attitude towards nature in this novel. Women are depicted to be conflated with nature; they are more attuned to its significance. Elizabeth, contrary to Victor who is not very perceptive of nature in terms of its rich beauties and power, is more attentive to her natural surrounding:

She busied herself with following the aerial creations of the poets; and in the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded our Swiss home—the sublime shapes of the

mountains, the changes of the seasons, tempest and calm, the silence of winter, and the life and turbulence of our Alpine summers—she found ample scope for admiration and delight. While my companion contemplated with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearances of things, I delighted in investigating their causes (Shelley 38).

Elizabeth views nature and “the world as a presence” (Feder 60), not a mystery. On the other hand, Victor views the world as a receptacle of secrets he has to excavate. In this enterprise, Victor becomes “insensible to the charms of nature” (56) which, in turn, makes him even neglect his friends and family. He becomes impervious to love, and “his love for the family is the first victim of his growing obsession” (Poovey 347) as he loses his brother and then his wife. He also harbours ambivalent feelings towards nature, both positive and negative. When he is immersed in his experiments, he is quite unresponsive to the beauties of his surroundings and works strenuously until he takes ill. His friend Clerval restores him to health and it is only then that he realizes the beauties he once missed. He discovers that “inanimate nature had the power of bestowing on [him] the most delightful sensations” (Shelley 71). This positive attitude to nature is only realized once he stops working on his scientific projects which entail the exploitation of nature. Still, he has an erroneous understanding of nature as he does not fully realize that the nature he exploited is not fully inanimate and it will respond through his own ill-begotten child, the creature.

Victor tends to imbue nature with morality, deeming it either as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ depending on whether it assists or thwarts his ambitions. The same principle applies to Victor’s view of Elizabeth, to whom he only returns after months of preoccupation with his own creation. He seeks Elizabeth again when he is at the nadir of desolation: “For myself, there was one reward I promised myself from my detested toils—one consolation for my unparalleled sufferings; it was the prospect of that day when, enfranchised from my miserable slavery, I might claim Elizabeth and forget the past in my union with her” (159). Elizabeth again becomes a reward, a gift to make Victor forget his ordeals. He has a utilitarian view of

Elizabeth, just as he views nature instrumentally to serve his purposes. He decides to go back to her and consummate the marriage when he considers himself to be the most miserable creature on earth, whom only Elizabeth can save. In such a context, it is no wonder that Elizabeth, a symbol of “domesticated nature” (Feder 59) is taken away by the creature, an embodiment of nature’s wrath, on the very night that Victor’s wedding is solemnized. Nature punishes Victor for his patriarchal and instrumental approach towards itself and women, both exploited and utilized by him.

## 5.4 Nature Strikes Back

Victor's project to conquer nature faces a series of complications which suggest that nature will not passively submit to the havoc humans wreak upon it. In the case of Frankenstein, he is not castigated by an ultimate divine justice for trespassing the boundaries, but by his own child, the very creature he brought into the world. The product of science takes its toll on its creator in a manner akin to the self-perpetuating problems created in a society that is prone to high-risk experimentation. The creature embodies the avenging force of nature who seeks vengeance on his creator. Natural disasters, by extension, become an expression of nature's revenge upon the transgression of boundaries by humans (Golinski 9-10). Indeed, the association of the monster with the weather and natural phenomena is too pointed and pervasive to miss in *Frankenstein*. The creature and Frankenstein are both first observed by Walton in the midst of cold and ice, but the former appears like a savage of an isolated land and the latter as a civilized European man. Therefore, from the very beginning, the creature is aligned with "the state of nature" (Bate, *Song* 50). Furthermore, Mary Shelley furnishes her work with subtle references to a period of unusual weather conditions in 1816 which came to be known as the 'year without a summer'. The eruption of Tambora in 1815 ejected tons of sulphur into the stratosphere that remained trapped there for years while blocking the sunlight which resulted in a drastic decrease in the temperature. The latter, in turn, led to poor harvests, increases in food prices, and in some cases, riots (97). The novel begins with a reference to "Arctic wind . . . one of the possible culprits for the 'year without a summer,' the vehicle by which polar cold was transmitted to British shores" (Carroll, "Crusades" 219). There are also references to a severe winter which postpones Victor's return home from university and an "uncommonly late" (Shelley 71) spring followed by winters with "indications of impending famine" (117). The novel was also coterminous with "dramatic climate change between 1816 and 1818" (Bill Phillips 59) in Switzerland, similar to the night when Mary Shelley and other literary friends stayed in Byron's Villa on account of stormy weather which also marked the

conception of *Frankenstein*. Therefore, the monster is akin to inclement weather conditions which blight people's lives.

In consideration of the meteorological evidence and a number of germane references to the unusual weather conditions of the time in *Frankenstein*, the creature can be construed as “the capacity of nature to instigate environmental crises of biblical proportion” (Bill Phillips 59). The creature acts like “a force of nature, descending upon [Victor's] family and friends like a storm of destruction” (Economides 624). His appearance is usually accompanied with lightning and stormy weather as in his first encounter with Victor on the mountains, when Victor tries to discern a figure from a distance: “I could not be mistaken. A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon, to whom I had given life” (Shelley 77-8). It is in this storm that Victor states that the roaring sound of the thunder is his murdered brother's elegy: “William, dear angel! This is thy funeral, this is thy dirge!” (77). The emergence of the monster announced by the thunderous lightning becomes William's requiem as the monster heralds death and misery. Another sign of an apocalyptic weather metaphor accompanying the creature's wrath is when he sets De Lacey's house on fire and leaves. Nature mirrors his wrath and desolation: “Nature decayed around me, and the sun became heatless; rain and snow poured around me; mighty rivers were frozen; the surface of the earth was hard and chill, and bare” (141-2). The fertile nature around De Lacey's house becomes metaphorically bone dry when the creature's hopes of connecting with the beneficial De Lacey's family dissipate. Unfavourable weather conditions mirror the creature's wrath and the misery and punishment it brings on people.

Yet another parallel between the monster and weather is that he is most at home in extreme weather conditions. The most inhospitable environments seem to welcome the creature and his “various sites of refuge [are] . . . frozen, mountainous, and desolate locations”

(Heiniger 46). Shelley thoughtfully parallels the emergence of the creature with calamitous weather conditions to embody the creature as an avenging agent of nature resisting the domination of humans. Although he is made of human and nonhuman pieces, he still resembles an uncanny superhuman, “an improved design” (Hunter 140) who is invulnerable to extreme cold or pangs of hunger, akin to a “spirit of the ‘desert mountains and dreary glaciers’” (Bill Phillips 67). He deliberately entices Victor to follow him to the indomitable Arctic terrain where they are both swallowed by Arctic waters, a symbolic return to nature from which they originally emanated. The creature also seamlessly travels across boundaries and borders. The creature, a “monstrous embodiment of cosmopolitan world” (Carroll, “Crusades” 223), can even traverse the “vast wilds of South America” (Shelley 148). He appears, phantom-like, wherever Victor goes. He is indeed a reminder of what Timothy Morton calls hyperobjects, which he defines as “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (*Hyperobjects* 1), and are also “nonlocal” (38). Considered from this angle, the creature is a hyperobject who is closely associated with weather and is, thus, ubiquitous. He is a product of various materials, emerging from the discourse of the Enlightenment, but not succumbing to it. It is “a figure of an identity that could survive an apocalypse of global cooling” (Carroll, “Crusades” 223) in *Frankenstein*. This figure also brings annihilation to those who transgress the sanctity of nature.

In addition, the creature reasserts itself and resists being dominated by humans via its disruption of a patriarchal sublime and its mastery over nature. This idea of the sublime is akin to the masculine sublime discussed in my chapters on Radcliffe, as the patriarchal sublime dominates nature and reaffirms the power of man’s faculty of mind over nature. In a similar vein, Victor’s ambition in discovering the secrets of life and death is aligned with the desire to dominate nature, which is an index of the patriarchal sublime. The traditional experience of the sublime is that the observer is awed and dwarfed before the grandeur of nature, but then regains his faculties and transcends nature. In Victor’s case, his attempts at attaining the

masculine sublime are constantly thwarted by the appearance of the creature immediately before the sublime is achieved. For instance, he resolves to climb to the summit of Montanvert to find some calm and peace from the “effect that the view of the tremendous and ever-moving glacier” (Shelley 100) exerts on him. The views afford him “a sublime ecstasy that gave wings to the soul and allowed it to soar from the obscure world to light and joy” (100). He also decides to go alone since “the presence of another would destroy the solitary grandeur of the scene” (100). As he begins to bask in the sublime scenes offered by Mont Blanc, ice, and the sea, he spots “the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards [him] with superhuman speed” (101). He is irate and filled with ‘rage and horror’ at the sight of the creature who is the harbinger of death. It is at this moment that it dawns on him, like an epiphany, that his own creature is the murderer of his brother, William. The sublime is not reached, as it is abruptly disrupted by the appearance of the monster.

Victor’s failure to experience the sublime and mentally dominate grand nature is a destabilizing experience in terms of his patriarchal ambitions. His scientific experiments do not yield the desired results and his patriarchal sublime also fails. The disruptive emergence of the creature at potentially sublime moments reminds Victor of his complicity in the creation of the creature and also his kinship with a creature who is of and from nature. The exclusive patriarchal sublime cannot be achieved as long as the creature is labelled the other and is not accepted by the community of humans. Alternative to this sublime is what Outka calls ‘organic sublime’, which is defined as “episodes when an individual experienced and recorded an often profoundly disconcerting awareness of the radical material identity between his or her embodied self and the natural world” (31). It is the recognition of our trans-corporeality or the fact that we are also composed of the same matter as other living beings in nature, the same components that make up nature. The creature’s disruption of the Romantic sublime moment underscores the necessity to alter the traditional binaries of natural and unnatural, human and

nonhuman (36). The creature's disruption is indeed his call for attention to his materiality which needs to be embraced by humans.

The irony is that the disruption occurs on top of a mountain. The very act of climbing and conquering a high mountain "was largely a product of the Enlightenment's search for knowledge, its impatience with all restrictions on human curiosity, [and] its willingness to transgress the boundaries" (Nardin 442-3) between natural and unnatural. Victor's ascent to the mountain in order to restore his mental health is akin to a mountaineer who climbs an inhospitable and harsh mountain covered in ice and snow. His ultimate goal of reaching the sublime, similar to his scientific hubris, fails just as the projects of the Enlightenment go similarly askew. The Enlightenment project of conquest is also resisted by the raging Arctic sea which serves as the backdrop for most of the encounters between Victor and the creature. The body of water is dense, deep, overwhelming, impermeable, in ways that make it an indomitable force that embodies the power of the nonhuman and stymies anything that is human (Feder 64). This decisively ends the myth of man's superiority and mastery over nature. The untapped Arctic land which becomes the ground for "a sui generis masculinity for Walton" (Hill 59) checks the ambition of human adventure. The Arctic is a place where land and sea become one, and this no-zone swallows both Victor and his creature. The binaries do not hold there, neither that between the sea and the land, nor that between human and nonhuman (Bate, *Song* 54) and they all become one and the same in the Arctic. Everyone and everything merges dynamically with nature in that 'zone of indistinction', which becomes the place where both Frankenstein and the creature are undone, decomposed, and return to nature.

The final act of the monster's revenge is the annihilation of domesticity and an inorganically assembled family. The creature himself is "a product rather than a creation, assembled and joined" (Montag 388); likewise, Frankenstein's family is also "an assembled family rather than an organic" (Hill 62) one. His family features a range of different filial relations such as people abandoned by their families, orphans, people adopted, people

abandoning their families to pursue their own selfish ambitions, people rejected as part of a family (Heymans 127), as well as people subjected to miscarriage of justice. This all stands in opposition to the ideal of the family that Shelley cherishes, that of De Lacey which represents “a vision of social group based on justice, equality, and mutual affection” (Mellor, “Possessing” 358).

De Lacey’s family resembles the idea of an organic family that F. R. Leavis formulated, based on the writings of George Sturt where people “expressed their human nature, [and] satisfied their human needs, in terms of natural environment; and the things they made . . . together with their relation to one another constituted a human environment” (Leavis and Thompson 74). De Lacey’s family is a positive model where relations are all based on mutual love, sympathy, acceptance, and connection. They even obtain their food from their land and lead a very Rousseauian lifestyle. Even the creature’s education in De Lacey’s house is based on the principle of connection and sympathy. He learns language so that he is better able to connect with people and communicate with them. In the process, he learns the history of the world and accounts of oppression and inequality and feels sympathy for the victims of inequality. By contrast, Victor’s education is based on conquering and mastering the world. He espouses an extremely selfish rhetoric with regards to education, and his scientific journey only sets him apart from the people he supposedly loves. It is an unavoidable consequence of Victor’s selfish acts that the creature strikes at his family and destroys the comfort of the domestic life that he is denied. Victor is a victim of his own indiscretion since he fails “to understand the significance of universal domesticity and the importance of extending it to his own creation” (Hogsette 555).

In such circumstances, the only surviving member of Frankenstein’s family is Ernest who is encouraged by Elizabeth to be a farmer (Feder 59)<sup>33</sup>, which is an affirmation of the need to be in harmony with nature, rather than to be its adversary like Walton and

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<sup>33</sup> The suggestion of Ernest becoming a farmer is based on the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*.

Frankenstein. This is Shelley's vision of "nature as a sacred life-force in which human beings ought to participate in conscious harmony" (Mellor, "Possessing" 365). This is the only way that a sustainable lifestyle, based on horizontal connection rather than hierarchical domination, becomes possible. The creature is a bitter reminder of the loss of an organic relationship that can eradicate inequality, the root cause of environmental woes. This relationship also possesses the ability to grant us all equality in a connective network where humans and nonhumans become equally and constructively involved in one another's fate.

The creature's behaviour is the perfect model for a new reconceptualization of nature. Nature is an unpredictable agent. It is an ambivalent phenomenon which is both the nurturing mother and also the exterminating angel of death. The creature is a similarly unpredictable entity which is metamorphosed from a meek, love-seeking being to a blood-thirsty avenging monster. The creature's unpredictability, along with the fact that he is a mixture of human and nonhuman, makes him an apt metaphor for nature. For this very reason Morton also calls the creature a "visible reincarnation of environmentality itself" (*Frankenstein* 156) as it is an amorphous phenomenon. This state of flux brings a certain degree of flexibility which permits the creature to be adaptable in response to its environment. This flexibility is also evident in its responses and reactions towards events. The hybridity of the cyborg creature enables it to be an appropriate symbol for creating a new discourse or a new onto-tale for nature and response to environmental problems (Aretoulakis 188). Carolyn Merchant also uses chaos theory to highlight the malleability of the concept of nature and how humans should conceive of it. She believes that this theory

. . . destabilizes the very concept of nature as a standard or referent. It disrupts the idea of the 'balance of nature,' of nature as resilient actor or mother who will repair the errors of human actors and continue as fecund garden (Eve as mother). It questions the possibility that humans as agents can control and master nature through science and technology, undermining the myth of nature as virgin female to be developed (Eve as

virgin). Chaos is the re-emergence of nature as power over humans, nature as active, dark, wild, turbulent, and uncontrollable (fallen Eve) (“Recovery Narrative” 156-7).

This is a testimony to the unpredictable and indomitable quality of nature. This fresh perspective on nature also accentuates the fact that nature is not at all what it was previously assumed to be. It has ceased to be the powerless ground for human intervention and exploitation. It can react to how it is transformed by humans and these reactions may, at times, be radical. In this sense the creature, by representing this particular quality of nature, becomes a “nature-culture hybrid. . . . upon [whose] palimpsestic body is written the story of human presence on earth” (Noble 130). Therefore, the creature is an inscription of our involvement or –intra-action with the Earth. Nature’s resilience has currently taken its toll on nations and their populations who are deeply affected by dramatic ecological changes and resultant economic and political plights. It is noteworthy that Mary Shelley lived in a time which gave rise to many industrial and economic changes in society which altered the social fabric of life. It was also a time which we now recognise as the beginning of the Anthropocene, which heralded a new geological Era. Given all of the environmental history that was coterminous with Shelley’s life, reading her novels, especially *Frankenstein*, from an ecological perspective, makes more sense and can offer fresh insights. Victor’s meddling in nature and the resultant creature, as the embodiment of an agentic nature, affect the lives of people adversely. However, Shelley refuses to punish humanity at large for Victor’s transgression. By contrast, Shelley’s next novel, *The Last Man*, completes what *Frankenstein* hints at: the destruction of the whole human species as a result of an environmental disaster. In the next chapter, I will analyse *The Last Man* from this perspective and discuss how it points towards the era of the Anthropocene.

## **6. *The Last Man*: Global Eco-Catastrophe**

## 6.1 Patriarchal Imperialism: Colonized Nature and Naturalized Women

Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) contains all of the key elements that qualify a novel as climate fiction. The book is a multilayered response not only to the intellectual issues of its time, but also to complex relations that lie at the heart of the nature/culture dyad. This is demonstrated in the intersections between ecology and imperialism, and between domestic and political spheres, plus the relationship between humans and animals. After nearly two centuries, the novel still echoes with ecologically-related forces that blight our modern life. Forced mass immigration, gender inequality, imperialism, social inequality, disease, and ideological wars are all vividly and intricately sketched in *The Last Man*. It is a science fiction novel set in the future which draws on an apocalyptic end-of-the-world scenario in which Lionel, the last of the human race, and his dog companion, desperately search for other human survivors of a plague that has obliterated the human race. It goes beyond depicting a mere doomsday story and instead draws a complex web of events which looks towards what Jonathan Bate calls the "Global Warming paradigm" ("Living" 438). Global warming criticism encompasses a wide geographical scale in its focus, rather than being confined to one locality, and weaves together issues such as imperialism and ecology (438). In a sense, *The Last Man* is a perfect specimen of climate fiction which speaks intelligently on a broad range of issues and clearly foreshadows global warming criticism. Furthermore, its focus on nature and women anticipates the contemporary concerns of ecofeminists, as they trace the roots of gender inequality back to an ideological mindset that has sundered male from female and culture from nature, resulting in a series of ecological woes. The portrayal of men and women, in tandem with the effects of their interrelation with nature, is a poignant feature of Shelley's art. The novel sketches a triad of men on the one side and a triad of women on the other whose actions lead to the rise of an all-annihilating plague, symbolizing the eruption of feminine power and also the agency of nature in the face of a domineering patriarchal imperialism. The

plague breaks out after the curse of Evadne, a marginalized woman, which in consort with meteorological changes almost erases the human species from the earth.

The three-volume novel presents England in the twenty-first century where it had a smooth transition from monarchy to a republic. However, the transition is ruffled as domestic and political stability is interrupted by war. The wide-ranging effect of the war creates a series of catastrophes that obliterates all humanity except for Lionel Verney, the novel's narrator, left alone in search of the remnants of his species. In the first volume, the social cohesion of the 'ship of the state', a reference to England, is realized at the cost of patriarchal domination of both women and nature. The undercurrents of colonizing nature in order to establish humanity's superiority cannot be missed at the outset of the novel where Lionel Verney introduces himself:

I AM the native of a sea-surrounded nook, a cloud-enshadowed land, which, . . . when balanced in the scale of mental power, far outweighed countries of larger extent and more numerous population. So true it is, that man's mind alone was the creator of all that was good or great to man, and that Nature herself was only his first minister. England, seated far north in the turbid sea, now visits my dreams in the semblance of a vast and well-manned ship, which mastered the winds and rode proudly over the waves. In my boyish days she was the universe to me. When I stood on my native hills, and saw plain and mountain stretch out to the utmost limits of my vision, speckled by the dwellings of my countrymen, and subdued to fertility by their labours, the earth's very centre was fixed for me in that spot, and the rest of her orb was as a fable (Shelley 9).

The vision of England is that of stability at the centre of the world, akin to a 'well-manned ship' asserting its command over turbulent waters. However, this "mental mastery, inviolable insularity, [and] self-sufficient centrality" (Johnson, "*Last Man*" 265) are underpinned by a logic which assumes control and authority over whatever falls under the gaze of the spectator. Kate Rigby analyses the scene in terms of constructed dualities such as land/sea, domesticated

land/wilderness, man's mind/nature's matter, all of which render humans sovereign over nature. Rigby finds a totalizing masculine mindset which is "ethnocentric, androcentric, logocentric, and anthropocentric" (*Dancing* 73). The constructed dualities perpetuate the notion of man's intellectual superiority over undomesticated nature. The opening of the novel attests to the power of human faculty in asserting its dominion over nature. It is a portrayal of man standing at the apex of his sovereignty.

The image of victory over nature is further reinforced by the other principal male character, Adrian, who takes it upon himself to educate Lionel, the noble savage of the novel (Morton, *Revolution* 50), who is the only male character that is conflated with nature rather than culture. He is an uncouth man living away from society because of the grudge he holds against the reigning nobility for neglecting his father, leaving him in an impoverished state until he meets Adrian, the late king's son. Adrian, the embodiment of nobility and culture, opens the doors of society to Lionel. He is described "as both a civilizing and a climatic force" (Bewell 303), akin to a breeze which blows away Lionel's savagery. Upon discovering the true identity of Lionel, as the son of his father's best friend, Adrian takes it upon himself to transform his life and teach him the best of human culture. Lionel is gripped by a fascination for knowledge which occupies all of his time in a quest of knowledge: "I was already well acquainted with what I may term the panorama of nature, the change of seasons, and the various appearances of heaven and earth. But I was at once startled and enchanted by my sudden extension of vision, when the curtain, which had been drawn before the intellectual world, was withdrawn, and I saw the universe" (Shelley 31). This excerpt explicitly expresses the idea that nature is akin to a curtain obscuring his wisdom and knowledge. In order to enter into a brave new world of civilization he must, therefore, push 'the curtain' aside.

Adrian, who symbolizes culture, is deemed to be a savior. It is he who transforms Lionel, the force of nature, from an animal into a human: "I now began to be human. I was admitted within that sacred boundary which divides the intellectual and moral nature of man

from that which characterizes animals” (29). Therefore, the dichotomy of nature and culture is established by Lionel and Adrian in which Adrian is the superior force educating and taking over brute nature. Lionel and Adrian form a dyad which reflects Val Plumwood’s notion of the “logic of colonization”. This logic is based on division, that creates “radical exclusion, not merely separation but hyperseparation” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 49). The separation also leads to the prioritization of one side over the other who has been relegated to the non-representational status of “non-identity or otherness” (49). It is a master/slave relationship (61) where one exerts its power over the other to colonize and exploit it. In a similar vein, the benevolent Adrian finds a savage in the wilderness and makes an obedient servant out of him as Lionel shows himself to be the most loyal companion to Adrian. Lionel needs to domesticate his uncouth and brutish ways to be worthy of his friend/colonial master. As a subaltern he passively, but willingly, adopts his master’s teachings. This is a reversal of the narrative of Frankenstein’s monster, whose attempts to enter the human community through education fail due to his appearance. He was thus forced to remain an animal in order for humans to retain their human subjectivity because “it relies on a tacit acceptance . . . that the full transcendence of the ‘human’ requires the sacrifice of the ‘animal’” (Wolfe 43). However, Lionel’s transformation is an ascent from nature to culture, from the realm of the senses to that of human faculty (Lynch 8), from animal to human. Therefore, Lionel’s entry into the league of governing men is realized by domesticating/colonizing the other, or nature. This process best exemplifies the ‘logic of colonization’<sup>34</sup> (Plumwood, *Feminism* 49), which leads to the creation of exploitable “subordinate identities” (61). Lionel and nature are both subordinate materials, harnessed by Adrian.<sup>35</sup>

Lionel’s reward for his acculturation is marriage with Adrian’s sister, Idris. Having secured a high position in the court, Lionel seeks to marry Idris, much to the dissatisfaction of her mother, the ex-queen who plots to stop the marriage by kidnapping Idris. However, Idris

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<sup>34</sup> This idea is similar to Karen Warren’s idea of ‘logic of domination’.

<sup>35</sup> Kilgour argues that some early readers would find Lionel to be “too feminine” (“Immortality” 571). Indeed, Lionel is portrayed as a follower, an obedient servant, who is not as assertive as either Adrian or Raymond.

discovers her mother's schemes and runs to Lionel in a fit of madness seeking safety. Lionel's heroic act to restore Idris to sanity veritably buttresses his new position within the patriarchal circle. He becomes an agentive man who has exercised his status as a superior saviour, and, thus, truly earns her; Idris is now the other, in the male/female dyad (Goldsmith 146) who has been captured by Lionel as his trophy for living up to a patriarchal standard. Women such as, Idris and Lionel's sister Perdita, are totally left out of any consideration in terms of being educated like Lionel is. They will have to remain situated as 'the other' and be domesticated in order to consolidate a sense of ideal manhood for others. Lionel along with his wife, Adrian, and Perdita with her husband Raymond, settle in the utopian Windsor Castle where they never separate except for when men decide "to discuss the affairs of nations, and the philosophy of life" (Shelley 90). The exclusion of women from politics is what undermines the foundation of this insecure utopia as women are left out of the political public sphere almost as if to suggest that the 'affairs of nations and the philosophy of life' are too abstruse for Idris and Perdita to be privy to. Women are domesticated by men as Lionel's "ecological identity" (Vicky Adams, "Discourse" 109) was domesticated by Adrian.

The exclusion of women is indicative of the superimposition of culture over nature which is reminiscent of Sherry Ortner's classic argument that in patriarchal societies, women's imposed identification with nature leads to their exclusion from the public sphere. This is another example of the 'logic of colonization' that perpetuates a "masculine ideal of self-presence, universalized as identity itself" (Goldsmith 137) leading to the subordination of the feminine, and subsequently nature. In this regard, Adrian's mastery over Lionel sets the ground for a systematic series of conquests, including those of men over women and culture over nature, in order to establish a working system of patriarchal government. Accordingly, Adrian refers to England as "the triumph of man. . . . a ragged canvas naturally painted by man with alien colors" (Shelley 323). England has only become England by casting a beautiful canopy of flamboyant color over the ragged canvas of nature. The greatness of this place is

guaranteed by men who domesticate and colonize the other, be it nature or women. This is indicated by Lionel's education through Adrian's civilizing dynamism, such that "the same social forces that transformed the English landscape, have also transformed its people" (Bewell 302). The construction of this utopia is underpinned by the exclusion of elements which are deemed to be deleterious in the eyes of men.

The bond between the male characters in *The Last Man* creates an axis from which the main action and catastrophes also emanate. The fact of the matter is that "male friendship becomes the centerpiece . . . of the collapse of human civilization" (Haggerty 233). The allegedly utopian plans of Adrian, Raymond, and even Lionel eventually initiate the catastrophic epidemic which causes the near-annihilation of the human race and civilization. At the centre of the male bond stands Raymond, a valiant military adventurer, and a war hero in Greece helping their cause against Turks. He is an emblematic figure in the construction of a utopian social order founded on gender inequality, and the domestication of nature. He is the unequivocal symbol of imperialism and colonialism, as he seeks to become the "King of England . . . unite with the Greeks, take Constantinople, and subdue all Asia. . . [he] intend[s] to be a warrior, a conqueror [like] Napoleon" (Shelley 57-8). His imperialistic ambitions are coupled with his belief that the world is his raw material that can be manipulated at will, since "he looked on the structure of society as but a part of the machinery which supported the web on which his life was traced. The earth was spread out as an highway for him; the heavens built up as a canopy for him" (45). His belief in the mechanistic nature of society has assured him that people are only cogs and wheels in machinery that he can turn and twist to get the desired results. He personifies a Cartesian mindset that looks upon the vibrant world as lifeless matter to be dominated, domesticated, and conquered. He even holds the same idea about women as he entertains the thought of marrying princess Idris only to facilitate his path to becoming a king.

Raymond's obsession with winning and conquering earns him the position of Lord Protector of England. Upon becoming the Lord Protector, he initiates a series of plans to improve the quality of life in London and boost commerce. His plans are a manifestation of his mechanistic notion of nature and society as he had

. . . a thousand beneficial schemes. Canals, aqueducts, bridges, stately buildings, and various edifices for public utility, were entered upon; he was continually surrounded by projectors and projects, which were to render England one scene of fertility and magnificence; the state of poverty was to be abolished; men were to be transported from place to place almost with the same facility as the Princes Houssain, Ali, and Ahmed, in the *Arabian Nights*. . . disease was to be banished; labour lightened of its heaviest burden. . . the discoveries of science had augmented in a ratio which left all calculation behind; food sprung up, so to say, spontaneously—machines existed to supply with facility every want of the population. . . Raymond was to inspire [people] with his beneficial will, and the mechanism of society, once systematised according to faultless rules, would never again swerve into disorder (106).

Raymond is a Cartesian figure whose plans are comparable to Enlightenment projects and Newtonian mechanistic science intended to harness nature for the benefit of humans. He perceives society as an automaton, which can be manipulated to bring about the optimum output. He assumes that science and technology can eradicate poverty and disease to bring about a utopia under his Protectorship. However, the unfeasibility of his plans is evinced by the allusion to the three princes in the *Arabian Nights* which “consign[s] such projects to the realm of pure fantasy” (Canuel 157). The conceited Raymond envisages the city to be a malleable entity that can be molded to create a utopia, but the reality of society proves him wrong. On a secret visit to Evadne, the woman who was once in love with him, he encounters a section of the city marked by “poverty, dirt, and squalid misery” (Shelley 108), making him admit that his projects are far from reality. His plans for the improvement of the public sphere also make him negligent of his domestic realm and the “territory of his own heart escape[s] his

notice” (117). His obsession with work and his increasing visits to Evadne damage his relationship with his wife, Perdita. What strikes at his empire is the very entity that he tries to dominate: nature. Nature’s curse, in the form of a plague, is characterized in the novel as feminine and rises up to seek revenge.

Adrian serves as the benevolent face of patriarchy who is more altruistic than Raymond. He feels he is a part of a larger web of connections as he has a holistic regard for nature and society. In contrast with Raymond, “Adrian felt that he made a part of a great whole. He owned affinity not only with mankind, but all nature was akin to him; the mountains and sky were his friends; the winds of heaven and the offspring of earth his playmates; while he . . . felt his life mingle with the universe of existence” (45). Nevertheless, the philanthropist Adrian and the egocentric Raymond share a great deal in common. They both harbor the same ideas about the progress of humans. Adrian holds some idealistic views towards his utopia as well:

And all ye happy nurslings of mother-earth, do ye not echo my words....Oh, that death and sickness were banished from our earthly home. . . . O Earth, . . . The choice is with us; let us will it, and our habitation becomes a paradise. For the will of man is omnipotent, blunting the arrows of death, soothing the bed of disease, and wiping away the tears of agony (76).

Adrian also deems poverty and disease to be the same social ills that need to be eradicated in order to expedite the creation of his earthly paradise. His political idealism and utopic visions betray his earlier assertion of his allegiance to nature, as his utopia smacks of a selfish anthropocentrism that deems the outer world to be exploitable material to improve human life. Nature as passive matter is only there to serve humanity to prosper.

Furthermore, Adrian’s remarks about humans’ faculty of mind and nature contradict his professed affinity with his natural environment: “Look into the mind of man, where wisdom reigns enthroned; where imagination, the painter, sits, with his pencil dipt in hues lovelier than

those of sunset, adorning familiar life with glowing tints [which]. . . . beckons us from the sterile seas of life, to her gardens, and bowers, and glades of bliss” (Shelley 75). Nature is merely ‘sterile’ unless it is colored and revitalized with the power of the human imagination. Adrian clearly draws a line between the realm of the mind and that of the senses affiliated with nature. This passage actually serves as the theoretical foundation of his actions throughout the narrative, as revealed in his education of Lionel whom he turns from a noble savage to a diplomat. Adrian also sees nature as a convenient highway to achieve human prosperity and progress. In effect, “Adrian’s ecocentric and Raymond’s egocentric understanding of nature” (Vicky Adams “Discourse” 118) are revealed to be two sides of the same coin which puts nature at the disposal of human progress. In this regard, Adrian’s “use of natural imagery to negate physical reality of nature” (Hutchings, “Phantasmagoria” 232) becomes highly hypocritical despite his taking those social measures in good faith.

The myth of a “paradisiacal telos” (234) through the eradication of poverty and disease is further exposed “by the comical characterization of Merrival” (Wagner-Lawlor 761), the court astronomer, who is presented as a comical parallel to the male leaders. His fantastical visions of the future echo those of Raymond and Adrian as he predicts the coming of a ‘universal spring’ prior to the creation of an earthly ‘paradise’. Merrival parallels the male leaders in his neglect of his family, and only becomes aware of them once they have succumbed to the plague. Raymond, Lionel, and Adrian are similarly marked by excluding women and family (domesticity/nature) from the political sphere, which eventually paves the way towards the rise of the plague. Additionally, the incapacity of male leaders is reflected in the portrayal of the imposter prophet who is “a near parody of the political leadership of Raymond, Adrian, and Ryland” (Fisch 277). The imposter prophet, who exploits the fear of the people in order to rule over them, employs a similar rhetoric to that of other benevolent leaders of the republic. The prophet deploys “prophetic modes of discourses [associated with] .

. . pastoral, prophecy, and conscience” (Hutchings, “Phantasmagoria” 235) which aligns him with Raymond and Adrian whose rhetoric similarly promises an idyllic pastoral paradise.

Ironically, Ryland, who serves as the Lord Protector for a short time, sees through the naiveté of Adrian and Raymond’s vision. Despite his egoism, he understands that the plight of humanity on earth is humanity itself: “Be assured that earth is not, nor ever can be heaven. . . . When the air breeds no disorders, when its surface is no longer liable to blights and droughts, then sickness will cease; when men’s passions are dead, poverty will depart” (Shelley 219-20). Adrian and Raymond’s vision of a utopia is indeed myopic but Ryland, with all his shortcomings, is the only figure who realizes that man’s greed is an obstacle to an earthly paradise. In effect, the incompetent Ryland presents “a precise and succinct summary of the forces, both natural and human, that doom the human race” (Lokke 130). The eradication of disease, poverty, and inequality is not attainable unless the deific stand of humans is questioned and perceived to be a part of the problem. The plague is unleashed as a result of humans’ anthropocentric actions which, instead of establishing a utopic republic of equality, bring about a dystopic society of death and misery. Raymond and Adrian’s illusory social order is a result of harnessing/colonizing nature and excluding women, thus elevating the patriarchal ideal of a politics which is founded on the noble faculty of man’s mind. Nevertheless, such a social order is an untenable one as excluding the other can lead to catastrophic repercussions.

## 6.2 Plague: Resurgence of Female Agency

The social order that prevails in England in *The Last Man* is achieved at the cost of a precarious male leadership whose ideological underpinnings are based on two principles: women's non-participation in political and public affairs and the manipulation and control of the environment to render the most suitable conditions for a utopia. Adrian and Raymond endeavor to eliminate disease and poverty through their plans to transform London, and conquer Constantinople to enhance trade with other nations. They construe nature as a passive, but rich resource which can be controlled through human faculty and intellect. They, in effect, colonize nature and position themselves as superior in relation to it on the basis of their rationality. Indeed, the faculty of reason allows them to assign to themselves what Plumwood would call a 'master identity' based on "multiple exclusions, and . . . domination not only of the feminine but also . . . of the natural" (*Feminism* 72). The 'master self' creates binaries of the self and the other in which the former is the master and the latter the slave that must be dominated and domesticated. Adrian's education of Lionel plus Raymond's plans for London exemplify this logic which excludes women and makes nature an exploitable resource for the improvement of human life. This process completely marginalizes women as they are part of the series of exclusions in the creation of men's utopia. However, their precarious estate is riddled with motifs of doom and the appointment of Raymond as the Lord Protector unleashes the dormant power of an exploited feminine nature to reclaim its lost territory.

The collapse of utopia is directly linked with both Evadne and Perdita, two of the most prominent women who were given little opportunity to realize their potentials. The initial sense of doom is perceived by Perdita after she and Raymond move to London for Raymond's new position. She, who is married to the most powerful man in England, is weak in her domestic realm, but very sagacious. While everyone is joyous over Raymond's success, she is "fearful that some evil would betide them. . . . A presentiment of ill hung over her" (Shelley 93). She embodies "a female voice that fractures the myth of (male) unity under Raymond"

(Fisch 274). Her premonition reveals “the conflict between familial harmony and the pursuit of masculine ambitions” (Banerjee 521). Additionally, she is cognizant that Raymond is an adventurist war hero whose newly gained power may not be easily reconciled with a domestic life.

The second sign of doom is Evadne’s return and her reunion with Raymond, who was once in love with her. Evadne’s residence in London is in a state of squalor, which exposes the unfeasibility of Raymond’s plans to banish poverty and disease from London. Ironically, a moral disease which Raymond contracts from his secret visits to Evadne affects his pure soul “which fades and shrinks from every contagion of foul atmosphere. . . . now the contagion had become incorporated with its essence” (Shelley 127). Therefore, Evadne is equated with the devastating power of a disease that “infects Raymond’s thoughts [and] his marriage” (Melville, *Hospitality* 159). The breakdown of domestic harmony triggers the collapse of Raymond’s political life and his venture into war which leads to the catastrophic epidemic. Such a level of interconnectedness reveals that the domestic domain cannot be separated from politics and nature. This is further emphasized when Perdita extends her sense of doom and melancholy to the whole humanity heralding their destruction (Webb 121). She does so by comparing Raymond’s perfidy with unusual natural events, as she observes that “the face of the eternal heavens is altered. The silly moon and inconstant planets vary nightly their erratic dance; the sun itself, sovereign of the sky, ever and anon deserts his throne, and leaves his dominion to night and winter. Nature grows old, and shakes in her decaying limbs,--creation has become bankrupt!” (Shelley 135-6). The natural imagery is a prophecy of the ravaging epidemic which will soon be unleashed on humans. The ominous changes in nature reflect the declining established social order that Raymond and other male leaders had created. The disruption of an ecological balance has led to such unusual events. Perdita expresses “her suffering as global catastrophe” (Bailes 689), thus conflating her grievance with natural disasters such as the plague that undoes men’s achievement.

Raymond's involvement with Evadne had already embittered his happiness with Perdita and had equally affected his duties towards his people as their Protector. This ruins Raymond's benevolent plans for the improvement of the general welfare of the state. The consequence of his failure in both domestic and political spheres precipitates a reversion to his original self – that of the conquering military hero. He admits his own inability to lead a nation and yearns “to become a soldier, perhaps a conqueror” (Shelley 153). Raymond feels he has been emasculated by his failure in politics and marital life and, therefore, the only way to reclaim his enfeebled chauvinist masculinity is to launch his career in military glory once again. Fisch also argues along the same lines when she maintains that Raymond's involvement in the Greek cause is “an attempt to reinstate coherent male selfhood” (275), which had been jeopardized by both Perdita and Evadne. The linkage between the collapse of the domestic and the spread of disease is poignantly perceived and announced by Perdita who is the first to feel alarmed by this prospect: “One word, in truth, had alarmed her more than battles or sieges. . . . That word . . . was PLAGUE. This enemy to the human race” (Shelley 174-5). She is literally the first person to warn others of the fatal consequences of men's exploitations. Perdita's prediction hints at the notion that the ravaging epidemic becomes a symbolic manifestation of women's frustration and exclusion.

Evadne is also linked with the plague epidemic and serves as an expression of resistance to patriarchy. She epitomizes the “transgression of boundaries” (Cove 31) in the sense that she occupies many positions traditionally held by men. She is an impoverished Greek princess, who is the secret architect of Raymond's National Gallery and his secret lover, too. She also fights in the Greek war disguised as a male. In all the roles she assumes, she launches a crusade against masculinity and is perceived as a menace to the men's republic, and thus is perpetually foreign, other, and an outsider (Goldsmith 148), who functions as the “moral contagion that is undermining British society” (Bewell 299). Courted by Adrian, she is given an opportunity to be cultivated and assimilated into British society but, unlike Lionel, she

refuses to succumb to Adrian's humanizing influence. She refuses to be tamed, domesticated and colonized by Adrian and serve as his domestic wife/servant. Instead, she opts for the megalomaniac Raymond with whom she identifies. She is the unconquerable feminine spirit that cannot be colonized, and asserts her power against its colonial masters by defying their wills. She is depicted "almost as mysterious, powerful, and paradoxical as the devastating disease itself" (An 592). She is the disease itself, as she is presented first as a moral contagion, and then in her moments of death as the prophetess whose dying words bring a curse on Raymond, catalyzing the spread of the disease. The lovelorn Evadne utters the following words before she dies:

'This is the end of love!--Yet not the end!'— and frenzy lent her strength as she cast her arm up to heaven: 'there is the end! there we meet again. Many living deaths have I borne for thee, O Raymond, and now I expire, thy victim!--By my death I purchase thee— lo! the instruments of war, fire, the plague are my servitors. I dared, I conquered them all, till now! I have sold myself to death, with the sole condition that thou shouldst follow me—Fire, and war, and plague, unite for thy destruction—O my Raymond, there is no safety for thee! (Shelley 181).

Her curse is a harbinger of the "apocalyptic visitations" (Paley 115) which will affect all humanity in its course. Raymond perceives the reality of her curse before charging into Stamboul: "Fire, the sword, and plague! They may all be found in yonder city; on my head alone may they fall" (Shelley 184-5). Raymond is already symbolically affected by Evadne's curse as his health deteriorates, he loses his charismatic command over his army, and becomes maniacally obsessed with conquering Constantinople, in order to place a cross on the dome of St. Sophia and symbolically reclaim his undermined masculinity. All these signs point to the fact that Evadne's curse was akin to a contagious disease. McWhir also argues that words operate similarly to a contagious disease and Raymond, "cursed by his former lover, Evadne, believes that he is already infected" (27). Evadne is, thus, aptly associated with the incarnation of the "death drive" (Lokke 120) as she brings death to the patriarchal order.

The onset of the plague is marked with Raymond's "fatal entrance" into the city of Constantinople. Goldsmith aptly highlights the identification of the city with a woman as the soldiers "looked on her as certain prey" (Shelley 182), and the oriental connotations of the city as the cradle of sensual delights reinforces such an identification. Raymond is the epitome of "male ego" (Goldsmith 152), a phallic symbol, who, "pointing with his sword to the gates of the city" (Shelley 192), urges his soldiers to "force the gates; enter and possess" (192) the delightful spoils of Constantinople. Such imagery and language are characteristic of Raymond, who is consumed with the idea of conquering and, in line with his egocentric patriarchal ego, the conquest of Constantinople is a reclamation of his endangered masculinity. This metaphor also echoes Victor Frankenstein's view towards a feminized notion of nature which is to be raped, domesticated, and possessed by men of intellect. However, Raymond's penetration of Stamboul turns out to be the fulfilment of Evadne's curse and nothing but fire, sword and plague await him there as an explosion occurs as he enters the city:

A crash was heard. Thunderlike it reverberated through the sky, while the air was darkened. . . . fragments of buildings whirled above, half seen in smoke, while flames burst out beneath, and continued explosions filled the air with terrific thunders. . . . all I could discern within the precincts of the massive walls was a city of fire: the open way through which Raymond had ridden was enveloped in smoke and flame. After an interval the explosions ceased, but the flames still shot up from various quarters; the dome of St. Sophia had disappeared (198-9).

The fulfilment of Evadne's prophecy accentuates the fact that the feminine city has vicarious vengeance on behalf of a suppressed femininity, which parallels the vengeance that nature similarly wreaks in *Frankenstein*. Evadne, in actuality, signifies "the deadly silent yet attractive city of Constantinople. . . . [which] would emasculate its new master as it had done to many other warlike conquerors in the past" (Lew 277). Raymond's dream to put the cross on St. Sophia's dome is shattered when the dome collapses, crushing him under the debris.

The fall of the dome, triggered by Raymond's charge into the city, initiates the plague epidemic and Raymond becomes the first symbolic victim of the disease as he becomes the bearer of the pestilence. This dramatic turn of events is revealed to Lionel in a dream after he enters the city to retrieve Raymond's body:

Methought I had been invited to Timon's last feast; I came with keen appetite, the covers were removed, the hot water sent up its unsatisfying steams, while I fled before the anger of the host, who assumed the form of Raymond; while to my diseased fancy, the vessels hurled by him after me, were surcharged with fetid vapour, and my friend's shape, altered by a thousand distortions, expanded into a gigantic phantom, bearing on its brow the sign of pestilence (Shelley 202).

The dream serves as a complex image with several interconnected images which all link masculinity to the rise of the disease. Raymond appears as a threatening monster hurling vessels at Lionel and releasing poisonous vapors into the world. This "nightmarish image of global contamination" (Melville, "Immunity" 838) points towards the connection between the rise of the epidemic and the excessive patriarchal ambition symbolized by Raymond (Snyder 440), as his anger releases the 'fetid vapor' into the air. Raymond's megalomania is responsible for the global epidemic as his charge into the plague-ridden city causes its explosion and the subsequent spread of 'fetid vapor' by winds. It is from this moment on that the plague ravages human species as Evadne's curse had envisioned. The outbreak of the plague also reverses the anthropocentric agency of humans and "instead of human agents controlling the story, the plague controls it" (An 586). Humans are pitched against the indiscriminate power of the plague as it spreads across the globe, blurring the human-made borders and devastating the landmarks of humanity. Ironically, the plague accomplishes the very thing that Raymond failed to do; to conquer and subdue the world (Tarr 150). The presence of plague as the dominant agentive entity in the novel dwarfs the anthropocentrism of humans as their measures against the disease prove futile and their glorious accomplishments fall, one after the other. Humans' disruption of the balance of nature, in

terms of military expansionism,<sup>36</sup> makes nature react to redress the balance by asserting its agency in the form of an all-consuming epidemic. In effect, nature frustrates humans' attempt to gain mastery over it by annihilating them and ironically, as we shall see in the next section, the nonhuman species and plant life seem to prosper and grow in abundance in the absence of humans. Nature prospers as humans decline, signaling the complicity of humans in the exploitation of nature.

The plague is also a feminine expression of rebellion against women's repression in the patriarchal, political, and social sphere. Iris, Perdita, and Evadne have been stripped of both agency and opportunity to perform in the public sphere. For instance, the death of Evadne leaves us wondering "what would have been her fate had her passion and ambition found expression in artistic or architectural endeavor" (Lokke 127). Idris is likewise prevented by Lionel from being an active social worker in times of emergency and is confined to being an ideal mother. Perdita also laments that she cannot have a career like her husband which could have partially alleviated her pain at being betrayed. In this context, the plague is also explicitly gendered female and referred to as 'she' and is identified as a queen who after seven years of ravaging humans "abdicated her throne, and despoiled herself of her imperial scepter" (Shelley 426). The epidemic is "a destructive and vengeful 'return of the repressed'. . . symboliz[ing] the eruption of pent-up female discontents" (Aaron 17). It is the manifestation of female agency that had been rendered passive by a male system and returns to seek vengeance. It is a reminder of the destructive consequences of repressing and colonizing the other (women and nature).

The relevance of plague to ecological exploitation is emphasized when one notes that the epidemic occurs in consort with odd natural events. As the plague is beginning to take its toll on humans, a solar eclipse takes place: "a black sun arose: an orb, the size of that luminary,

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<sup>36</sup> Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* details the deleterious effects of war on the environment.

but dark, defined, whose beams were shadows. . . . and eclipsed the bright parent of day. Night fell upon every country, night, sudden, rayless, entire” (Shelley 224). This account of the eclipse aligns with Perdita’s description of her husband’s infidelity where the collapse of the domestic sphere was likened to “the sun itself . . . desert[ing] his throne” (135). Therefore, Perdita’s melancholy, expressed through natural imagery, crystalizes in the form of a real eclipse which serves as an ominous herald of plague, the eruption of feminine power. This is an ingenious integration of ecology, politics, and women’s situation which are all interrelated in *The Last Man*. The negligence and repression of women on the one hand, and Raymond’s failure in politics on the other, lead to a war in which all of these grievances converge. This, in turn, triggers a global epidemic along with natural disasters that eradicate the human species from the earth.

In effect, plague is an amalgam of “divine punishment and man-made disaster” (Gomel 407) which redresses the disturbed balance of nature. It is as “an emblem of social justice carried out on a global scale” (Hutchings, “Phantasmagoria” 238). The global scale of devastation renders the world devoid of inhabitants, but in reality Shelley envisages a world without women in order to accentuate “the injustice of an actual present world in which they are merely controlled, marginalized and subordinated” (Eberle-Sinatra 100). The plague is Shelley’s anger directed against passive femininity and oppressive masculinity which upset not only the domestic and political balance of society, but also the ecological balance of the world. This vision reverberates with *Frankenstein* as well, in the sense that the Victor creates life by thwarting the reproductive role of women and transgressing boundaries, an act which gradually leads to his destruction (107). *The Last Man* is similarly a story of a global destruction as a result of transgressions against both nature and women. In both stories it is nature that points towards man’s responsibility in creating disasters.

### 6.3 Anthropocene and Pollution

*The Last Man* is a stunningly modern novel which foreshadows myriad issues in contemporary discussions on environmental changes and how they affect human welfare. Such discussions also carry greater implications about the role of humans in the transformation of their ecosystem. Whether Mary Shelley wittingly intended her novel to voice environmental concerns or not is unknown, but there is ample evidence that in Shelley's time there was a nascent understanding about the impact humans exerted on their environment. Shelley's life time was also contemporaneous with the beginning of atmospheric changes which today we know as the 'Anthropocene'.

'Anthropocene' has become one of the most prevalent terms in environmental literature and has recently emerged in public and political discourses. It has entered social sciences and humanities as well. The term refers to a new geological epoch where humans have had the most discernible effects on their environment. Embedded in this phenomenon are a range of pressing issues that the world is currently struggling with, such as the rise of pollution in the atmosphere, the growth of anthropogenic environmentally induced violence, mass migration, species extinctions, gender and social inequality, and the damaging aftermath of modernization. Remarkably, *The Last Man*, written about two centuries ago, engages with all these topics which make the novel a dazzling tapestry in which discourses on the environment, politics, gender, power, modernity, and war are interwoven. Indeed, Shelley's work can be described as a cogent depiction of the symptoms of Anthropocene conditions.

The term Anthropocene was officially introduced by the Nobel Prize winner Paul J. Crutzen in 2000. According to him, human impact on the environment has become so great that it has ushered in a new geological epoch superseding the previous one known as 'Holocene'. Holocene refers to the past 11,700 years of the earth's history marked by stability and sustainability in the global ecosystem which was a crucial driver of the development of

human civilization (Zalasiewicz et al. 5). The recent changes in atmosphere and ecosystem have alarmingly turned into existential threats to both humans and nonhumans, which may render life on earth impossible in the near future. The concept of Anthropocene is described by Crutzen as such:

For the past three centuries, the effects of humans on the global environment have escalated. Because of these anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide, global climate may depart significantly from natural behaviour for many millennia to come. It seems appropriate to assign the term ‘Anthropocene’ to the present, in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene — the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia. The Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt’s design of the steam engine in 1784 (Crutzen 23).

One aspect that stands out in this description is the role humans have played in such radical transformations which started around the end of the eighteenth century and continued with the Industrial Revolution up to the middle of the twentieth century; this stage of the Anthropocene is known as The Industrial era or stage 1, followed by stage 2 known as The Great Acceleration, from 1945 up to the present. Stage 2 is marked by a two-fold increase in global population and growth in the global economy which expedited the unprecedented pace of adverse changes in the earth’s ecosystem caused by humans (Steffen et al. “Humans” 616-7). Anthropocene has yet to be officially chosen as a new Geological Time Scale but after years of studying and analyzing data, the Working Group on Anthropocene (WGA), which is comprised of geologists and scientists, gathered in the International Geological Congress in Cape Town on August 28<sup>th</sup> 2016 and officially proposed that Anthropocene be named as a new epoch (Carrington). However, the formal decision has yet to be made by the International Commission on Stratigraphy.

Climate change and its consequences comprise a vast part of the Anthropocene phenomenon. The publication of *The Last Man* in 1826 coincides with an increasing awareness of atmospheric changes, or air pollution to be more precise. The issue of air pollution was not an unknown problem to Londoners. According to Whitehead, concerns over the quality of air existed as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century, indicated by ‘the 1307 Royal Proclamation’ which imposed restrictions on the unchecked consumption of air pollutants such as sea coal (Whitehead 134). The most explicit expression of concern about air pollution was John Evelyn’s *Fumifugium* in 1661 which described London as “cloaked in such a cloud of sea-coal . . . it is in this volcano in a foggy day: this pestilential smoke which corrodes the very iron, and spoils all the moveables, leaving a soot on all things that it lights: and so fatally seizing on the lungs of the inhabitants, that cough and consumption spare no man” (qtd. in McNeill 57). Evelyn laments the adverse effects of air pollution on the general population and puts forth a solution by encouraging more plantation around the city of London.

In the 1820s, scientists like Joseph Fourier also warned of an environmental menace which we now recognize as the greenhouse effect (Clapp 23). Percy Shelley was also acquainted with the poor air quality in London by referring to it as a polluted city in his “Peter Bell the Third”: “Hell is a city much like London / A populous and a smoky city” (423). It would be inconceivable to think Mary Shelley was unfamiliar with such concerns when she was penning *The Last Man* in 1826. There is no overt claim that she consciously decided to write a novel aimed at depicting the catastrophic consequences of environmental changes. However, Shelley was clearly acquainted with the unusual weather conditions of 1815 known as the ‘Year without Summer’. She consciously exploited weather conditions “as a flint stone for catastrophe” (Scott 34) in *The Last Man* where warm weather becomes the carrier of the disease. In a similar fashion, for many environmental scientists, weather is akin to an environmental weapon that can terminate the sustainable epoch of the Holocene (Bonneuil and

Fressoz 5) which provided fertile ground for the development and progress of human civilization as we know it. Shelley, similarly, employs the plague-ridden weather as a weapon against humans who have tampered with nature to tame it to their benefit.

Raymond's plans for modernizing London are indicative of the Enlightenment project of progress and domination of nature in an attempt to assert the mastery of man over the physical realm. This was a significant moment in the history of the earth as the progress of science along with ensuing processes of urbanization and industrialization were coterminous with the genesis of the first stage of Anthropocene (Steffen et al., "Human" 616). The emergence of the Anthropocene coincided with a burgeoning public understanding of how different enterprises such as human activities, their health, a benevolent system of government and nature are interrelated (Bonneuil 22). Anthropocene is not solely an environmental issue, but also relates to other aspects of human society. Raymond's attempts in *The Last Man* to bring prosperity to people reveal this process of interrelation. The failure of his plans and his obsession with progress and growth create what Bonneuil calls the 'eco-catastrophic narrative' of the Anthropocene (26). Such a scenario "depicts us not as moving towards the better (better lives, better knowledge, better dominion over nature) but towards limits, tipping points, collapse, violence and wars" (27). The unintended consequences of Raymond's actions become synonymous with an environmental war. The charge into the city of Stamboul also symbolizes environmental conflict embodied by an explosion and dissemination of smoke and gas by wind.

The invasion of Stamboul, which is the breaking point of the crisis, is rooted in an expansionist colonial project which involves the exploitation of resources and the expansion of commerce. The decision to invade Turkey was not merely for the Greek Cause, but, in effect, an attempt to gain control of the resources which can reinforce the British Empire. Apart from the chaotic weather conditions and the plague-infested climate, territorial expansion, industrialization, urbanization, and commercial expansion also contribute to the formation of

the plague and the subsequent doom of the human race. Lionel reveals that “every European nation had an interest in [Greek] success” because of “their extensive commercial relations” (Shelley 161). The expansion of colonialism is intended to safeguard Britain against its existential threats. Indeed England prides itself on its immunity from the disease as the idea of being affected by the epidemic is scoffed at by Ryland and dismissed as a mere dream. The unique imperial position of London as a metropolis leads characters to assume that it is protected against the foreign threat of the plague: “We fancied that the little channel between our island and the rest of the earth was to preserve us alive among the dead. . . . this small interval was to save us: the sea was to rise a wall of adamant—without, disease and misery—within, a shelter from evil, a nook of the garden of paradise—a particle of celestial soil, which no evil could invade” (248). This naïveté proves both erroneous and ironic when the natural bulwark of the sea becomes the first transmitter of plague to England as the disease arrives with the shipwreck of an American vessel that carried on board a man who was both a deceased sailor and a plague victim. The disease enters England through its coast, the same route through which commerce is conducted. Consequently, the “dichotomy of domestic wellbeing and foreign infirmity” (Grinnell 107) is shattered by the very same means which was intended to reinforce the invulnerability of England. The encroachment of the disease into the neighboring countries makes the British ponder if they could curb its spread, but this is a vain speculation. Unlike domesticated nature and women, the plague represents a part of both culture and nature which cannot be conquered or harnessed. It is a hybrid phenomenon arising from the air as a result of man’s action; it is both nature and culture, a by-product of humankind’s devastating mark on the earth which has come back to punish them. In addition, it is actually a manifestation of ‘intra-action’ of humans and nature. The epidemic is both natural and cultural in the sense that, on the one hand, it is produced as a consequence of humans’ actions, but on the other hand, it is also a natural phenomenon, a disease. However, both the epidemic and humans exert a bilateral influence on one another. The disease creates a global community that is not marked by nationality or social standing but by the mutual threat

of extinction. Humans have created the disease as much as the disease has created a new identity for humans.

Symbolically, the plague first strikes at the economic structure of England, the commerce-driven country to which the “busy spirit of money-making in all its branches, [was] peculiar” (250). Yet, England is thoroughly and unpropitiously affected by plague. The nation, which was once united under its patriarchal and utilitarian leadership, begins to commercially collapse:

The overgrown metropolis, the great heart of mighty Britain, was pulseless. Commerce had ceased. . . . the streets were grass-grown—the houses empty—the few, that from necessity remained, seemed already branded with the taint of inevitable pestilence. In the larger manufacturing towns the same tragedy was acted on a smaller, yet more disastrous scale. There was no Adrian to superintend and direct, while whole flocks of the poor were struck and killed (261).

Commercial success, progressive projects, and military superiority cannot withstand the encroachment of the plague, thus exposing man’s frailty in the face of nature’s indomitable power. The plague targets the commercial routes through which the empire expands in order to destabilize and paralyze it. To the people of London “the foreign distresses came to be felt . . . through the channels of commerce” (232) which made many bankrupt. Indeed, the epidemic “spreads with the efficacy of England’s commercial trade” (Grinnell 97), which justifies Paul Cantor’s argument that the novel is a depiction of ulterior fears of colonialism which makes it an “atlas of European colonialism [in which] channels of commerce become indistinguishable from the channels of the plague” (Cantor 197-8). Viewed from this perspective, the plague is a force of retribution for impoverished colonial subjects and exploited nature, both of which are the victims of the ravages of colonization. Therefore, the plague reveals colonialism, to use Donald Denoon’s term, to be a “health hazard” (qtd. in Bewell 301). This kind of hazard pertains to environmentalism, as Rob Nixon calls it ‘slow violence’ which “occurs gradually

and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence. . . . a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2). Effects of war, colonialism, and climate change are examples of such violence which is committed by the powerful rich against the poorer stratum of societies. The leaders in *The Last Man* also initiate such ‘slow violence’ as war is followed by climate change resulting in a widespread suffering that is particularly felt by the poor.

The global outbreak of the pandemic coincides with the escalating condition of war between Greece and Turkey which is rooted in colonial expansionism to boost commerce. The juxtaposition of war and disease proves to be a sophisticated technique on the part of Shelley which permits her to reveal a progressive stance by suggesting that war and environmental issues are interrelated. The Anthropocene is similarly likened to “a war that we are waging against the most vulnerable populations of this planet”, such that “if we, humans . . . have become the main agents of the transformation of the Earth, the result of this transformation has been to make the Earth increasingly uninhabitable for a growing number of people” (Gemenne 171). This is precisely what leads to war in Shelley’s fiction, where the actions of a few leaders unleash a deadly war whose environmental consequences render the earth uninhabitable for humans, catalyzing their extinction. Raymond’s actions lead to what environmentalists call crossing the “planetary boundaries”, an idea put forth by Johan Rockström. ‘Planetary boundaries’ are “‘safe operating space[s]’ for humanity with respect to the Earth system” (qtd. in Steffen et al. “Anthropocene” 860). Crossing these planetary boundaries, that serve as a safety valve of the earth, will have irreversible effects since the transgression can “threaten the viability of contemporary civilization and perhaps even the future existence of *Homo sapiens*” (862). The plague in Shelley’s novel not only obliterates human existence, but it also destroys all humans have achieved. It is a transgression of the ‘planetary boundaries’ which unleashes the disaster. When Lionel tries to find a safe place on

earth by spreading a map of the world, to his horror he realizes that “on no one spot of its surface could [he] put [his] finger and say, here is safety” (Shelley 260). Humans have all become hapless victims of the disease.

The involvement of the British in the Greek Cause is also a colonial project of “competitiveness for dwindling resources that eventually results in armed conflict” (Cantor 194). One of the many causes of extensive war in human history is the perpetual desire for and struggle over natural resources. In *The Last Man*, this occurs when a group of North Americans, famished and displaced by the plague, arrive in Ireland and plunder the existing food sources and ravage Irish villages. In an attempt to gain the remaining resources in England, the army of invaders moves towards England until they are stopped by Adrian and the British army. War for resources also motivates Raymond’s invasion of Stamboul as he hopes to gain access to more commerce routes. The plague, moving from Stamboul to other parts of the world, “replaces the victory of the West over East”<sup>37</sup> (Johnson, “*Last Man*” 264). In fact, nature unbinds the achievements of the empire realized by military power and commercial success in order to demonstrate the inimical consequences of the transgression of boundaries.

The environmental changes which can trigger disastrous consequences are usually initiated by only a small rich and powerful clique of elites. The Anthropocene also reflects the unequal distribution of wealth, but since this phenomenon is caused by the powerful few, Erik Swyngedouw sarcastically calls the condition ‘Oliganthropocene’ as the term Anthropocene is inadequate to address ‘equity issues’ which need to be highlighted (Bonneuil and Fressoz 70). The condition of the Oliganthropocene which, again is a reflection of slow violence,<sup>38</sup> is

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<sup>37</sup> It is noteworthy to mention that in the 1820s some commentators related the collapse of the ancient civilizations of the East to environmental issues such as deforestation. François Antoine Rauch, a French geographer and advocate of ecology, warned that the drought in the East might soon be the future of France unless deforestation is stopped (Fressoz 75).

<sup>38</sup> Rob Nixon opens his book, *Slow Violence*, by recounting the former World Bank president, Lawrence Summers’, proposal to move the garbage of rich industrial countries, especially America, to Africa, a reflection

vividly hinted at in *The Last Man*. We are given a sketch of each leader's plans for the improvement of the state and how each fails with the implementation of the plans, which eventually leads to the ensuing catastrophe. Indeed, the rise of the plague is attributable to the actions of the elites who hold the political power. The onset of the plague is coterminous with the eradication of social and economic inequality rooted in social contracts. This, according to Rousseau, also leads to the alienation of humans from nature, as discussed in chapter one. In fact, this clearly suggests that humans are responsible for the growing inequity in their own societies where nature has been exploited to benefit only a few chosen ones who hold the means of power and control. Therefore, the plague is a manifestation of this phenomenon through its dire consequences.

In this manner, the plague has the capacity to redress social injustice by its "distinct power to act as a social equalizer" (Tarr 141) or a "social leveller" (Fisch 272) that removes all the distinctions and advantages bestowed on some people by the privilege of birth or political power. Of course, the plague is not synonymous with a divine idea of justice which renders everyone equal, but is a natural undoing of humans' actions that create the artificial distinctions which lead to social inequality. The state of emergency created by the epidemic forces the elites to open their palaces to the poor and dedicate large parts of their land and 'pleasure-grounds' to agriculture to supply more food. Thus, the plague annihilates all man-made social constructions including class, or status; the rich and poor are rendered equal. This form of social justice annuls "rules of order and pressure of laws" (317) which regulate the unjust distribution of wealth:

Palaces were deserted, and the poor man dared at length, unreprieved, intrude into the splendid apartments, whose very furniture and decorations were an unknown world to him. . . . when the boundaries of private possession were thrown down, the products of human labour at present existing were more, far more, than the thinned generation could

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of 'slow violence' and 'environmentalism of the poor'. Also, it is often noted that the countries that have the smallest carbon footprint must bear the worst effects of Global Warming and climate change.

possibly consume. . . . We were all equal now. . . . and there was nothing to prevent each from assuming possession of his share. We were all equal now; but near at hand was an equality still more levelling, a state where beauty and strength, and wisdom, would be as vain as riches and birth. The grave yawned beneath us all (317).

The plague is a radical refutation of the notion of an ‘Oliganthropocene’ as everyone is entitled to an equal share of wealth, happiness, or misery. All are equal, but it is the final force of death that establishes such a radical equality. The plague “strip[s people] of all representational identity” (An 591) and unites them all. Despite its destructive impact on human civilization, the epidemic becomes a “democratizing force” (Bewell 306) that creates social equality. The Anthropocene is similarly rooted in inequality, but will ultimately affect everyone equally. In this regard, the eco-catastrophe of plague as the “ultimate equalizer” (Marchbanks 31) or as an “emblem of social justice carried out on a global scale” (Hutchings 238) also bears the environmental message of social equality. Ironically, equality is established by the death of the human species. The Anthropocene involves the same destiny for the earth and its inhabitants, as it is marked with a great rate of extinction that is almost unprecedented. The threat of extinction and its relation to the Anthropocene will be addressed in more detail later in this section.

The condition of Anthropocene is inextricably linked to air quality which becomes an indicator not only of a Geological Time Scale but a measure of the earth’s tenability. *The Last Man* demonstrates an incipient understanding of the changing quality of England’s air and its noxious consequences. Environmental scientists have estimated that in 1800 around one million tons of coal was burned in London alone and around 15 million tons in the whole Britain (Thorsheim 1,4).<sup>39</sup> The nineteenth century, known as the Industrial Era or ‘stage 1’ in Anthropocene literature, is marked by the rise of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere to a level

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<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that more than half of the carbon emission was caused by Britain and America during the past century, so that some sarcastically stated that Anthropocene should be better called Anglocene (Fressoz 71).

unprecedented before the Holocene<sup>40</sup>, which reveals the undeniable role of humans in changing the ecosystem (Steffen et al. “Humans” 616-7). Nevertheless, the British did not consider coal to be a pollutant; quite the contrary, coal and smoke were regarded as efficient disinfectants (Thorsheim 2). The significance of the air quality in *The Last Man* is more highlighted after Raymond charges into the city and causes an explosion which releases a “fetid vapour” (Shelley 202) that becomes the vehicle of a global plague. According to McKusick, such a vision of air as the carrier of pollution in *The Last Man* is only conceivable in relation to the start of the Industrial Revolution, and the emergence of England as a country with a large consumption of coal which filled the cities with ‘photochemical smog’, threatening the existence of life on earth (109). Therefore, the ‘fetid vapour’, as the carrier of the disease, can embody the changing atmosphere of England through the smoke released by the phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution.

Air becomes the main enemy of humans after the invasion of Stamboul and the release of the ‘fetid vapour’. The disease is airborne, which conveys Shelley’s familiarity with miasma theory. There were two common theories about the spread of disease: contagionist and anti-contagionist. The former held that the transmission of the disease relies on bodily contact, while the latter located the source of infection in the “quality of the air itself, often a ‘miasma’ generated in particular but remote places and carried on the winds” (McWhir 23). According to miasma theory, the body of the person who has inhaled the fetid poisonous air was said to be afflicted by ‘zymotic illness’ and the sources of miasma were generally in areas with poor sanitary conditions (Thorsheim 10). Also, in the eighteenth century the transmission of diseases was not only associated with miasma, but also with “insufficient quantities of respirable air” (33). The famous encounter between Lionel and the negro in a cottage in London indicates that Shelley was also a believer in miasma theory, as Lionel Verney disregards the warnings of some people not to enter the cottage where a plague-afflicted body

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<sup>40</sup> In 1850, the level of CO<sub>2</sub> was around 285ppm, but it soared by 25ppm by 1945 (Steffen et al. “Human” 616-7).

lies, by pointing out that they are “under an entire mistake as to the nature of the plague” (Shelley 259). For Shelley, “the novel’s plague with its miasmatic etiology would have been considered the result of poor environmental conditions . . . and its mode of transmission would have been thought to resemble those of malaria, a disease whose name quite literally means ‘bad air’” (Melville, “Immunity” 832). Verney also notes that the epidemic is different from other contagious diseases such as small-pox or scarlet fever, and that the plague’s “infection depended upon the air, [and] the air was subject to infection” (Shelley 231). He also acknowledges the power of wind, both the giver and destroyer of life, as the strongest natural element: “O wind, to be throned above all other vicegerents of nature’s power; whether thou comest destroying from the east, or pregnant with elementary life from the west; thee the clouds obey; the sun is subservient to thee; the shoreless ocean is thy slave!” (239). This passage substantiates the assumption that air is the carrier of the disease which moves from the east (Stamboul) to other parts of the world, infesting all with pestilence. Therefore, McKusick’s association of wind and ‘fetid vapor’ with the industrial revolution garners more strength in view of such references to the wind in *The Last Man*.

The assumption that airborne plague is a consequence of war and imperialism is also embedded in a manifestation of environmental changes in the atmosphere which include famine and excessive heat, harbingers of an impending eco-disaster. Unusual weather conditions, as predicted by Perdita after Raymond’s disloyalty, affect the lives of people and exacerbate the war:

[The wars] were aggravated by the season: they took place during summer, when the southern Asiatic wind came laden with intolerable heat, when the streams were dried up in their shallow beds. . . . Nor did night refresh the earth. Dew was denied; herbage and flowers there were none; the very trees drooped; and summer assumed the blighted appearance of winter, as it went forth in silence and flame to abridge the means of sustenance to man. In vain did the eye strive to find the wreck of some northern cloud . . .

. and moisture to the oppressive and windless atmosphere. All was serene, burning, annihilating. . . . the stoppage of the public fountains [,] the bad quality of the food, and scarcity even of that, produced a state of suffering, which was aggravated by the scourge of disease (189-90).

The dire situation of the besieged city of Stamboul is harrowing indeed, yet the same scenario is visited upon the world at large after the fall of the city. European nations fall, one after the other; even England, which is presumably safe on the basis of its geographical location and technological advances, ultimately falls victim to the imperial war that it wages against the environment. The air ostensibly devours all the man-made geographical boundaries and assumes an indomitable superiority which dwarfs humanity's power over nature. Scott also cites the same passage and interprets it as the embodiment of the theme of "global warming" (40) in the novel. This is a legitimate claim when one notes that the plague occurs only after the introduction of unusual spells of heat, failure in the crops, and famine. The heat, a sign of a disaster, becomes a fearsome enemy to people in *The Last Man*, just as the rising temperature on the earth is now the harbinger of an ominous future for humanity.

The harsh conditions, which adversely affect humans in the novel, seem to be favorable to the nonhuman world. As a consequence, humans who have created this situation are the first to feel the impact:

It was no consolation, that with the first winds of March the lanes were filled with violets, the fruit trees covered with blossoms, that the corn sprung up, and the leaves came out, forced by the unseasonable heat. We feared the balmy air—we feared the cloudless sky, the flower-covered earth, and delightful woods, for we looked on the fabric of the universe no longer as our dwelling, but our tomb, and the fragrant land smelled to the apprehension of fear like a wide church-yard (Shelley 270).

The beauty of nature is juxtaposed against the gloomy destiny of the earth's inhabitants. Contrary to its salubrious effect on nature, the miasma carried by the air and intensified by the

heat, not only fails to nourish humans, but actively threatens to annihilate them. This confirms that the changes humans have initiated in the ecosystem have backfired, with humans functioning as the exterminating angel of their own kind. The passage also highlights the alienation of humans from nature as industrialization and urbanization entail a violation of the natural order. A detachment from nature was also commonly believed to give rise to illnesses in nineteenth-century England (Thorsheim 40). It becomes evident that flourishing nature is pitted against the destruction of the human race through the plague pandemic in *The Last Man*.

The intensification of the disease in summer is coterminous with the spread of the plague-ridden miasma. This situation reinforces the trope of global warming effect in Shelley's work as aptly mentioned by Scott. The other evidence is the mitigating effect of cold weather on the disease and the general health of the remainder of the earth's population. The onset of winter is welcomed since it alleviates the force of the pandemic:

Winter was hailed, a general and never-failing physician. The embrowning woods, and swollen rivers, the evening mists, and morning frosts, were welcomed with gratitude. The effects of purifying cold were immediately felt; and the lists of mortality abroad were curtailed each week. . . . We breathed again. . . . and our hopes of a cessation of pestilence were high (Shelley 237-8).

Unlike the heat of summer, winter brings the hope for the revival of life on Earth but it solely renews nonhuman life. The irony of the situation is that winter is commonly coupled with the hibernation of the earth, and warm seasons with its rebirth. However, the opposite applies to *The Last Man* where humanity's existence is jeopardized by warm weather and saved by the cold winter. Indeed, the preoccupation of *The Last Man* with weather conditions continues on from the same meteorological preoccupations in *Frankenstein*, which is concerned with the effects of weather and atmospheric changes. *The Last Man* is a bolder denunciation of how human activities have led to irreversible changes on the earth.

The spread of the disease through miasma also brings forth a deep concern for the ecology, in general, and Anthropocene, in particular, which is the issue of scale. The plague renders geographical borders, and the very concept of a boundary, futile and meaningless. The miasma, according to Morton, “surrounds and penetrates. It is a dis-ease that affects everything. It cannot be localized in one place” (“Oedipal” 17). The global nature of miasma makes the whole world a dangerous zone as it is disseminated thoroughly throughout the globe. Ryland and Adrian realize that the plague thoroughly permeates the globe and there is no escape route since “all the world has the plague” (242). Similarly, the Anthropocene condition is not restricted to a specific locale. It operates like a hyperobject phenomenon, distributed globally. It might be caused by the actions of a limited number of people around the globe, but the effects are far-reaching and encompass a global scale. This is of great significance, as England’s population in the novel hold the bucolic belief that they are insulated from the outer world and that the vast body of water surrounding their island is protective. However, air becomes the agent of their destruction as “the atmosphere contains the invisible, intangible connections between people that oceans pretend to divide. The cosmopolitanism of the ocean may be deniable; the cosmopolitanism of the atmosphere is not” (Carroll, “Global” 11). Air is both cosmopolitan and democratic in its dissemination of toxins.

The global scale of the miasma and the intertwining of commerce, colonialism, and industrialization in *The Last Man* are a response to the localism of the kind that Heise is so critical of in *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* where she advocates for “eco-cosmopolitanism” (10) and “allegiances to diverse communities, cultures, and places” (43) as opposed to the obsession with eco-localism. *The Last Man* is an apt apogee of this call. The invasion of the plague from east to west, the interconnected web of commerce, the Greek and Turkish war, and American and Irish mass migration to England, are all manifestations of the global effects of the plague whose vehicle is the air. The plague that connects all these ‘dots’ across the world exhibits how people, so diversely remote, are intimately connected by an ecological

disaster. All the different identities, communities, and nationalities are drawn together, defined by one common goal, which is to defy a global pestilence. It is, in fact, a redefinition of the concept of community in the face of a global emergency which makes the national and ideological boundaries meaningless. The vehicle of the disease also becomes a literal translation of Ulrich Beck's aphorism that "poverty is hierarchical, smog is democratic" (*Modernity* 36), as the miasma does not distinguish between race, nationality, and gender since it is the 'levelling', but 'democratizing' force of nature which obliterates nearly all humans.

The global nature of the miasma is similar to *Frankenstein's* phenomenon of the hyperobject which I discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, the miasma in *The Last Man* continues Shelley's concern with the same environmental tropes as those of *Frankenstein*. Shelley's depiction of the plague corresponds to a dark picture of the rise of pollution caused by urbanization and industrialization which, in unison with imperialism, becomes a spatial and temporal phenomenon that transgresses all defined human boundaries. Hyperobjects, or non-localized omnipresent phenomena, can "cause us to reflect on our very place on Earth and in the cosmos. Perhaps this is the most fundamental issue—hyperobjects seem to force something on us, something that affects some core ideas of what it means to exist, what Earth is, what society is" (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 15). In a similar vein, the plague topples the imaginary walls of the 'sea-surrounded nook' of England and forces its people to admit "a crisis of cosmopolitanism in which one acknowledges oneself as a citizen of a world in peril" (Carroll, "Crusades" 222). The sense of crisis brings people together as the insularity of England fails to save this newly created "community of shared risk" (Canuel 162). They all share the same destiny and are threatened by the same common foe, which makes them aware of their fragility and impotence in the face of the global scale of nature. In Shelley's novel, "the vessel of society was wrecked [and] Man existed by twos and threes" (Shelley 320). The congregation of such a small community under Adrian's leadership is based on the creation of a new idea of society not founded on national identity, but on their collaboration and

'coordination' (Canuel 151). The formation of this new concept of society becomes so effective that Kate Rigby suggests that "*The Last Man* [should be] as compulsory reading in all of the currently burgeoning disaster management courses" (*Dancing* 77). The sparse population that is left from the ravages of the plague is bound together by their sense of shared humanity and cooperation rather than national interest or commercial benefit.

## 6.4 Environmental Refugees and Solastalgia

The condition of the Anthropocene is metaphorically depicted in *The Last Man* in the form of the breakout of a global epidemic. The sustainable conditions of life deteriorate substantially and literally make life impossible in the long term. The plague-ridden miasma threatens the health of the inhabitants of England and other countries. The decline in health and the economy is preceded by environmental changes and a steep decline in agriculture. The unusual weather conditions in *The Last Man* are equally as disastrous and harsh as the plague, which accentuates the reverberations of ecological changes on humans' life:

The crop had failed, the bad corn, and want of foreign wines, added vigour to disease. Before Christmas half England was under water. The storms of the last winter were renewed; but the diminished shipping of this year caused us to feel less the tempests of the sea. The flood and storms did more harm to continental Europe than to us—giving, as it were, the last blow to the calamities which destroyed it. In Italy the rivers were unwatched by the diminished peasantry. . . . Whole villages were carried away. Rome, and Florence, and Pisa were overflowed, and their marble palaces, late mirrored in tranquil streams, had their foundations shaken by their winter-gifted power. In Germany and Russia the injury was still more momentous (Shelley 269).

The changing landscape also becomes an agent of destruction, similar to the plague whose power is only intensified by the unfavorable ecological conditions. This fact confirms the hypothesis that the plague is “born of ecological disturbance first and foremost” (Scott 42), coupled with imperial and commercial interests. It also highlights the role of weather in the Anthropocene, as it functions as a lethal weapon with the capacity to affect billions of people worldwide; indeed, weather is not a man-made construct to be restricted to a particular locale. Weather, similar to global warming, is a hyperobject phenomenon that transgresses human boundaries. Such “environmental changes — human-induced or not — have now become a major driver . . . of migration and displacement on the planet” (Gemenne 169). Such conditions give rise to a new phenomenon called ‘environmental migrants’ or ‘environmental

refugees' (Black et al. "Effect" 3), which refers to the people who have been forced out of their homeland on account of man-made or natural disasters such as war, flooding, or famine. Such a migration "will offer opportunities as well as challenges" (Black et al., "Climate" 447), as it can be an adaptation strategy, but the dearth of resources in other places can also present a range of problems.

The scope of many contemporary climate fictions that revolve around an eco-disaster is narrowly limited, practically verging on 'village localism' as a solution (Trexler 10), but *The Last Man* depicts a cosmopolitan approach to the disaster. Following the onset of plague in London, its inhabitants realize that "the air of London is tainted" through miasma and if they do not leave, their country will transform into a mass grave. The fear of death in England, previously known to have been the "birth-place of excellence and school of the wise" (Shelley 323), translates to ecophobia, defined as "irrational and groundless fear or hatred of the natural world" (Estok, *Ecocriticism* 4). The fear of the changing environment changes the birth-place of civilization to the tomb of humanity, which urges Adrian to devise a strategy to save the people. His strategy is mass emigration from England in search of safety, which is indeed a survival strategy: "let us go! England is in her shroud,—we may not enchain ourselves to a corpse. Let us go—the world is our country now, and we will choose for our residence its most fertile spot. . . . The world is vast, and England . . . is but a small part of her. At the close of a day's march . . . we may come upon health, and . . . replant the uprooted tree of humanity" (Shelley 326). The significance of the passage is the transition from a provincial localism to a more cosmopolitan approach. The characters recognize the smallness of England, which contradicts the illusion of its superiority and singularity which they erroneously assumed would safeguard them from the plague. Moreover, the proposed scheme renders them climate refugees, or environmental immigrants, who are forced to leave their homeland on account of an eco-disaster. The mass immigration of American and Irish refugees to England and their plundering of the native people's resources is a fitting parable in which issues of war, violence

and environmental destruction all converge, thus underscoring the entanglement of environmentalism (the Anthropocene), war, and violence.

Environmental disasters can also afflict psychological effects on their victims, which emanate from a realignment of spatial boundaries such as the loss of one's homeland due to an eco-disaster. A specific form of distress that is linked with the changing landscape is called 'solastalgia', a term coined by Glenn Albrecht. According to him, people can experience feelings of pain and suffering in their current homeland. Solastalgia is defined as feelings of pain derived from the changing landscape which cannot provide solace and comfort to its inhabitants. It is detachment from land when one is still inhabiting the land. The term itself is a twist on nostalgia, but it is the pain (algia) of the lost solace that used to be derived from land (Albrecht, "Concept" 45). This phenomenon is accompanied by the loss of sense of belonging or space-bound identity, and is thus classified as "a new form of psychoterratic illness" (Albrecht et al. 96). The plague which is exacerbated by unusual weather conditions has so much transformed the urban fabric of London and the general landscape of England that it has literally turned it to a mass graveyard where the bodies of the deceased lie scattered on the ground. The mass emigration of climate refugees from England is not a voluntary decision, but a forced necessity which is accompanied by the same feelings of remorse and pain, or solastalgia:

Look at England! the grass shoots up high in the meadows; but they are dank and cold, unfit bed for us. Corn we have none, and the crude fruits cannot support us. We must seek firing in the bowels of the earth, or the unkind atmosphere will fill us with rheums and aches. The labour of hundreds of thousands alone could make this inclement nook fit habitation for one man. . . . England. . . . thy children are gone, thy glory faded! Thou, England, wert the triumph of man! Small favour was shewn thee by thy Creator. . . a ragged canvas naturally, painted by man with alien colours; but the hues he gave are faded, never more to be renewed. So we must leave thee, thou marvel of the world; we

must bid farewell to thy clouds, and cold, and scarcity for ever. . . . thy tale of power and liberty at its close! Bereft of man, O little isle. . . . thy soil will be birth-place of weeds, thy sky will canopy barrenness. . . . [Thy children] are gone, and thou goest with them the oft trodden path that leads to oblivion (323-4).

The dislocation of this population of climate refugees causes them to feel the excruciating pain that comes from the “recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault” (Albrecht, “Concept” 45). England is no longer England because it has lost its significance and value on account of the devastating disease that transformed her landscape. A place is endowed with a consciousness and value which makes it a dynamic entity with a history that can be the source of mental solace (Rose, *Terrain* 7). The miasma of the plague strips England of this sense of history and it ceases to be a source of consolation and with leaving England “the name of England die[s]” (Shelley 326) as well. The emigration of people from England renders the land of their ancestors a vacant, uninhabited, and inhospitable piece of land. It marks the end of its history.

The symptomatic manifestation of the trauma of solastalgia is evident in the theatre scene in London where Shakespeare’s “Macbeth” is played at ‘Drury Lane Theatre’. The aesthetic distance a theatre creates is expected to be therapeutic; however, it backfires as Lionel and other members of the audience are reminded of their abject misery. The scene from “Macbeth”, where Macduff inquires “Stands Scotland where it did?” and Rosse replies: “Alas, poor country;/Almost afraid to know itself!” (282), becomes a tipping point for Lionel and the audience who identify the status quo of England with Macbeth’s Scotland ravaged by misery and war. The uncanny similarity between Lionel’s England and the imaginary Scotland in “Macbeth”, both in a state of ruin, triggers a “traumatic return of a repression that would avoid the inevitability of the plague” (Wagner-Lawlor 763). The trauma not only emanates from the loss of solace and comfort that England previously provided, but also in an imminent dislocation that thwarts the cathartic role of the theatre and, instead, throws the audience into a

state of emotional breakdown: “A pang of tameless grief wrenched every heart, a burst of despair was echoed from every lip.—I had entered into the universal feeling—I had been absorbed by the terrors of Rosse—I re-echoed the cry of Macduff, and then rushed out as from an hell of torture, to find calm in the free air” (Shelley 283). The psychological trauma that has afflicted Lionel and his countrymen is, in effect, entangled with the history of their land which has lost its presumed insularity and is no longer the safe ‘nook’ it used to be. In this regard, the concept of solastalgia is a “useful way to theorize about the distress resulting from natural disasters” (Warsini et al. 89) and also to address the “social impacts of the disease epidemics” (Albrecht, “Solastalgia” 35), which yokes together the history of the earth and the history of humans. Solastalgia and the Anthropocene drive home the message that humans have played a calamitous role which has not only destroyed the earth, but is also damaging themselves. Thus, they are simultaneously the destroyer and the destroyed; human history is inscribed upon the earth.

## 6.5 The Earth is the Subject

The impact of humans on their environment sheds new light on the question of humans' agency and their subject position in relation to all other entities in the world. The Anthropocene has shown that humans' mark on the earth has long been perceived to be an inevitable reality. As early as 1778 the French naturalist, Buffon, wrote that "the entire face of the Earth today bears the imprint of human power" (qtd. in Bonneuil and Fressoz 4). The Italian geologist, Antonio Stoppani, also predicted the condition of Anthropocene in 1873 by equating human activities to a "new telluric force which in power and universality may be compared to the greater forces of nature" (qtd. in Steffen et al. "Humans" 615). It is indisputable that humans have been the cause of such drastic changes; nevertheless, we are also "actually the victims of these changes rather than their agents" (Gemenne 168). The dual position of humans as agents and victims begs us to reconsider the great divide of culture and nature. The project of modernity and Enlightenment deepened the divide between humans and nature. Adrian, Lionel and Raymond are the symptoms of this institutional discourse that creates an eco-disaster, rendering them powerless in the face of nature's rage. Therefore, the Anthropocene challenges the "ontological break between human being as subject of entitlement and the [Earth as] object of nature" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 40) in order to remind us of the porosity of the subject and object binary. In effect, the Anthropocene embodies "the reunion of human (historical) time and Earth (geological) time" (32), which returns us to the idea that humans cannot and should not strive towards the ideal of rising above nature, or shake off the alleged shackles of the natural world, in an attempt to modernize it.

The scale of humans' impact on the earth and environment has radically changed attitudes regarding the ontology of human and nonhuman agents, which tended to divide the two. Now that "humankind has become a global geological force in its own right" (Steffen et al. "Anthropocene" 860), one can assume that the traditional separation between the history of humans and that of nature has collapsed (Chakrabarty 201). Humans have been obsessed with

the anthropogenic drive to sustain their own species even at the cost of the life of other species and nature. Thus, their geological force has become synonymous with ‘the role of planetary killer’ (Wilson 102). However, the Anthropocene has asserted the agency of the earth, the nonhuman domain, in unprecedented ways. Bruno Latour aptly considers conditions such as Anthropocene and global warming to be the reversal of the dominant binaries of Western philosophical tradition where nature was the static object and humans were the dynamic intelligent agents of change. In lieu of the old binary, the earth is currently an agent with a “surprising inversion of background and foreground, it is human history that has become frozen and natural history that is taking on a frenetic pace” (Latour, “Agency” 12). This entanglement of human history with natural history, reflected by the Anthropocene, can be best described as “global hybrid” or “naturecultures” (Dibley 142) where the boundary between human subject and nonhuman object is blurred.

The concept of ‘naturecultures’ is very similar to Donna Haraway’s coinage which was used in the previous chapter to describe Victor Frankenstein’s creature as an assemblage of both human and nonhuman components. The plague is also an assemblage of human and nonhuman activity, a hyperobject produced by humans as well as nature, which returns to destroy humans in much the same manner that *Frankenstein’s* creature destroys his own creator, because he abandoned him. Latour makes a case for Victor Frankenstein, arguing that his guilt lies not in his wish to supersede nature, but in his misconception that his dominion would liberate him from earthly bonds. Victor’s sin is demonstrable in his flight from the abject materiality of his own creature instead of developing a bond of attachment (“Monsters” 2). Adrian and Raymond erroneously labor under a similar misconception, evident in their creation of a modern state which they found through their domination of and detachment from nature, at great cost. The phenomenon of the Anthropocene reminds us of the interrelation of human beings, nonhuman entities, plants, and animals; it also underscores “the dynamic relationships and processes within an extremely dynamic biosphere” (Rose, “Noir” 207). The

appreciation of this fact brings about a relational ontology where human destiny becomes attached to earth's history, which is the basis of what Deborah Bird Rose calls "ecological emplacement" ("Animism" 106). This concept, similar to that of the ecological self, discussed in chapter three, deems the world to be a dynamic source of life of which humans are only a small, but integral part.

The Anthropocene also informs us that the earth, as it stands today, is a "wholly man-made world" (Maris 123), in the sense that the catastrophes could be created as a result of man's activities. However, the other side of this story, as also pointed out by Latour, is that the Earth now occupies the subject position and asserts its will over us. Michel Serres rightly describes earth's agency as such:

For, as of today, the Earth is quaking anew: not because it shifts and moves in its restless, wise orbit, not because it is changing, from its deep plates to its envelope of air, but because it is being transformed by our doing. Nature acted as a reference point for ancient law and for modern science because it had no subject: objectivity in the legal sense, as in the scientific sense, emanated from a space without man, which did not depend on us and on which we depended *de jure* and *de facto*. Yet henceforth it depends so much on us that it is shaking and that we too are worried by this deviation from expected equilibria. We are disturbing the Earth and making it quake! Now it has a subject once again (86).

Bruno Latour, as mentioned earlier, also highlights this reversal of history where man's agency and subject position have been supplanted by that of the earth. Still, we are enmeshed in the fabric of our ecosystem and the Anthropocene has enunciated the end of the ontological divide of culture and nature. Instead, we need a new "species-consciousness" (Clark *Ecocriticism* 17), or an appreciation that our destiny is intertwined with that of the earth and all its inhabitants. This consciousness, which is in actuality a relational ontology, is the same as what Deborah Rose calls "the transnational and transpecies communities" (qtd. in Rigby

“Noah” 176), examples of which abound in *The Last Man*. Such communities manifest themselves in the formation of new groups, regardless of their territorial or even biological boundaries and taxonomies. Lionel’s only companion is a dog at the end of the novel, highlighting the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman communities, a result of a new consciousness born from the eco-disaster. Therefore, the Anthropocene, more than any time before, has underlined the congealing of our history and agency with that of the world around us; additionally, it announces the reunion of “human history and terrestrial history” (Clark *Ecocriticism* 2).

The agency of the earth creates a revisionist history, one that can be more inclusive and appreciative of nonhuman actors. Bruno Latour uses the term “geo-stories” (qtd. in Hamilton et al. 6) to refer to this new history created by the Anthropocene. The term ‘geo-story’ has a Deleuzian twist to it, as it allows for the reconceptualization of our history with regard to the earth in order to achieve the effect of a ‘becoming-Earth’ (ibid). In other words, becoming-Earth considers the earth and all its occupants to be a fluid and organic assemblage wherein all entities are interconnected and the actions of one can affect the other actors and entities in the assemblage. *The Last Man* is an incisive and, at the same time, an arresting depiction of Latour’s geo-story. The novel is “commensurate with global history” (Elmer 356), in which the earth assumes the ultimate agency and power in response to what has been done to it. Michel Serres also maintains that agency is no longer exclusively associated with humans: “On Planet Earth . . . action comes not so much from man as an individual or subject . . . [but] the decisive actions are now, massively, those of enormous and dense tectonic plates of humanity” (16). The ‘dense tectonic plates of humanity’ are, in effect, what the Anthropocene calls the mingling of human and the Earth’s agency. *The Last Man* sketches the same agency emanating from the ‘tectonic plates of humanity’ which can thwart men’s sovereignty:

Nature, our mother, and our friend, had turned on us a brow of menace. She shewed us plainly, that, though she permitted us to assign her laws and subdue her apparent powers,

yet, if she put forth but a finger, we must quake. She could take our globe, fringed with mountains, girded by the atmosphere, containing the condition of our being, and all that man's mind could invent or his force achieve; she could take the ball in her hand, and cast it into space, where life would be drunk up, and man and all his efforts for ever annihilated (Shelley 232).

Nature and the earth are no longer the passive spectators of humans' activities. The earth asserts its power to dominate the so-called humans' culture. The "boomerang" effect (Bonneuil and Fressoz 18) of their activities strikes back. The Anthropocene indicates that humans have become their own destroyer by pushing the ecosystem to its tipping point, and therefore, the catastrophe is "both a product and a producer of Anthropocene" (Ginn 351).

The vindictive nature in *The Last Man* is the progenitor of more modern climate fictions in which human ascendancy is toppled. Indeed, "Anthropocene fictions emphasizes [sic] the real agency of atmospheric warming" (Trexler 7) to the extent that human agents pale into insignificance and therefore such fictions are not deemed to be "character-driven" (26). Shelley also dexterously depicts vanishing human agency in the novel, to the point that humans become the hapless pawns of the naturecultural plague. The first volume of the novel revolves around gender segregation in politics and the domestic as well as the colonization of nature. The second exposes the consequences of such a dyadic mindset and how it exacerbates a war for the possession of resources; it is in the midst of this volume that the eco-disaster of plague starts to subtly shape the narrative around itself and overshadow humans' agency. The third volume wholly revolves around the inevitability of death and the frailty of humans, in the face of the wrathful agency of nature which has asserted itself in the form of a plague: this becomes the ultimate agent in the novel and all humans are subdued to its power.

The Anthropocene also heralds a dire scenario of species extinction which is not new in and of itself. Nonetheless, the process of species extinction has been expedited unprecedentedly on account of humans' activities. According to Will Steffen, the rate of

species extinction in the age of the Anthropocene is equal to that which exterminated the dinosaurs millions of years ago (qtd. in Chakrabarty 207). Similarly, Edward Wilson warns us that if the conservation plans were to be stopped, we would have lost one-fifth of different species on earth by 2030 (102). The phenomenon of species extinction is not a new story and humans have always played a role in it since the beginning of history. Nevertheless, the scientific understanding of this phenomenon became popular during the eighteenth century, when new discoveries were made and sciences such as geology and anatomy developed. Georges Cuvier, the French naturalist, proved the theory of extinction by his works on fossils. In effect, he “proved the existence of some world previous to ours, destroyed by some kind of catastrophe” (Rudwick 183). Therefore, his works contributed to the idea of catastrophism, or the concept that a catastrophe may be the cause of a species’ demise. In spite of the fact that Shelley’s depiction of extinction is only restricted to the human race, her novel engages with Cuvier’s ideas of catastrophism and extinction (Bailes 672). Besides, Bailes finds further evidence that both the accounts of countries flooded by the rising sea level in *The Last Man*, and the dream that Lionel has that “the ocean, breaking its bounds, carried away the fixed continent and deep rooted mountains” (Shelley 447), corroborates Cuvier’s concept that continents and ocean had constantly shifted in the earth’s history (Bailes 685). Scientific discoveries about species extinction underpinned Shelley’s work, but the ingenuity of Shelley lies in the fact that she coupled this anxiety with climatic eco-disasters.

Mary Shelley also uses another Anthropocenic trope, but transforms it with an ingenious twist. The story of the Anthropocene is an ironic story of man’s civilization and progress from a hunter-gatherer’s life-style to an agrarian and then an industrial one. The story begins millions of years ago with *Homo erectus*, or upright man, who built stone tools and then discovered fire which greatly enriched humans’ diet. Over time, the change of diet increased humans’ brain size three times and the development of language ensued. Ultimately, humans started using fossil fuels such as coal, from mines. European nations started mining in the

thirteenth century which raised the level of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. This, many believe, laid the ground for the advent of the Anthropocene. Apart from all these developments, the development of agricultural practices exponentially improved the quality of humans' life, but it also catalysed humans' passage into the Anthropocene (Steffen et al., "Anthropocene" 846-7). Shelley's story is the reverse of the story of the Anthropocene, in the sense that her story starts when England is already at the height of its power. However, the plague reverses the story of men's progress and it becomes "a force of devolution" (Bewell 306), taking humans back to the point of extinctions. The plant and animal life is impervious to the plague; instead it is the humans who die one by one to the point of verging on extinction:

Summer advanced, and, crowned with the sun's potent rays, plague shot her unerring shafts over the earth. The nations beneath their influence bowed their heads, and died. The corn that sprung up in plenty, lay in autumn rotting on the ground, while the melancholy wretch who had gone out to gather bread for his children, lay stiff and plague-struck in the furrow. The green woods waved their boughs majestically, while the dying were spread beneath their shade, answering the solemn melody with inharmonious cries. The painted birds flitted through the shades; the careless deer reposed unhurt upon the fern—the oxen and the horses strayed from their unguarded stables, and grazed among the wheat, for death fell on man alone (Shelley 276).

Human life perishes while animal life prevails. In the absence of man, nature even prospers and animals enjoy a taste of liberty and take their residence in cities. The cities become deserted and the few remaining humans congregate to embark on a journey in search of a safe place to live. Animal life takes over the cities which used to be populated by humans: "Birds, and tame animals, now homeless, had built nests, and made their lairs in consecrated spots. . . . London . . . had been somewhat deserted in the midst. . . . No human step was heard, nor human form discerned" (332). The advance of the plague becomes synonymous with the recession of human life and anything that is left of their culture. The encroachment of nature upon culture makes human values meaningless and the only concept that has value is survival

for the remainder of human population: “life—life—the continuation of our animal mechanism—was the Alpha and Omega of the desires, the prayers, the prostrate ambition of human race” (294). The reversal of humans’ destiny makes them equal with animals, which is Mary Shelley’s twist on the Anthropocene; humans are supplanted by nature and animals in order to demonstrate the agency of the nonhuman and how it can overpower that of men.

Lionel Verney is the person who exhibits the pettiness of humanity in comparison with the grand scale of creation on earth. He turns into a lonely drifter who rambles on earth in search of another survivor. The ocean thwarts the last chance of the perpetuation of the human race as it drowns Adrian and Clara, who were the only couple left of the human race, in an act that reaffirms the indomitability of nature. Lionel is washed ashore and then starts his symbolic journey into Rome, the cradle of Western arts and civilization which is now in ruins, devoid of any human presence. Lionel discovers that the artefacts of human creation have ceased to comfort and awe him. He discovers that Rome, emblematic of humans’ culture, is now a “naked ruin” which “is robed by nature in a verdurous and glowing veil” (462). The final chapter of the book recaps the sense of desolation in the face of an eco-disaster; it becomes a vivid depiction of solastalgia as “the bringers of solace [become] self-born mockers of man’s enterprise” (Paley 114). Rome ceases to be the comforting land of art and aesthetics as it is now conquered by nature.

Verney’s last visit to Rome is a depiction of the scale of the catastrophe and the pettiness of humans’ power. It is an illustration of what Deborah Rose calls ‘dark tourism’, defined as a visit to the “sites of death, disaster, and suffering” (“Noir” 211). The second half of *The Last Man* is literally a case of dark tourism as Londoners witness their own death and misery while the plague is roaming and scourging their country. Dark tourism can engage the visitors in a deep philosophical inquiry regarding the existential question of life and death (4), which is what happens to Lionel Verney as he contemplates why he is still left alive to suffer the excruciating pain of witnessing the doom of human race. Deborah Rose draws a befitting

parallel between dark tourism and our situation on earth in the age of the Anthropocene as we are witnessing the demise of the earth, the death of other species along with our own. *The Last Man* is also a manifestation of Anthropocene where Lionel is the only remnant of the human race who is left to take stock of what has become of our planet.

Lionel's observations in Rome assume a symbolic ring as he undergoes a metamorphosis which is emblematic of humans' new status. After becoming a dark tourist of the Anthropocene, he regresses into an animal state which is closer to what he originally was before he was tamed and colonized by Adrian to be a part of the high society of England. As Lionel walks into an abandoned palace, he is taken aback by the figure he spots there: "I looked again with renewed wonder. What wild-looking, unkempt, half-naked savage was that before me?" (Shelley 455). It takes a moment for him to realize that he has set eyes on his own reflection in the mirror. This is a pivotal moment in the novel which occurs towards the end of the story. Lionel is the only human left and he has already assumed the "likeness of an extinct species" (Bailes 694). It turns out that Lionel had not completely shed his untamed and wild side, more aligned with nature, and his state at the end is a regression into his earlier identity.

At this stage, his first encounter with a family of goats fails as he is perceived as a threat by the male goat, but in his next encounter, Verney bonds with a dog: "My only companion was a dog, a shaggy fellow, half water and half shepherd's dog" (Shelley 467). His new kinship is an index of tolerance and acceptance of alterity, since Verney himself is, to use Agamben's phrase, in a "zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture" (qtd. in Chatterjee 42). This new identity "makes room for the liminal [space]. . . between human and animal" (Williams 146) which creates a new ontology that is more all-embracing, to the extent that it enables the kinship of human and nonhuman. This new ontology is the same concept Rigby previously identified as "transpecies, and transcorporeal connectivities" ("Catastrophe" 220); Timothy Clark calls it "transpersonal agency" or "species-consciousness" (*Ecocriticism* 14,17); and Haraway calls it

“naturecultures” (*Manifesto* 1). The crux of Lionel’s transformation is that the old categories and binaries of human/nonhuman or culture/nature are untenable once the earth’s history collides with that of humans’.

The final destiny of Lionel Verney reminds us of the nebulous categories and ontologies humans have created and perpetuated to egotistically exploit the potentials of the inferior side of the categories. Verney’s final journey on the sea in a small boat and his animal companion signify the last remnants of humanity, akin to Frankenstein’s creature on a piece of floating ice, who similarly inspires us to contemplate and even yearn for new ontological categories. Lionel Verney’s final inscription on a pillar carving “2100, the last year of the world” (Shelley 467) heralds the onset of “Anthropocene noir” defined as “the looming sense of fatality; the creeping awareness that nothing can be put right” (Rose, “Noir” 215). Humans have become subjected to the same laws of nature that they attempted to harness, and species extinction, as foreshadowed by Georges Cuvier, befell them, underpinning the connection of human and geological history and to reveal the limits of humans’ agency (Cameron 267).

The account of the devolution of human history in *The Last Man* reaffirms the need for an “alternative to modernisation” (Latour, “Modernize” 220); in other words, we need to ecologize rather than modernize. Both Victor Frankenstein and the male leaders of the Republic of England in *The Last Man* suffer from the same ideological myopia which drives them towards modernisation, at the high cost of neglecting their creation, be it a creature or a nation-state. The need for what Will Steffen calls “planetary stewardship” (“Global Change” “Anthropocene” 744) has never been more imperative. It is a political ecology that can account for both human and nonhuman participants which can contribute to an appreciation of the fact that humans have never been separate from the world they live in. This is a form of “situatedness of the Anthropocene” (Rose, “Noir” 7) that teaches us that we create what we see; our fate is entangled with that of the earth; and our agency is implicated with that of the earth and its ‘tectonic plates’.



## 7. Conclusion

Climate change is one of the most recurrent tropes of daily modern life. We are immersed in a culture which reflects the effects of this phenomenon in myriad ways, ranging from the films and documentaries that we watch to the food and products we purchase. Whether one is a climate-change believer or denier, there is one looming certainty: the significance and presence of a collective consciousness that situates climate change at the forefront of our culture. The presence of this awareness is visible, pronounced, and inevitable. Climate scientists have conducted copious research and written profusely on global warming. It is generally assumed that it is their domain of expertise and responsibility to warn the public about the causes and their consequences. Indeed, they have done so with unrelenting perseverance and conscientiousness. It is evident that science has effectively played its part but what of the humanities?

The question has profound implications for us in the humanities. Although the humanities have made a substantial contribution in this regard, humanities scholars must nevertheless carry a greater share of the responsibility in terms of enlightening the masses about climate change. The public engages more meaningfully with cultural renditions and stories with ecological themes, than with a dry scientific parlance that is too abstruse for them. Few scientific books have been able to repeat the enormous success and influence of *Silent Spring*, which owes its popularity to the apocalyptic rhetoric it employed. Issues pertaining to global warming and climate change are mainly processed through our aesthetic and cultural responses, and therefore they must be regarded more as cultural rather than scientific issues (Heise, *Imagining* 50).

The reason stories matter is because they have the power to shape our ecological consciousness and identity. This was the main driving force behind writing this dissertation. Stories from over two centuries ago that resonate with environmental issues can assist in

shaping a more moral ethos and a more informed approach towards nature. It is erroneous to believe that environmental literature is a modern invention newly instigated by climate change. Nevertheless, one can retrospectively find a rich storage of ideas that have only recently garnered attention. Romanticism, with its focus on nature immediately piques ecocritics' curiosity. Since Romanticism was partly a reaction against the Enlightenment and industrialization, it was felt that a return to nature would rectify the dislocation of humans from nature, also known as the nature culture divide. For similar reasons, some people refer to environmentalism as "neo-romanticism" (Hay 4) due to their mutual interest in reconciling humans with nature. The ecocritical interest in Romanticism has been primarily directed towards poetry, which was mainly written by male poets. As a consequence, I chose to focus on two prominent female novelists who represented an important transitional period from the end of the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, when England was going through rapid changes in its economic and social modes of life. Radcliffe and Shelley's portrayal of the connection between humans and nature yields revealing insights as how the perception of nature had changed over this defining period of England's environmental history.

At first glance, Radcliffe and Shelley may not share much except that they are both known for writing gothic fiction. However, both authors demonstrate a perception about the environment that may not be conscious, as their insights are the inevitable by-products of a changing society which was being rapidly industrialized. Nevertheless Radcliffe's and Shelley's foresight looked towards some of the principles of environmental ethics that we now have in the twentieth century. They represent two ends of an environmental continuum. One can classify Radcliffe as an essentialist ecofeminist because she reformulates the connection between women and nature which has the potential to empower women to develop an ecological identity rooted in their place of dwelling. This provides the foundation for the development of a sense of place and an ethics of care. Shelley, on the other hand, is a more revolutionary writer who completely dismantles a Romantic notion of an essential

woman/nature connection. On the contrary, she considers this connection to be limiting and disempowering. Shelley is more aligned with transformative ecofeminists who neither totally embrace nor wholly reject the woman/nature bond. They seek to move beyond this classification by creating a middle ground where nature is assimilated into culture in a non-hierarchical manner. This, in turn, materializes into an ethics of kinship where man and woman, human and nonhuman, and nature and culture, are all dynamically merged and connected.

One of the common tropes in Radcliffe and Shelley is the dichotomy of nature and culture. Radcliffe invokes nature as a physical entity and presence which heroines turn to for solace, creativity, and courage. However, she draws a line distinguishing nature from culture as a man-made concept. Nature mainly exists as a stretch of land which characters either traverse or a plot of land that has been cultivated and improved with trees and flowers such as La Vallée. The castles and dungeons feature as patriarchal spaces that are not quite natural, and are the means through which men extend oppression and confinement. Nevertheless, heroines like Emily and Ellena successfully create a mental scape through their negotiation of space, thereby resuming their bond with nature. Nature is, indeed, a palliative to oppressive forms of culture. Besides, the benevolent patriarchs are men of science who bring about a union of domesticity and science in nature. St Aubert and La Luc use natural sciences to create harmony between nature and culture. The symbiosis of the two engenders an idyllic pastoral utopia, a safe haven, where the foundation of families and communities are established. Even if the stability of this community is temporarily disturbed, it will be restored at the end and even cemented with the heroines' marriages, which only strengthens their community. In this vision, it is mainly women who bond reciprocally with nature, to the effect that nature solely communicates with them and assists them to garner strength. In this sense, identification with nature is an empowering enterprise, helping them to develop a stronger sense of identity.

Nature is not merely a background for the plot, and one can sense its effect and significance in developing the heroines' sense of self and empathy with others.

In this fashion, Radcliffe is very similar to first-wave ecocriticism whose focus is limited to the natural environment. Evidently, such an approach maintains binaries and fails to move beyond a romanticized depiction of nature. Nature is, indeed, portrayed as an actor, but it is an actor which can only operate and exist when called upon by humans. Nature derives its significance and existence only in the presence of humans, as if it has no agency of its own except in concert with human agency. Radcliffe attempts to blur the boundary between culture and nature, or the human and nonhuman worlds, by bringing the two as close as possible; however, she ultimately fails to do so as she still retains a thin, dividing line between a natural environment and anything else that bears the signature of humans on it. Furthermore, her conservative politics aligns her with an essentialist ecofeminist stance which tends to reaffirm the woman/nature bond as an empowering one. The flaw of this position is that it is fundamentally founded on the perpetuation of the dichotomies and anthropocentric hierarchies which are the root cause of adverse environmental issues.

Shelley addresses the same nature and culture binary, but does not retain existing dichotomies. Her vision seeks to reveal the disturbing, but necessary collapse of binaries. She blurs the line between nature and culture by demonstrating how integrated and interconnected the two are. Women and nature are both the victims of a system of patriarchy, but Shelley indicates that if women are associated with nature, so too are men. If men are linked with culture, so are women. Men and women, humans and nonhumans, and nature and culture, are all part of a bigger web of interconnection. It literally becomes impossible to distinguish them. In fact, unlike Radcliffe's position, Shelley's stance proves enabling as nature becomes all-inclusive. It not only moves beyond the natural environment, but includes the nonhuman, animal, or even the seemingly inert substances of which we are all composed. The collapse of hierarchies and the need for a new sense of justice are emphasized in Shelley's work. While

Radcliffe unwittingly reaffirms the categories of gender, the discourse of patriarchy, and the binary of nature and culture, Shelley calls for a whole new 'ontology' inclusive of all the entities in the world. Even humans' biological makeup is exposed as a combination of human and nonhuman.

Shelley's radical vision signifies a transformative politics of ecofeminism that addresses existing binaries which have been ideologically and socially fabricated and perpetuated in order to rationalize the marginalization of women and nature. Transformative ecofeminism is similarly concerned with the relationship between human and nonhuman, and how a reconceptualization of this relationship can lead to a more ethical approach towards our environment (Warren 100,101). Therefore, it does not totally seek to obliterate the relationship between woman and nature, but uses it as a basis to expose the 'logic of domination' while suggesting that, not only women, but humans in general are connected with nature. This can form the foundation of a non-anthropocentric attitude that accepts differences and embraces diversity without domination. At times, Radcliffe approaches this stance as she also tries to dialogically merge nature and culture by embedding her heroines in a relational bond with nature and also by placing benevolent patriarchal scientists in a harmonious reciprocation with nature. Nonetheless, she demonstrates a commitment to ultimately maintaining these borders. Women's temporary empowerment is again coupled with a return to the safe arms of benign patriarchs (Durant 525).

The representation of nature and culture is addressed in the form of science and domesticity in both authors, but from different perspectives. Radcliffe and Shelley were both aware of the Enlightenment legacy and humans' distantiation from nature. Radcliffe offers an alternative where a responsible approach to nature can prove effective by placing humans in harmony with nature which serves as an object of scientific study and simultaneously a source of wisdom and delight which must be revered for its own sake. La Luc and St Aubert are the apogee of this approach, creating a sense of harmony, family, and community around them.

Their scientific approach does not attempt to excavate or dominate nature; instead it brings them closer to nature to appreciate and care for it, hence Radcliffe's 'scientific romance'. To some extent, Shelley follows the same agenda. She reveals science and domesticity to be arch enemies, but in actual fact it is the irresponsible pursuit of science that alienates humans from nature and family. Victor's obsession with science in *Frankenstein* and the male leaders' vision of their utopian progressive society in *The Last Man* have one thing in common: the marginalization and exploitation of women and nature through science. While Radcliffe demonstrates the benefits of the symbiosis of nature, women, and culture, Shelley paints the drastic consequences of an excessive obsession with science at the cost of neglecting domesticity, which can lead to the annihilation of individuals and families. She also underlines the need for a new sense of justice and a responsible symbiosis of the two realms to bring about harmony. In Shelley's vision the catastrophes are always accompanied by the gradual collapse of family, while Radcliffe rectifies these ordeals through the family reunion.

Radcliffe's stance, with all its limitations regarding the woman/nature dichotomy, has one important value in environmental criticism: the significance of place-making. Radcliffe ties her characters with place. The characters are bound to their place and constantly add meaning, value and history to their dwelling. The result of this process of place-making is that the place becomes inflected with overtones of its inhabitants' personal identity, and family history. Once place and character are aligned with one another, one's individual identity expands to include a place-bound identity as well. The notion of place identity construes a sense of place as an integral part of one's physical body and history, whereby damage to the place inflicts damage on the self. Therefore, a sense of place or an ethics of place is developed, whose environmental implications entail the protection and conservation of nonhuman occupants, such as the trees in *Udolpho*. The synthesis of human identity with place, or the human body with place, illustrates Radcliffe's attempt to cross the divide between nature and culture. One criticism that can be levelled at Radcliffe's process of place-making is that she

reverts to a romantic idealization of place as a pastoral site of felicity and innocence. The vision of utopian country life, as Raymond Williams noted in *The Country and the City*, is an ideological myth which conceals the social inequalities of the time. Still, Radcliffe is meticulous enough to make some references, however fleetingly, to the poverty and social injustice that exist in the idyllic rural life too.

In a similar vein, Shelley accentuates the significance of place as well, but in a slightly different manner. Unlike Radcliffe, who demonstrates the benefits of attachment to place while accounting for how such an attachment may contribute to the development of an ecological identity, Shelley exposes the consequences of a detachment from place, most visibly in *The Last Man*. The island of Britain is first introduced as a land of great heroes and a site of culture, but once it is transformed into a mass grave, as a result of a global epidemic, it loses all its social, emotional and human connotations. It ceases to be a place which its inhabitants recognize and identify with. It merely becomes a vast tomb which devours its people. It is a loss of stories, histories, and identities which ultimately leads to solastalgia; the pain of not recognizing one's own place of dwelling. This loss is obviously caused by environmental issues which force people to depart their country and, by extension, to discard their place-bound identity. Departure from land/place is equated with a loss of identity. The same scenario applies to *Frankenstein* where Victor, having lost his friends, family, and fiancée, sees no reason to stay in his homeland and leaves the place in search of the monster. His departure marks the final process of his loss of identity or his being "unmade-up" (Gigante 582), as he also frequently refers to himself as a wanderer. By contrast, Radcliffe's characters all make a return to their place of dwelling and reaffirm their attachment to the place. In short, Shelley demonstrates departure, detachment from place, loss of history and identity, but Radcliffe presents return, attachment to the place, and reaffirmation of history and identity.

Radcliffe is credited with making the gothic global (Gottlieb 95), in terms of covering a wide geographical European landscape. Nevertheless, her approach to place remains a highly

local one. The characters' concerns about identity, place attachment, and community fail to move beyond their own place of living, and therefore Radcliffe's sense of place is mired in localism, indicative of first-wave ecocriticism. On the other hand, Shelley's approach to place indicates a more global perspective. The ecological catastrophe of the epidemic dismantles local communities and identities, but instead creates a new concept of community which is transnational, not restricted to local ties, defined by mutual concern for the environment and for human life globally. It is in line with Heise's 'eco-cosmopolitanism' that advocates an "environmental thinking [that] shift[s] the core of its cultural imagination from a sense of place to a less territorial and more systematic sense of planet" (*Place* 14). In the face of environmental challenges, Shelley expands the concept of community to include a global 'sense of planet', that extends far beyond city or country. This progressive stance highlights the fact that environmentalism is a global and transnational issue, hence Shelley's environmental globalism as opposed to Radcliffe's localism.

Both Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley have proven to be a rich source of environmental precepts. Despite their seeming differences, they reveal themselves to share a great deal in common. Shelley effectively demonstrates the dire consequences of the absence or negligence of the very principles Radcliffe touches upon. Shelley was a more radical writer compared to Radcliffe. Her Godwinian education, the feminist legacy of her mother, and her own difficult personal life might account for her revolutionary views in her novels as opposed to the more conservative approach of Ann Radcliffe. Another reason is the very different social and economic conditions of England in Shelley's time, which made the likes of Shelley far more conscious of the process of industrialization and the changing attitude towards nature. Issues such as pollution and climate change were not totally alien concepts in the nineteenth century. Therefore, one would expect a more explicit engagement with environmental challenges. In this transitional period from the eighteenth to nineteenth century, Radcliffe and Shelley embody the need for a transition from a social contract to a natural contract. Radcliffe's world

is based upon a Rousseauian social contract where humans' relations, property, propriety and marriages are based on rules and laws which govern every aspect of the society. Although such contracts are seen as the cause of humans' division from their original state, Radcliffe's benevolent characters still maintain their rapport with nature. Despite some significant environmental reverberations of this rapport it, nevertheless, verges on a romantic idealization of nature where the physical world is not given an independent entity and agency. In contrast, Shelley draws attention to what Michel Serres calls natural contract. The role of nature is taken into account and its independent active agency and presence is recognized. Nature is envisaged to be a participatory actor as important as humans, if not more so. Serres' natural contract acknowledges that nature is also involved in the violence and war humans have caused for as long as their existence. He reminds us of Goya's painting where two men are duelling on quicksand: "they are gradually burying themselves together. How quickly depends on how aggressive they are. . . . The belligerents don't notice the abyss they're rushing into" (Serres 1). This is a parable of our relation with the earth with which we have waged a war that devours us, burying us deeper and deeper. Moreover, Shelley's works poignantly signify the violence we have wreaked upon nature. However Shelley, unlike Radcliffe, brings in nature as one of the warriors which has refused to be the passive recipient of our harm and instead asserts its agency in unforeseen ways to dominate the agency of humans. Today, we are well aware of the agency of earth as a global actor which defies the will of humans by presenting us with the consequences of our own action.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

This project sought to give evidence of the rich environmental literature that can be found in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at a time when environmentalism had yet to be established. The project began with a consideration of the relationship between humans and nature, how it had changed over a crucial period of England's history, and ended with a manifestation of pollution and epidemics. One of the recurring aspects of this project was a critique of the proliferation of ideological binaries such as men and women, culture and

nature, and human and nonhuman. I also explored the concept of liminal or threshold spaces where the opposing terms in such binaries begin to merge dialogically, highlighting the need for a third category which is non-hierarchical and more democratic. My research also pointed forward to the manifestation of environmental pollution and its harmful cultural and ecological effects.

Following up on these ideas, further research can be conducted on Victorian fiction which more fully explicates symptoms of industrialization and rapid urbanization. Urban gothic literature is a Victorian creation which addresses the urbanization of society and the resultant issues such as pollution. Victorian gothic literature had already made a shift from a pastoral setting to an urbanized one, but London's urban society was depicted as a place replete with dark alleys and sewers brimming with crime and violence. Also, industrial pollution was inscribed in the city and became manifest through a variety of forms such as urban fog, disease, or mythical life forms such as vampires or shape-shifters. Such liminal life forms are introduced by Mary Shelley, where Frankenstein's creature occupies a threshold space between human and animal. The cultural and ideological representation of pollution in Victorian urban gothic continues the same concept of liminal spaces between nature and culture, and human and nonhuman. Mary Douglas's ideas about the cultural meaning of dirt and cleanliness in her seminal book, *Purity and Danger* (1966), can prove immensely helpful for ecocritical research in this area. Douglas argues that the concepts of dirt and pollution were ascribed to anything which a particular culture deemed to be subversive of its structures and binaries such as culture/nature or artificial/natural. Similarly, in Victorian gothic literature the inscription of pollution relied on either victimization or vilification of the female sex, as shape-shifters were mainly women. Novels such as Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) all represent a female shape-shifter who presents a threat to the status quo. In fact, the bodies of women become a cultural site upon which impurity and

pollution are inscribed. Studying such works will yield further insight as to how women and nature continued to be marginalized and stigmatized in the Victorian period when there was greater awareness about the environment than there had been earlier on. Moreover, Lawrence Buell's idea of toxic discourse can be a useful framework to examine the cultural understanding of environmental pollution. It is particularly effective, for example, when one notes that the 'Great Stink' of 1858 caused many illnesses and epidemics and redirected attention to issues of health and the poor air quality again.

In conclusion, the revisitation of Romantic literature proves that many of the contemporary challenges regarding the environment have been familiar issues in the past too. An environmental consciousness is not so much the product of rigorous scientific and laboratorial research as it is a cultural and philosophical enterprise. Our view of the earth, nature, and our environment is shaped by our stories and their cultural rendition.

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