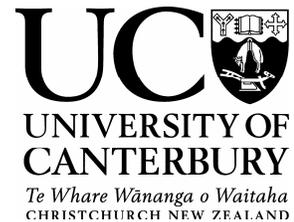


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From the Sublime to the Rebellious

Representations of Nature in the Urban Novels of a Contemporary New Zealand Author

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Abstract

Although nature is a dominant presence both in historical New Zealand literature and in New Zealand's current international image, literary critics observe a tendency on the part of young writers to neglect nature in favour of more human, urban and cultural themes. I write against this perception, basing my argument on the hypothesis that such urban-based literature may in fact be centrally concerned with the natural world and with human-nature relations. In locating nature within the urban fictional environment, I demonstrate a model of analysis that extends literary critical approaches to nature both within New Zealand literature and within the field of ecocriticism, both of which are largely consumed with analysing representations of sublime, non-urban nature. I test this urban ecocritical method of reading in my analysis of Catherine Chidgey's three novels, *In a Fishbone Church*, *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*, all of which adhere to the human-centred trend typical of contemporary New Zealand novels. I reveal within Chidgey's fiction a gradual progression away from archetypal representations of the sublime toward a more complex, fractured and rebellious variety of nature that co-exists alongside humans within urban space. Thus, while the characters in her first novel predominantly interact with nature as a sublime, non-urban entity, those in her second and third novels face the daily possibility of encountering "the wild" within domesticated settings that are apparently severed from any connection with the natural world. This kind of urbanised feral nature poses a significant threat to Chidgey's characters, overtly in the form of the powerful natural elements, and covertly through the myriad varieties of transformed nature with which they surround themselves. I read this portrayal of nature as a commentary on contemporary modernity's relationship with the natural environment, and

I suggest that this kind of agentive, autonomous nature demands a new theory of environmentalism which will consider nature as an actor alongside humans.

Introduction

Tokyo: rush hour. The lights have changed and the evening traffic momentarily halts to allow passage to the swarm of commuters making their way out of the city. The streetscape is gripped in a metropolitan pandemonium: lights flash; people jostle each other; beneath the ground, the subway rumbles. But above the heads of the crowd, suspended amidst skyscrapers and kanji florescent advertisements is a window to another world, a world which beckons viewers, tempts them with a panoramic image of a winding river and snow-capped mountains, suggests that they might stand dwarfed against the vast skyline alongside the two tiny figures who survey the scene (*Pure* 7).¹ Property of Tourism New Zealand, the billboard promotes an image that has defined New Zealand since the 1880s when proto travel agent Frank Cook, son of Thomas, pronounced the South Island a place of “solitary grandeur, [boasting] waterfalls higher than those of the Yosemite and lakes that will bear comparison with those of Switzerland and Northern Italy, with mountain ranges and peaks which [will] test the powers of the best Apline climbers” (Brendon 214).² As a visual descendant of New Zealand’s foundational touristic narrative, the Tokyo billboard attracts potential customers with the same earnest fervour that Frank Cook adopted, reinforcing a perception of New Zealand as a naturally beautiful, primeval country whose 100% pure environment boasts the most untouched, ancient and majestic natural landscapes in the world.

While New Zealand’s tourist industry faithfully reproduces this image for international consumers, its contemporary fiction writers seem determined to neglect it. New Zealand’s face may retain a green hue in the global public eye, but in the private interiors of its literature the country has a more multi-coloured visage, its themes cen-

tred on human, urban and increasingly globalised concerns that retain little connection to virgin landscapes. Philip Temple observes in contemporary writers a “preoccupation with issues of ethnicity, gender and urban moralities [and] a contempt for, or at least, discomfort with a whelming natural landscape” (9). In the introduction to his 1998 nature-writing anthology, *Lake, Mountain, Tree*, he perceives in contemporary writers a lamentable disregard for nature, the realm he sees as definitively characterising New Zealand:

It has become fashionable in literary circles to ignore or condescend to the natural environment. It has been post-modernly uncool to see mountains over malls, to weigh forests more than French fries, to hear the louder sound of rivers under the reo.... The evidence of much recent “creative” writing supports the notion that nature and landscape are irrelevant to what New Zealand is currently all about. (9)

Implicitly, Temple suggests that New Zealand literature ought to be more attentive to the distinctive markers of its identity, the lakes, the mountains and the trees that grace Tourism New Zealand’s billboards the world over. Why, he seems indignantly to ask, do New Zealand’s young writers so doggedly avoid the thing that makes their country unique? Why does the New Zealand novel now include protagonists like a nineteenth-century French vintner infatuated with a male angel or an ambitious entomologist scouring the Amazon jungle for a mythic butterfly? While the Japanese are contemplating New Zealand nature on a billboard, why is a young writer like Karl Shuker turning away from the picturesque scenes just outside his office window and instead composing a novel set almost entirely in claustrophobic Tokyo?³

Dunedin-based Catherine Chidzey is an exemplary representative of the generation of writers that Temple criticises. Voted “the most fabulous New Zealand

writer alive” by a group of thirty literary professionals in a 2003 *Listener* poll, she has to date produced three highly acclaimed novels that demonstrate the globalising and increasingly urban trajectory of contemporary New Zealand literature (Braunias 50). Her first novel, *In a Fishbone Church*, was originally composed as her MFA thesis at Victoria University, and is set primarily in Wellington, with short jaunts overseas and several flashbacks to the 1950s Christchurch suburbs. Whereas this novel is centred in New Zealand, her second novel, *Golden Deeds*, has half of its action set off-shore in the United Kingdom, and her third, *The Transformation* is finally severed from any direct connection to New Zealand whatsoever, set as it is in the nineteenth-century frontier town of Tampa, Florida. Chidgey appears to have no intention of altering the globalised, urban character of her fiction, given that she is currently working on a novel which is set in Berlin in the 1930s. While *In a Fishbone Church* briefly displays images of wild and rural nature craved by Temple, Chidgey’s subsequent fiction categorically refuses to make eye contact with “the waves breaking on our long shores” and “the wild stretch of land” privileged by the writers in Temple’s anthology (Temple 11; Tuwhare 214).

Although such literature may indeed neglect wild and rural locales, this does not necessarily mean that it is uninterested in nature. In this thesis, I build my argument on the hypothesis that urban-based literature may be centrally concerned with the natural world, just as nature-writing is often centrally concerned with human issues. In yearning for a return to nature-based New Zealand literature, Temple overlooks the well-established literary perspective that colonial and cultural nationalist depictions of nature reflected upon the authors’ material, emotional or cultural concerns. Thus, when colonial poets describe nature as a powerful foe, literary scholars read these descriptions to be an expression of the difficulties of settlement, and when

writers romanticise nature as a beautiful, sublime paradise, critics suggest that the portrayal shows settlers' anxious need to affirm the strange new land and to deflect attention away from the ugliness of the changes wrought against nature during colonisation.⁴ Meanwhile, analysts of the Caxton poets reveal their ubiquitous inhospitable mountain ranges to be an icon in a quest for a genuine New Zealand identity, a tool by which the men attempt to grasp a definitive uniqueness beyond what they see to be the hollow quality of 1930s provincial culture.⁵ Nature certainly plays a central role in this literature and in the critical discussions that stem from it, but the diverse cultural meanings attached to nature both by writers and literary scholars suggest that it functions primarily as a screen for human concerns.

My reading methodology reverses this tendency: whereas the human typically assumes a default position of centrality within literary studies, even within those concerned with analysing nature writing, I adopt an ecocritical approach which places nature and the environment in the centre of the reading.⁶ Although the vast majority of ecocritical studies are focused on nature writing, I extend the parameters of the ecocritical approach beyond the nature-writing domain to test its application in an analysis of Chidgey's urban-based fiction. I have adopted this urban ecocritical reading approach with three primary research aims. First, I seek to determine what role, if any, nature plays in Chidgey's urban fiction and to discuss how the characters perceive and relate to that nature. Second, I seek to read Chidgey within the broad context of New Zealand literature in order to determine how her representations of nature differ from or remain aligned to those of her literary predecessors. What do her depictions of nature suggest about the development of human-nature relationships in New Zealand and in its literature in particular? Third, I seek to theorise about the role of nature within contemporary modernity. If nature is in fact present within the appar-

ently nature-less fictional metropolis, what does this mean for the characters who structure their lives without any immediate reference to the natural world? In a cultural framework that has developed in tandem with the control and subjugation of the natural world, how does urban modernity negotiate its coexistence with nature?

My first step in answering these questions is to undertake an extended analysis of modernity's relationship with nature. In Chapter One, I establish an historical and contextual foundation for my discussion by surveying the development of Western attitudes toward nature from the medieval period until the twenty-first century. Special attention is paid to contemporary theoretical approaches toward nature and the environment, including ecocriticism, in order to provide a framework within which to locate Chidgey's fiction. I attend to the first of my research objectives throughout the remainder of my thesis, devoting Chapters Two, Three and Four each to a different aspect of Chidgey's representation of nature. My discussion in Chapter Two centres on *In a Fishbone Church*, the novel that I read as being the most intimately connected to historical New Zealand literary representations of nature. In this chapter, I also attend to the second of my research objectives, assessing the ways in which Chidgey repeats and revises cultural nationalist portrayals of sublime nature. Chapters Three and Four both consider *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation* in tandem, and both are concerned with addressing my final research focus on the relationship between nature and modernity. Chapter Three examines modernity's urge to control and transform nature, and discusses Chidgey's depictions of colonialism and industrialisation, as well as her idealised vision of an alternative pre-modern mode of nature utilisation. Chapter Four considers the ways in which nature usurps the various methods of control identified in Chapter Three, and examines the insidious and often violent ways in which such rebellious nature challenges and destabilises the culture of modernity.

In searching for nature within the urban text, I thus engage in a literary critical version of the process I see functioning in Chidgey's novels: just as her characters encounter nature within their ostensibly nature-less lives, I reveal the presence of nature within the urban fictional work, subverting Temple's perspective that nature is absent from contemporary New Zealand literature. If this reading approach aims to provide a new perspective within contemporary literary discourse, it also attempts a more widely applicable cultural commentary on the existence of the vast majority of contemporary New Zealanders, 86% of whom reside in urban centres, their everyday lives disconnected from the pristine wilderness promoted by Tourism New Zealand.⁷ Urban ecocriticism unearths a kind of nature that inspires no sense of gap between daily metropolitan life and the idealised imaginings of a pristine country that is mainly seen on television. It introduces a theory of the natural world that accommodates both nature and culture, one that has immediate relevance even in a city like Tokyo, one that redeploys wild nature from the billboard into the twenty-first century urban environment.

Chapter One

Modernity and Nature: A Theoretical and Historical Overview

In her study on nature and the city, Annabelle Sabloff notes a common perception amongst her Toronto interviewees that “nature is where the city is not” (7). This contrast between nature and human society is pervasive within contemporary Western culture: in Sabloff’s study, participants instinctively differentiate between rivers and roads, wildflowers and concrete, animals and humans in much the same way that Temple does in his critique of contemporary New Zealand literature. Tourism New Zealand’s advertising campaign similarly draws its strength from the nature-culture contrast; without it, the promotion loses all meaning, because if consumers do not perceive a difference between the billboard photo and the stress of urban life, they will have no impetus to purchase the advertised product. In this chapter, I outline the process by which the image on the billboard comes to be perceived as something fundamentally different from the city street, the process by which nature and culture are separated from one another by modernity both in a material and conceptual sense. I provide an historical synopsis of Western culture’s relationship with the natural world, which I trace from the Middle Ages until the twenty-first century, and I argue that the rise of modern science and the birth of Romanticism continue to influence dominant cultural perceptions of nature, both in contemporary environmentalism and in ecocriticism. Because ecocriticism retains reverberations of this nature-culture dualism, its application to apparently nature-less writing is problematic; I thus draw on the work of postmodern theorists to posit a model of ecocriticism that will destabilise modernity’s separation between nature and culture, and allow for a nature-centred reading of fictional urban environments.

1. Mystical to Mechanistic: Western Culture's Developing Vision of Nature

Both the Tourism New Zealand campaign and the responses of Sabloff's participants suggest the pervasive quality of nature-culture differentiation within contemporary culture and a shared investment in a distinctively modern orientation toward the natural world. In both examples, the human conceives of nature as separate from the self: a source of income, a holiday site and a thing of beauty to be gazed upon, nature is conceptualised as asset or as commodity, as something which may be utilised in the human agenda, be that revenue-generation or leisure. In assuming that nature is passive and available for human utilisation, contemporary humans subscribe to the vision of nature mobilised at the onset of modernity, when science and technology transformed human perceptions of space: as cartographers mapped the totality of the globe, astronomers discovered the movement of the planets and scientists revealed the internal workings of nature, the world was increasingly perceived to be knowable, manageable and ultimately controllable. Instead of being victimised by the forces of nature, humans from the sixteenth century onward possessed a growing sense of power over their surroundings. Within this modern framework, nature became something that could be observed, dissected and understood through empirical science, something that could be harnessed in the service of human culture.

This understanding represented a vastly altered perception of humans' place in the world compared to those that had dominated the Middle Ages. Whereas modern humans surveyed their surroundings with an increasing degree of confidence, medieval subjects viewed the world with less assurance. During the medieval period, thinkers operated under the assumption of a divinely controlled world, with God positioned at the apex of the medieval taxonomy, followed by angels, humans and beasts in descending order. Instead of relying on the methods of empirical evidence and experi-

mentation instilled by Sir Francis Bacon in the sixteenth century, medieval philosophers drew on biblical authority and the knowledge of antiquity—the writings of Aristotle and Pliny, the medical theories of Galen, and the astronomical observations of Ptolemy, in particular—in their attempts to understand the world in which they lived (Richard Jones 4). The explanations of these ancient authorities were accepted in a spirit of faith: the prevailing notion of the world was that it was divinely controlled and that knowledge was revealed by God or by His representatives in the Church. Within this scripturally centred, faith-based framework, the divine and material combined fluidly in everyday life; whereas conceptions of “truth” would come to be linked with observable evidence in subsequent centuries, medieval thinkers drew their “truth” from the sacred scripture and the authority of the ancients.

This assumption inhibited the development of any systematic or scientific investigation of nature and the environment because independent exploration was perceived as being neither necessary nor godly. Raymond Williams argues that the notion of divine order instilled a belief in godly controlled laws and destiny that discouraged active inquiry into the properties of nature’s material physicality (“Ideas of Nature” 74). The studies of nature that did take place during the Middle Ages operated within the sharp confines instilled by the dominant theological understandings of space. In his extended study of medieval “books of secrets”—recipe books for medicinal or magical practices—William Eaton has noted that medieval scientists believed that nature was “arcane... full of miracles and packed with symbolic meaning.... [It was knowable] only by divine revelation” (15). Although the writers of the books of secrets engaged in a manipulation of nature, they did so outside of the empirical guidelines imposed by modern science; they were more alchemists than scientists, simultaneously engaging with both the physical and the metaphysical in their

manipulation of matter. Despite the medieval emphasis on the metaphysical, Clarence Glacken has observed that a minority of thinkers were concerned with articulating theories of the physical environment. For example, Albert the Great's thirteenth-century treatise *Liber de natura locorum* (*The Places of Nature*) advocated the need for a detailed knowledge of the variety of places and the causes of their varieties (Glacken 265 – 67). Although Albert subscribed to the view of nature as a divinely ordered realm, his analysis also took into account the astrological and local conditions affecting a given environment (Glacken 271). This study, amongst others, showed some embryonic consideration both of local nature and the material particulars affecting that environment.

With the development of distinctively “modern” forms of science and technology from the sixteenth century onwards, the mythical and God-centred figurations prominent during the medieval period were replaced by a world perspective that situated humans firmly in the centre. The year 1492 remains pivotal in the perceptual displacement of the world's unknowable quality: although mythological stories about the New World persisted for hundreds of years following Columbus's discovery of the Americas, the factual existence of the New World proved that humans could navigate their way through unknown regions of the globe and chart their route for future journeys. As numerous studies have shown, the circumnavigation of the globe imposed order over space, transforming the world from a frightening, divinely-controlled realm into a knowable, mapped space that was revealed, and thus controlled by those men who mapped it.¹ Following Columbus's discovery, there ensued a flurry of cartographic activity that culminated in Gerard Mercator's sixteenth-century projection of the globe, which compressed the spherical world onto a flat surface in order to allow navigators accurately to plot their course through the seas (Brotton 161 – 69).

The grid of longitude and latitude that Mercator projected upon the globe was but one of the universalising systems of knowledge developed during the Renaissance. As explorers discovered the physical world, scientists, artists and engineers were busy discovering whole new worlds of their own: artists rediscovered the Euclidian theory of perspective, thereby establishing a mathematically-calculable grid by which to paint, and Sir Isaac Newton extended the astronomical work of Galileo and Johannes Kepler to produce his revolutionary theory of universal gravitation, which reduced all motion to a finite set of universally applicable rules. With the development of scientific knowledge came the practical application of that knowledge and an exponential advancement in technology: drawing on the work of the physicists, engineers developed sophisticated machines which significantly altered perceptions of humanity's capacity to create, manage and control their environment. The development of various forms of automatic propulsion—the combustion engine, clockwork, hydraulic systems and so on—served to validate modernity's perception of its independence from and mastery over the natural world. Carolyn Merchant argues that the increasing presence of machines in every day life, coupled with the advancements made in scientific knowledge, made plausible the idea that the world itself was an ordered machine (*Eden* 76). Indeed, Newton initiated the mechanised worldview in his 1687 *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, suggesting that the “world machine” was governed by “law and order” and that it was consequently predictable, regulated and therefore governable (Merchant, *Eden* 77). Since human-created machines were made to act in accordance with the goals of their operators, the physical world was similarly theorised as a complicated mechanism that was operated from outside by God. The cosmos was metaphorically conceptualised as a clock, with God

as the clockmaker, mathematician and engineer who created it (Merchant, *Eden* 76; Asma 101).

The comparisons made between the physical world and the machine had a profound impact on human understandings of nature. Whereas the medieval understanding of nature had assumed that the natural world was beyond human control, the modern theory of nature's mechanistic quality implicitly reduced nature to an inanimate entity that passively offered itself to humans for their purposes. René Descartes is perhaps the figure most centrally associated with this mechanistic understanding of nature. Writing in the mid-seventeenth century, Descartes argued that

There exists [sic] no occult forces in stones or plants. There are no amazing or marvellous sympathies or antipathies [;] in fact there exists nothing in the whole of nature which cannot be explained in terms of purely corporeal causes totally devoid of mind and thought. (Descartes cited in Plumwood, *Feminism* 104)

The Cartesian conceptualisation of nature as purely corporeal and material converts the natural world into a finite, mechanised version of the divinely-controlled, dynamic realm it had been within medieval thought. Given humans' ability to create and dominate the machines at hand, Cartesian philosophy suggested that humans, given sufficient knowledge, could come to occupy a godly position in relation to the natural world; in his writing, Descartes explicitly relayed his belief in humans' potential as masters of nature: "Knowing the nature and behaviour of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens and all bodies which surround us, as well as we now understand the different skills of our workers, we can... make ourselves the masters and possessors of nature" (151). Since it was through the advances made in science and technology that humans created and controlled other machines, Descartes assumed that a greater scientific

knowledge of nature would allow humans to exercise a similar level of control over the complicated natural machine.

No-one did more to document the detailed inner workings of the natural machine than the eighteenth-century Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus, whose system of examining and categorising natural specimens positioned over nature the totalising grid established by Mercator in cartography and Newton in physics. Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (*The System of Nature*) outlined a method by which he claimed all plants on the earth could be categorised: taking into account the plant's size, form, number, position and the characteristics of its reproductive parts, Linnaeus grouped each specimen in one of twenty-six categories and later went on to extend his method to document species of animals, including humans (Pratt 16). Linnaeus's categorising system was perceived as a panacea, a method by which to find order within a natural world that modernity regarded as utterly chaotic. In contrast to medieval thinkers who saw nature as being divinely ordered, Bacon argued that the natural world had become disordered and uncontrollable at the fall of man and that the means for regaining control was the intense interrogation of nature through science (114 – 115). While various thinkers had struggled to make sense of what they perceived to be nature's chaos and had proposed ordering schemas by which to understand nature, none approached the simplicity and practicality of Linnaeus's.²

The confidence with which Linnaeus approached the task of mapping the entirety of nature was a distinctly modern sentiment that placed him in the company of the men who, over the previous three hundred years, had uncritically assumed the supremacy of the developing Western knowledge structure. The scientific discoveries taking place in physics, astronomy, natural history and engineering, coupled with the philosophies fuelling these investigations, placed the Western bearer of knowledge in

a perceived position of superiority over the scientifically undeveloped world. This perception of the West's technological superiority was part of a much wider structure of thought that privileged modern science and rationalism as the most advanced form of knowledge. In her foundational study *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood argues that the culture of modernity developed within a structure of thought that legitimated the quest for mastery aspired for by figures like Linnaeus, Newton, Bacon and Descartes. She sees Descartes' continental rationalist philosophy as a particularly significant influence in the development of this structure: Descartes' conceptualisation of nature as an inanimate machine established a split between humans and nature, positioning humans as the potential masters of inanimate nature on account of their intellectual and technological advancement. Cartesian philosophy therefore explored and cemented a split between humans and the external world, explicitly relating the former with mind and the latter with matter and corporeality. In Plumwood's analysis, mind-body dualism echoes throughout the entire epistemological structure of modernity.³ As she trenchantly shows, the multifarious dualisms springing from the mind-body split result in a "logic of colonialism" that is based on a supposition of rational modernity's epistemic supremacy and its inherent right to govern anything that can be aligned with the "non-rational" side of the dichotomies. Indeed, Plumwood's central concern is to show the interconnectivity between the various modes of domination (colonialism, industrialism, patriarchy and so on), and to situate them within the Cartesian dualistic conceptual structure.

Linnaeus's benign sketching of plants and animals takes on a rather more dubious hue when viewed through Plumwood's mastery thesis.⁴ Although he personally exhibited hesitation over how to categorise nature and repeatedly revised his system, his project nevertheless subscribed to modernity's dualistic episteme in as much as it

conceived of nature as a passive material entity, available for either literal or intellectual annexation by an active, thinking European human: observing, sketching, gathering and often killing their specimens, Linnaeus and his disciples were clearly invested in the Cartesian presumption of nature's acquiescence to the human agenda.⁵ From this perspective, the naturalist dominates nature, extending European global domination in a manner even more ambitious than the mapping of the globe because it seeks to chart not only coastlines, but "every visible square, or even cubic inch, of the earth's surface" (Pratt 30). Moreover, Linnaeus's systematisation of nature initiated a process of intellectual imperialism within which other forms of knowing nature were displaced by a default empirical truth (Pratt 34 – 35). This intellectual mastery of nature associates the detached scientist with modernity's other dominators—the coloniser, the slave owner, the patriarchal male and so on—because of a shared investment in the dualistic power structure.

Of course, the connections between natural history and European domination also existed at a much more material level than the ideological one identified by Plumwood. Cataloguing the totality of global nature was conceivable only within the global space made accessible through modernity's technology and, therefore, the exploration of nature increased in tandem with the exploration of the globe. Naturalists were often present as members of oceanic expeditions, ready to fulfil the explicitly global ambitions of their mentors by scouring uncharted territories of the globe, and, as Mary Louise Pratt shows, equally ready to identify natural resources that would be lucrative to the empires they represented (34 – 35).⁶ The intimate connection between colonist and naturalist is particularly evident in the example of Daniel Solander, a student of Linnaeus's who was the official naturalist on Cook's first journey to the South Pacific. Although he was in one sense present purely for the purpose of gathering

plant and animal specimens, Solander was also directly involved in many of the pivotal events of Cook's journey, including the captain's initial landing in New Zealand.⁷ Setting foot on the shores of Aotearoa only moments after Cook himself, Solander remains one of the most prominent members of the *Endeavour* crew, privileged enough to be the only other person apart from Joseph Banks to accompany Cook ashore to attempt to meet with Maori the day after the Cook's men had killed a warrior approaching their yawl (Cook 34). Solander's blurred role as scientist and colonist encapsulates the unified aim of the colonial and scientific factions of the imperial project. Whether the goal was an intellectual mastery of nature or a literal mastery of land, these men functioned within a system that legitimated European domination at both the ideological and the practical levels.

With the development of modernity, then, an entirely new idea of nature emerged to replace the medieval perception of nature as a divinely controlled, implicitly unknowable realm. As the Cartesian strain of Enlightenment thought took hold, nature came to be perceived as something increasingly objectified, malleable and controllable, something increasingly "out there" (Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature" 79). The modern dualistic structure of thought established a firm demarcation between humans and nature, performing a process that science sociologist Bruno Latour has called "purification" within which modernity created "two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand [and] that of nonhumans on the other" (*Never Been Modern* 10 – 11). Both Raymond Williams and Latour argue that this separation between humans and nature was a fundamental step in mobilising the epistemological mechanics of modernity. Latour suggests that the separating work was instigated by a body he calls the "modern constitution", an epistemological structure that worked to abstractly order the world, "[defining] humans and nonhumans,

their properties, their relations, their abilities, their groupings” (*Never Been Modern* 15). Latour’s modern constitution, of course, performs its separating function in accordance with Cartesian dualism, not only defining nature as passive *terra nullius*, but also defining humans as the ordering, agentive subject. Like Latour, Williams acknowledges the abstract outcomes of the separation, noting that modern understandings of nature made it possible to describe the processes of the natural world in ways inconceivable prior to modernity. However, he also notes the practical, active outcomes of “discovering” the workings of nature: while scientists may have aspired for objective observation of nature—knowledge for knowledge’s sake—they were equally interested in experimentation and “applied science, the conscious intervention [in nature] for human purposes” (“Ideas of Nature” 77). The practical human utilization of nature was most thoroughly achieved through colonialism and industrialisation: transforming uncultivated terrain into commodity-producing machine, the two juggernauts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries confirmed modernity’s perception of its mastery of nature, and irrevocably transformed the natural world in the process.

2. God’s Own Temple: Romantic Appreciations of Nature

Paradoxically, as European domination of the natural world increased, so did the appreciation of nature within Western culture. The birth of Romanticism during the late eighteenth century remains the pivotal moment in modernity’s developing natural aesthetic, but there had existed an appreciative sentiment toward nature even prior to the birth of modernity. The early appreciative expressions toward nature were most often directed toward rural areas which were conceived as being a refuge from the squalor of the city.⁸ As early as the thirteenth century, writers had complained about the air in

London, the quality of which had apparently not improved in 1578 when Queen Elizabeth I stayed away from her capital on account of its “noisome smells”, preferring instead to remain in her rural dwellings (Thomas 244). Although the city was generally conceived as synonymous with civility during the Renaissance, there also existed a developing ambivalence towards the burgeoning urban centres and a corresponding conviction that the countryside was healthier and more beautiful than heavily populated areas (Thomas 243). Wilderness, on the other hand, was typically thought of as a frightening and undesirable realm, conceived in biblical terms to be akin to the world Adam and Eve entered upon their expulsion from the garden. As William Cronon shows, pre-eighteenth century conceptions of wilderness saw it as deserted, savage, desolate and barren: it was “Satan’s home” (70; 72).⁹

In contrast, Romantic appreciations of nature deified the wild. In part a reaction against the Enlightenment’s overwhelming emphasis on order, the Romantic preference for untamed nature functioned as an antidote to what many writers and artists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw as civilisation’s unnecessary complexity. Following Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Jonathan Bate argues that Jean-Jacques Rousseau is the first to articulate “the dialectic of the Enlightenment”—that the liberating effects of science had in fact resulted in the enslavement of humanity, hence the need to return to a state of nature (76 – 77). Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* explored the idea of nature as humans’ original home, with society functioning to sever humans from their connection with nature, thus leaving them alienated and dissatisfied (Bate 42). Although Rousseau recognised an inherent ugliness in nature, where the strong killed the weak, he nevertheless viewed these tribulations as infinitely preferable to the vices of progressive civilisation (Bate 44). His juxtaposing of nature to culture was an approach adopted in

various guises by writers over the next century or so: William Wordsworth, William Blake and Lord Byron in England, and Edgar Allan Poe, Henry David Thoreau and Herman Melville in America all remain influenced by the Romantic vision of nature.

Whereas pre-Enlightenment understandings of wild nature had emphasised its potentially demonic power, the idealised Romantic portrayals of unmodified nature show a monumental shift in perception. As Cronon points out, “Satan’s home... [became] God’s own temple”, a place within which one could glimpse the divine and experience a purity unavailable within the cloistered artifice of civilisation (72). The confrontations with the divine to be had in the wild were, however, far from pleasurable: the early Romantic portrayals of nature emphasised the trepidation and horror involved in encountering uncultivated nature. These portrayals drew on Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant’s theories of the sublime which suggested that a sublime experience occurs when an object defies cognitive or intellectual comprehension due to its magnitude or dynamic force (Edgar and Sedgwick 390; Hitt 607 – 09). Eliciting contradictory feelings of “displeasure and a simultaneously awakening pleasure”, the sublime was conceived in oxymoronic terms as a “delightful horror” in which the subject confronted a powerful other and thus increased his or her reflective capacity (Kant 106; Burke 73). In the writing of many Romantics, the reflection that takes place in the sublime encounter revolves around humanity’s insignificance in the face of a transcendent, supernatural force; from this perspective, contact with the wild was a religious experience akin to meeting the wrathful God of the Old Testament (Cronon 74).

As the popularity of wild nature grew and as opportunities for travel improved throughout the nineteenth century, the wrathful visage of sublime nature was replaced by something much more benevolent. Cronon argues that the sublime became domes-

ticated and that a sentimental quality toward nature replaced the awe-filled rhapsodies of the early Romantics (75). While flocks of intrepid tourists followed in Wordsworth's footsteps to the Lakes District and to the Swiss Alps seeking some version of his transcendent experience, Cronon argues that "the religious sentiments [these places] evoked were more those of a pleasant country parish than those of a grand cathedral" (75). By the nineteenth century, the delightful aspect of the sublime overwhelmed the horrific, resulting more often than not in a facile aestheticisation of remote locales by culturally savvy consumers who ventured out into the wild for their afternoon excursions. It is no coincidence that the proliferation of Romantic appreciations of the wild occurred at precisely the point when colonisation began in earnest; indeed, as Geoff Park shows, Cook first laid eyes on New Zealand at about the time that Romanticism was taking hold in Europe ("Theatre Country" 9). Given the romantic privileging of remote locations, the bush-clad islands of the New World were readily subsumed into Romantic discourses on nature. Throughout the nineteenth century, Romanticism was as much a way of processing the landscape as science and colonialism: whereas natural historians were concerned with categorising nature, understanding it through empiricism, the Romantics incorporated the New World into their own mode of cultural perception, understanding nature through the European values of aestheticism.

Although in one sense the appreciation of the wild and the increased processing of nature seem to be contradictory impulses, in another sense, they may be seen to be different sides of the same coin. Both the appreciative and extractive approaches are equally invested in the separation between humans and nature mobilised with the birth of modernity and cemented by Enlightenment philosophy. Implicit within the Romantic privileging of unpopulated locales is the necessity for the land to be empty

and devoid of human presence, and the idea that nature is most pure when it is isolated and protected from human contact. While those following Rousseau idealised pre-modern interactions with nature, in practice, the appetite for pristine, primeval landscapes often involved ignoring or controlling the presence of indigenous people within those areas deemed worthy of protection (Park, "Theatre Country" 18 – 19). In this vein, Cronon argues that the entire concept of "wilderness" represents a "flight from history" in which consumers not only avoid the historicity of a particular area (including how it came to be empty), but also avoid the origin of their own angle of vision (79 – 80). Appreciative nature consumption arose alongside the mounting consumption of nature in other forms, as sugar, cotton, coal, and the myriad other commodities produced via modernity's intensified interactions with nature. In other words, the appreciation of pristine nature was predicated upon modernity's control of non-pristine nature and an implicit unequivocal assumption of the human-nature divide. Indeed, as Raymond Williams shows, those most invested in the mastery of nature were often the same people who deified remote locales: the aristocracy of the eighteenth century and the wealthy industrialists of the nineteenth were among the first wilderness enthusiasts, the first to purchase country retreats funded from the profits of their processing of nature (79; 80 – 81). The Romantic conceptualisation of nature represents a new stage in modernity's mastery of nature: whereas generations of Europeans had fought throughout the Middle Ages to establish a tenuous hold over a threatening natural world, modern humans resting comfortably in the mastery of their environment could afford to be ambivalent about the destruction of nature and could entertain the idea of visiting the last unspoiled areas that remained.

3. Deep Versus Shallow: Contemporary Environmentalist Responses to Nature

Echoes of Romanticism continue to reverberate within contemporary Western culture, not least in the environmental movement which repeats many of the basic tenets of Romanticism. Emerging in the latter half of the twentieth century, the environmental movement adopted a critical approach toward progressive modernity, problematising the extractive, rapacious modes of industrial production that had dominated throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Cronon argues that environmentalism is “a grandchild of Romanticism” which takes its bearings from the model of nature instilled during the late eighteenth century (72). Like the Romantics, environmentalists tend to privilege wild locations, those areas most under threat from human impact: their central concerns include protecting endangered species, wilderness preservation, supervising outdoor reserves, and maintaining the cleanliness and purity of the world’s forests, oceans and plains. These areas have indeed been severely affected by modernity’s intensive interaction with the natural world: colonialism and industrialisation, in particular, resulted in increasing pollution, species extinction and decreasing resources which forced a widespread recognition that the advancement of some portions of humanity had resulted in something quite the opposite for the natural world.¹⁰ The steady stream of environmental publications and conferences ensuing during the 1970s stressed the fundamental contradictions between the limited resources of the globe and the unlimited growth aspired for by Western modernity (Irwin 36). Many of these environmental publications suggested that economic and technological growth had compromised the earth’s environmental future, that survival depended upon a modified human interaction with nature, and that modernity’s modes of pursuing “progress” were not necessarily within the long-term interests of humanity.¹¹ Positioning nature as the antithesis of progress and casting the natural world as implicitly

“good”, the environmental movement challenged modernity’s assumption that “the growing domination of nature by [people] was the very measure of humanity’s advancement” (Hobsbawm 261).

This does not suggest that mainstream environmentalism necessarily disputes progress per se, nor that the movement is unified in its vision of how to address modernity’s degradation of nature. Although the effects of progressive modernity on the natural world are undeniable, mainstream environmentalism generally does not offer a universal condemnation of modernity: rather, it supports a modified interaction with nature, one which takes into account the earth’s limited resources, while retaining the kind of developmental goals that have informed modernity since its inception in the final years of the fifteenth century. For example, the discourse of sustainable development that emerged in the late 1980s attempts to reconcile the disparate themes of modern environmental discussion, that is, the need to practice restraint, yet the simultaneous desire for ongoing development and luxurious standards of living (Irwin 44).¹² In practice, mainstream environmentalism tends toward technocentrism, an approach which operates under a continuing faith in modernity’s capacity for mastery, assuming that environmental degradation is best dealt with through the tools of modernity—science, technology and the careful management of resources (O’Riordan 32; Hays 2). Mainstream environmentalism’s overwhelming reliance on scientific data and forecasting further indicates a substantial investment in the culture of modernity: while environmentalism’s manipulation of nature may be undertaken for the purpose of protection, rather than exploitation, the fundamental premise of modernity’s ability to master nature remains unchallenged.¹³

The technocentric approach is viewed with scepticism by more radical factions of the environmental movement which argue that mainstream environmentalism aims

for nothing more than a superficial modification of humans' historic interaction with nature. Members of the deep ecology movement, in particular, regard mainstream environmentalism's policy modification as a "shallow" solution to a problem that has its roots in the very foundations of Western society.¹⁴ Deep ecology takes an "ecocentric" stance toward environmental degradation, operating under a supposition of "a natural order in which all things [move] according to natural laws, in which the most delicate and perfect balance was maintained up to the point at which man entered with all his ignorance" (O'Riordan 34; McConnell 190). Within a deep ecocentric framework, both humans and nature are endowed with intrinsic worth, a belief that ostensibly dissolves the boundaries between the two ontological domains; indeed, the founder of the deep ecology movement, Arne Naess, advocates a merged sense of identity that extends beyond the self to include the non-human (Devall and Sessions 67). The achievement of this expanded sense of self leads to a perception of "biocentric equality" wherein the self-realised person understands that all entities have "an equal right to live and blossom" (Devall and Sessions 67).

While deep ecology's emphasis on identification and intrinsic worth may offer something of an alternative to modernity's instrumental view of nature, the movement contains strong resonances of Romanticism that pervade its philosophy and inadvertently repeat the Western dualistic conceptualisation of nature it strives to critique. Deep ecology possesses none of the moderate agendas of mainstream environmentalism: committed deep ecologists like Naess envision a rejection of the fundamental structures of modernity, suggesting that "the ecological crisis... can only be countered by a 'new renaissance', a 'new path' with new criteria for 'progress, efficiency and rational action'" (Morris 39 – 40). In other words, Naess suggests the need to alter what he sees to be the root of environmental exploitation, the very structure of West-

ern society. This is, of course, a familiar mantra, one initiated by Rousseau when he drew attention to the “mental agonies”, “lunatic vanity” and the “miserics” to be had in modernity’s pursuing superfluities over necessities (Bate 45 – 46). Deep ecology’s vision of an alternative structure is not altogether dissimilar to the “primitive-man-in-Edenic-nature” scenario envisioned by Rousseau. Drawing on an eclectic medley of Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Native American ritual, deep ecologists enshrine a spiritually inflected version of the human-nature relationship which repeats Romantic idealisations of non-Western approaches to nature.

In taking its cues from Romanticism, deep ecology, like mainstream environmentalism, tends to exalt wild settings and, in the process, succumbs to the dualism implicit within Romantic portrayals of nature. The central figures of the deep ecology movement are wilderness-loving philosophers, mountaineers like Naess and Gary Snyder, who deify remote nature in a manner that is not altogether dissimilar to Wordsworth or Thoreau. Despite the deep ecological assertion that “there is no bifurcation in reality between the human and the nonhuman realms”, the deification of wilderness will always result in a strong demarcation between the human and the non-human, because it implies that nature is in its purest, most spiritually potent state when it is free of human presence (Fox 194). Cronon argues in this connection that the dominant equating of “nature” to “wilderness” insistently reinscribes a “dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural”, a vision which results in irresponsible environmental behaviour because wilderness advocates fail to see nature around them in their day-to-day lives (80).¹⁵ The fact that the majority of environmentalists are themselves white, middle-class urban-dwellers (not unlike their Romantic predecessors) potentially substantiates this claim (Ross 15). Since the urban context would be seen as firmly separated from nature within deep ecological thought, it

would thus be considered unworthy (or at least, not as worthy) of environmental concern.

Attempts to bridge the separation between humans and nature do not necessarily rectify the hierarchical power relations between nature and culture in modernity's default epistemology. Plumwood points out that although deep ecologists seek to correct the bifurcation between the human and the non-human worlds through identification, this act implicitly places the human in the position of spokesperson on behalf of nature (*Feminism* 178). Assuming that their own sympathy with nature empowers them to act on its behalf, deep ecologists adopt a position in which humans once again claim a position of superiority over nature, casting themselves as the empowered saviours of a passive natural realm (Plumwood, *Feminism* 178). Plumwood notes that "such treatment is a standard part of subordination, for example, of women, servants, the colonised [and] animals" (*Feminism* 178). This perspective suggests that breaching the West's entrenched notions of dualism requires more than mere identification, the act of which may indeed result in a denial of difference, a usurped speaking position by the human, and an avoidance of the fact that nature may possess a radically different agenda from that imagined by sympathetic humans.

Despite their critical stance toward modernity, then, both deep ecology and mainstream environmentalism ultimately operate within its epistemological paradigm: nature is equated with wilderness and humans assume a position of mastery within which they may either protect or exploit nature depending on their affiliation. What remains constant throughout is the agency of the human and the notion that "the environment" is a passive terrain, best left uninhabited by humanity. Critics suggest that this dichotomy between humans and the environment is unhelpful in theorising fresh solutions to the environmental crisis: theorists like Cronon and Andrew Ross argue

for the need of an expanded definition of the term “environment”, one which will include humans in a role other than as perpetrators of environmental crimes. Ross, in particular, suggest that environmentalism’s focus on wilderness marginalises issues that may not involve endangered species or mountains, but that are equally worthy of environmental consideration—problems like hunger, poor housing, sanitation, industrial waste disposal and pest control (15).¹⁶

Such socially inflected environmental analyses offer a promising corrective to the dualism that pervades deep ecology and mainstream environmentalism alike. Studies conducted from this point of view implicitly adopt aspects of social ecological philosophy which strives to account for human effect in the environmental crisis. Assessing the political antecedents and consequences of environmental decay, social ecology operates under the central premise that nature and environmentalism are inseparable from wider cultural, historical and social forces. Numerous analyses conducted from this point of view centre on densely inhabited spaces in an attempt to consider those environmental issues marginalised by the mainstream movement. For example, Catherine Villanueva Gardner discusses the threat of urban environmental hazards to the poor who are circumstantially forced to endure them, while Michael Bennett examines the racial issues within American urban environments, noting that areas most affected by physical decay and pollution are often also areas that are mainly black (Gardner 203 – 04; Bennett, “Manufacturing the Ghetto”, 170 – 72).¹⁷ In contrast to the ecocentric focus of deep ecology, studies such as these are human-centred, considering the human to be as worthy of environmental concern as the non-human.

Social ecology thus drastically reconceptualises modernity’s human-nature dichotomy: not only does the concept of “the environment” come to include the city and

humans, but nature itself becomes politicised and connected to human events. However, while social ecology seems to add a promising liberationist perspective, Plumwood argues that it is just as prone towards repeating the colonising politics of Western human-nature relations as deep ecology and mainstream environmentalism are (*Feminism* 15). For example, social ecology's best-known proponent, Murray Bookchin, universally dismisses deep ecology's emphasis on intrinsic worth, and casts attempts at compassionate identification as irrational, "New Age" and "arbitrary" (viii; 4):

It is the responsibility of the most conscious of life-forms—humanity—to be the 'voice' of a mute nature.... To frivolously speak of 'biocentrism', of 'intrinsic worth' and even metaphorically, of a 'biocentric democracy' (to use the deplorable verbage of mystical ecology), as though humans were equitable in terms of their worth to say, mosquitoes... is to degrade the entire project of a meaningful ecological ethics. (32)

In his call for what he sees as ecological rationalism, Bookchin reiterates the human-nature hierarchy mobilised during the Enlightenment. Moreover, in juxtaposing reason with irrational spirituality, he maintains the privileged role of reason as the distinguishing feature of humanity and the justification for human control of nature (Plumwood 15). In assuming that nature is less conscious than humanity and is mute, he denies agency to nature in a manner that reflects modernity's instrumentalist views of the natural realm and loses sight of non-human nature's precarious existence in a human-dominated world.

Nevertheless, social ecology's expansion and politicisation of environmentalism remains a valuable contribution to environmental discourse, not least because it begins to break down modernity's quotidian understandings of what counts as nature

and what counts as culture. While social ecology falls somewhat short of successfully theorising a revised human-nature relationship (at least in Bookchin's version of it), numerous writers have adopted its fundamental assumption that nature is intimately bound to human political concerns. Seeking to position humans and nature in closer proximity to one another, many writers have begun to interrogate the wilderness-metropolitan dichotomy as a way of reconceptualising modernity's human-nature separation: various studies by theorists like William Cronon, John Tallmadge, Anabelle Sabloff and Jennifer Wolch situate wilderness within the bounds of the city, thus uniting humans and nature in a manner that goes beyond deep ecology's problematic identification with the wild.¹⁸ These studies attempt to preserve nature's absolute alterity, its autonomy and independence, all the while bringing that otherness into the daily lives of nature's human cohabitants. The proximity factor inspires an identification of sorts, yet humans are unable to incorporate or subsume autonomous nature into their agendas in any complete way. Simultaneously recognisable and fundamentally different, the urban wild delicately balances on an ontological bridge between nature and culture.

4. Ontological Promiscuity: Postmodern Rethinking of Nature-culture Dualism

The act of recognising the presence of wild nature within the city forces a rethinking of modernity's diametrically opposed nature-culture ontologies in a manner that subverts the firm human-nature boundaries implicitly upheld by theorists of both nature and urban space. Just as the dominant mode of nature study since Linnaeus has sought pure knowledge of the natural world, free of the muddying influences of human society, so studies of urban space have almost exclusively concentrated on the political and economic aspects of cities, neglecting to establish any connection to a natural

world presumably expelled beyond the city's boundaries. A large body of theorists, social ecologists amongst them, have begun to recognise that neither nature nor human culture is free from each other's influence; indeed, although modernity in one sense initiated a process of separation between nature and culture, in another, modernisation established an increased intimacy between the two (Swyngedouw 68).¹⁹ Modernity's accelerated conversion of nature into commodity results in humans being surrounded by more nature than ever before, albeit in transformed state: bigger buildings, more clothing, greater varieties of food, efficient electricity and piped water all signal an increasing detachment from "pure" nature, yet all remain converted versions of one or another raw material. Eric Swyngedouw notes the proliferation of these "socio-natural" entities within urban space, indeed, suggests that the city itself is a socio-natural body within which society and nature "are inseparable, integral to each other, infinitely bound up" (66). From this perspective, the urban centre becomes an ideal milieu within which to theorise the confrontation between nature and culture, and to explore the deficiencies in modernity's attempts to create two ontologically distinct zones.

Swyngedouw's theorisation of the socio-natural urban centre is heavily indebted to Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway, both of whom are centrally concerned with ontological promiscuity.²⁰ Haraway remains one of the most high-profile theorists of natureculture synthesis, the discussion of which is the unifying thread throughout her work, from her reflections on human-animal primates, to her influential cyborg discussions of the mid 1980s and early 1990s.²¹ The primate and the cyborg have become exemplary figures of the "leaky distinctions" between modernity's ontological domains, icons through which Haraway has trenchantly theorised "naturecultures"—as one word—the implosions of the discursive realms of nature

and culture” (*How Like a Leaf* 105). While Haraway’s discussions tend to be focused around individual figures of natureculture merging, Latour is concerned with the exploring of the pervasive omnipresence of the natureculture. He uses the terms “network” and “hybrid” to describe nature-culture transgressions, suggesting that the incidence of ontological transgression signifies the ineffectuality of modernity’s ideologies, which, he argues, rely on this separation (*Never Been Modern* 46 – 47). Latour argues that “networks weave our world” and that scratching beneath the surface of almost any issue or entity reveals it to be “*simultaneously real, like nature, narrated like discourse, and collective, like society*” (*Never Been Modern* 8; 6 italics in original). His most extended example is the ozone layer, which he argues is simultaneously a threatened natural entity and a human-induced phenomenon that has far-reaching social and cultural implications. Enumerating the ozone layer’s tiers of meaning, he shows industries modifying their production procedures to minimise ozone impact, meteorologists analysing cyclical fluctuations and Third World countries discussing the right to development in the face of unalterable environmental degradation. In other words, Latour argues that the ozone layer is a multi-faceted entity which demands both

chemical and political reactions. A single thread links the most esoteric sciences and the most sordid politics, the most distant sky and some factory in the Lyons suburbs, dangers on a global scale and the impending local elections of the next board meeting. The horizons, the stakes, the time frames, the actors—none of these is commensurable, yet there they are, caught up in the same story. (*Never Been Modern* 1)

Ontological impurity of this kind is ubiquitous in Latourian theory: frozen embryos, endangered species, exploited workers, aerosol spray cans, AIDS—all evoke analysis

by scientists, economists and sociologists alike, each approaching these entities from their various “pure” disciplines without regard for their splintered quality.

Recognising the ubiquity of the nature-culture hybrid undermines modernity’s mastery of the environment on several levels. At the epistemological level, the hybrid signifies modernity’s inability to successfully purify its culture of the natural world it strives to control. In the apparently nature-less metropolis, for example, the ongoing presence of nature, even in converted form, acts as a reminder of modernity’s connection to and, indeed, its dependence on the bounty of the natural world. Since dependence and mastery cannot coexist, nature becomes a ghostly reminder of the failed project of modernity. On another level, Haraway suggests that the natureculture’s refusal to be neatly categorised renders it monstrous within the narratives of modernity (“The Actors are Cyborg” 22). She illustrates the cyborg’s potential to subvert human control, to be “disturbingly lively”, to exhibit the agency typically assigned only to autonomous humans (“Manifesto for Cyborgs” 10 – 11). One need look only as far as the fluctuations of the deteriorating ozone layer to gauge the level of threat posed to humanity by the lively natureculture.

Nature’s “disturbingly lively” quality represents the ultimate challenge to the modern episteme because it blatantly subverts the Cartesian notion of the nonhuman world as a passive, malleable terrain. For Latour, consideration of nature’s liveliness is a crucial factor in imagining a new nature-culture collective which might replace modernity’s hierarchical model. Latour proposes a new collective within which those aspects of the world figured mute or static are brought together as players alongside humans and culture. He argues that fluid definitions of agency are essential within this collective, that “the self-evident distribution of roles [within modernity] must be replaced... by a *range of uncertainties* going from necessity to freedom”:

To distribute roles from the outset between the controllable and obedient object on one hand and the free and rebellious human on the other is to preclude the searching of the condition under which... these entities... [may] appear on the scene as full-fledged actors... as mediators with whom it is necessary to reckon, as active agents whose potential is still unknown. (*Politics* 81 – 82, italics in original)

It is the unknown potential of the actors that leads to modernity's perception of threat on the part of nature. Latour does not draw on the romantic construction of nature as the embodiment of all good. Rather, he sees the notion of recalcitrance as the most succinct approach to defining both human and non-human potentiality: just as humans are capable of refractory action, so nature may also behave in rebellious, unpredictable ways. Indeed, Latour argues that the maxim of ecologists and environmentalists should not be "Let us protect nature" but "No-one knows what an environment can do" (*Politics* 80).

In his discussion of non-human agency, Latour uses the term "actor" to refer to any entity, either human or nonhuman, which possesses the ability to modify another in a test; that is, he endows both humans and nonhumans with the ability to perform action (*Politics* 237). Latour's actor-network theory animates those entities typically rendered static within Enlightenment thought; landscapes, machines, text, animals and weather all become actors, because they exert influence over each other and over humans. This model recognises nature's potential for intentionality and rebellious behaviour: agentic nature becomes active rather than passive, a subject rather than an object, alive rather than dead. Admitting this kind of nature into a collective with humans anticipates an egalitarian political ecology, one in which the various modes of mastery—Cartesian philosophy, colonialism, romanticism, industrialisation

and even contemporary environmentalism—are marginalised in favour of an ecological democracy.

5. Ecocriticism: The Literary Response to the Environmental Crisis

The concerns addressed by theorists like Latour and Haraway remained largely irrelevant to literary studies until the 1990s. As a discipline, the contemporary study of literature has tended to be dominated by discussions of language and continues to be influenced by modernism's acute suspicion of "nature writing"; as such, it would appear to have little need to discuss matters of environmentalism, ecology and nature-culture dualism, being concerned more with literary representations of the world than with the materiality of it. Although nature remains one of the more prominent subjects within English literature, Lawrence Buell points out that traditional literary approaches toward the study of nature lead analysts away from the physical world, rather than closer to it, since literary theorists are trained to "stress the distinction between text and referent" (10). The literary text, however sympathetic toward nature, can never *be* nature, and, as such, studies of literary representations of nature in one sense serve to further isolate readers from the natural world by confining them to the realm of discourse. Moreover, as Bate points out, literature is itself one of the more prominent appendages of culture, that antithetical realm which, according to mainstream environmental discourse, threatens and exists in opposition to the natural world (72). Developing in tandem with the other facets of modernity, literature and literary studies have shown themselves to be prone to modernity's dualistic conception of nature, envisioning it in opposition to discourse, text and culture.

In privileging language and representation over material concerns, literary culture was slow to acknowledge degradation of the environment. The rise of the envi-

ronmental movement during the early 1970s affected a growing awareness of nature's fragility and a subsequent "greening" of humanities disciplines including history, philosophy, sociology, law and religion, all of which began to incorporate environmental perspectives into their research and teaching (Glotfelty xvi). While literary studies enthusiastically embraced the other critical paradigms mobilised during the 1960s by the social movements associated with race, class and gender, the urgent issues raised by the environmental movement appeared to have had minimal impact on the study of literature (Love, *Practical Ecocriticism* 3). As late as the mid-1990s, Cheryl Glotfelty sardonically observed the ongoing avoidance of environmental concerns within the literary profession:

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know there was an earth at all. (xvi)

From one perspective, the dearth of nature-related literary analyses suggests a certain irrelevance of real-world environmental concerns to the study of literature. However, the magnitude of the environmental crisis resulted in some scholars reversing this conclusion to question the relevance of traditional literary scholarship in the real world, a world which was, if environmentalists were to be believed, at risk of irreversible damage and possible destruction. As early as 1972, Joseph Meeker urged for a revised paradigm of literary study, suggesting that literature "should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence on human behaviour and the natural environment—to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind" (3).

Although Meeker's study *The Comedy of Survival* was largely ignored by the literary community when it was published in the early 1970s, contemporary environmental literary scholars regard this text as an antecedent of the ecocritical literary paradigm (Love, "Revaluing Nature" 228; Bate 180). Meeker's work was but one of a smattering of environmentally focused texts which began to tentatively add a green hue to the study of literature.²² These efforts, however, were not recognised as part of a unified approach; Glotfelty notes that this disunity resulted in environmentally attuned literary scholars repeatedly reinventing the environmental approach toward literature in isolation from each other's work. It was not until the early 1990s that ecocriticism consolidated into a cohesive critical approach through which scholars might address the interconnections between literature and environmentalism. During the early years of the decade, a new Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was founded, Glotfelty was awarded the first official position as professor of literature and the environment at the University of Nevada, Reno, and a new journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, was established to facilitate ongoing environmentally related discussion amongst literary scholars.

The burgeoning environmental-literary discussion ensuing from the early 1990s offered a positive response to Meeker's musings about the relevance of literary studies in the age of environmental crisis. Practitioners of ecocriticism are committed to analysing and expanding the relationship between literature and the physical environment, taking as their starting point "the premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glotfelty xix). Far from seeing literature as isolated from the natural world, ecocriticism regards literature as an arena which lends itself not only to the depiction of nature, but also to the interrogation of

how environmentally responsible relationships between humans and nature might be established. In this respect, ecocriticism aims to strike a balance between real issues affecting nature and the literary representation of it; it is a critical stance that “has one foot in literature and the other on the land” (Glotfelty xix). By considering the values, representations and metaphors associated with nature in a text, ecocritics attempt to read from a nature-centred perspective in much the same way that feminist scholars read literature according to a gender-conscious approach or postcolonial scholars read in a culturally or ethnically located manner.

In displacing the centrality of the human, ecocriticism is intimately related to the modes of cultural critique like feminism and postcolonialism which offer alternative reading perspectives. Ecocriticism, however, addresses a form of oppression that Buell sees to be more pervasive than the undeniably important racial, gender and political issues targeted by feminism and postcolonialism. While the issues of gender and ethnicity have claimed extensive critical attention, Buell suggests that these are less insidious than the anthropocentrism which he sees to be the most omnipresent constraint in the matrix of modernity and literature (20). From the outset, ecocriticism radiated a somewhat radical aura, its practitioners fervently aiming to correct this default anthropocentrism through their infiltration of mainstream literary studies. Glotfelty, for example, envisions

a position in every literature department for a specialist in literature and the environment. I would like to see candidates running on a green platform elected to the highest offices in our professional organisations. We have witnessed the feminist and multi-ethnic critical movements radically transform the profession, the job market, the canon. And because they have transformed the profession, they are helping to transform the world. (xxiv)

With this kind of zealous rhetoric and ambition for global transformation, it is hardly surprising that ecocriticism has largely aligned itself with one of environmentalism's more radical factions, the deep ecology movement. Overwhelmingly, the vast majority of ecocritical work falls within an approach Michael Bennett calls "deep ecocriticism" ("Wide Open Spaces" 32). These studies concern themselves with analysing the wild natural settings portrayed by Romantic nature writers and those following in their wake: Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* is centrally concerned with Thoreau's writing; Bate's *The Song of the Earth* concentrates on the Romantic poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron and so on; and John Elder's *Imagining the Earth* reads contemporary American nature poets like Gary Snyder as literary descendants of the Romantics. These writers, particularly Thoreau and Snyder, are precisely the same sources that deep ecologists like Neass draw upon for their philosophical inspiration.

While ecocriticism potentially offers a constructive challenge to the anthropocentrism of critical literary studies, the dominant deep ecocritical approach runs the risk of reinforcing human-nature dualism in all the same ways that deep ecology does, by speaking on behalf of a mute, disempowered nature, by persistently equating "nature" with the nonhuman realm and by deifying a wild nature whose purity is contingent upon humans' remaining estranged from it. In theory, of course, many ecocritics do not limit their conceptualisation of nature to those advocated within deep ecology, but adopt a wide-lens view of what constitutes nature within a text. Buell outlines four main criteria by which he identifies an "environmental text": the non-human environment exists not only as a framing device, but as a presence that fuses human and natural history; the human interest is not considered the only legitimate interest; human accountability is part of the text's ethical orientation; and there is a sense of na-

ture as a process, rather than as a passive or constant entity (7 – 8). While Buell’s framework suggests that the ecocritical perspective may be applied towards texts ranging well beyond the nature-writing thematic, in practice, the focus of the more prominent ecocritical studies suggests the paradigm’s fraternity with the contemporary descendents of the romantic tradition and a resultant tendency toward Romanticism’s assumption that nature is “out there”, pure and separate from the observing subject.²³

This tendency has inhibited the development of any thorough ecocritically based rethinking of modernity’s quotidian nature-culture ontologies: the wilderness focus of much ecocriticism suggests an uncritical acceptance by practitioners of what may count as “nature”. If mainstream environmentalism’s wilderness fixation has inhibited the movement from addressing the broad spectrum of ecological concerns adequately, as social ecologists argue, this trend is repeated in the literary world by ecocritics. The equating of nature to wilderness results in a marginalisation of non-wild locales and an overwhelming neglect of texts falling outside of the nature writing thematic. Just as literature without female characters may be read from a feminist perspective, surely literature that is apparently without nature may be read ecocritically. What might be revealed, for example, in an ecocritical reading of the modernist classics, *The Great Gatsby* or *To the Lighthouse*, or the great nineteenth-century masterpieces like *Middlemarch* or *Emma*, or the esteemed works of contemporary fiction like *Midnight’s Children* or *Paradise*?²⁴ Clearly any nature-centred reading of such human-focused, thoroughly cultured novels as these will require a vigorous reworking of ecocritical theory and an expanded definition of what constitutes nature.

This expansion project is begun by Michael Bennett and David W. Teague in their edited collection of essays *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and the Environ-*

ment, in which they argue for the need to develop an “urban ecocriticism” that may serve as a theoretical lens for the ecocritical examination of human-populated space and literature. Drawing heavily on theories of social ecology, Bennett and Teague’s volume aims to

point to the self-limiting conceptualisations of nature, culture and environment built into many ecocritical projects in their exclusion of urban places.... [It aims] to remind city dwellers of our placement within ecosystems and the importance of this fact for understanding urban life and culture. (Bennett and Teague 4)

While this statement of purpose seems sound enough, the book slips too easily from its professed goal of developing urban ecocriticism to a more general exploration of urban ecological issues. Indeed, the only section to deal explicitly with literature is Part Two on urban nature writing; the rest are devoted to related issues like city parks, urban “wilderness”, ecofeminism and theoretical portrayals of urban space. These matters of course remain important to the development of an urban ecocriticism, but Bennett and Teague seem less concerned with actually putting them into practice than they do with assembling a potpourri of urban ecological offerings.

More promising is *The Greening of Literary Scholarship*, a recent publication that clearly demonstrates the application of an expanded ecocriticism. Edited and introduced by Steven Rosendale, this volume recognises a need to “expand the purview of ecocritical practice by widening the canon of texts for ecocritical investigation and placing environmental criticism in a more productive relation with other, perhaps suspiciously humanist theoretical and critical practices” (“Introduction” xvii). While the mandatory nature-writing analyses remain within the book, contributors also apply ecocritical readings to urban American literature, nineteenth-century English literature

and eighteenth-century Gothic fiction. Additionally, they actively engage in testing the parameters of a wider theoretical foundation for ecocriticism, interrogating its relationship to new historicism, the sublime and poststructuralism.²⁵ These attempts begin to problematise the passive, pure visage that ecocriticism has constructed for nature: the expanded functionality of ecocriticism relies on an assumption that nature is not just the pure, isolated terrains that Thoreau and Snyder depict, but may also be active and urban, and, indeed, situated closer to humans than is generally recognised either in the real world or in the literary text.

6. *Conclusion: Defining My Ecocritical Approach*

In this thesis, I engage with an extended model of ecocriticism that reaches beyond nature-writing in the manner begun in Bennett and Teague's publication and more fully developed by Rosendale and his contributors. My project is to read Catherine Chidgey's New Zealand urban-based fiction from an ecocritical perspective, and at the same time, to challenge the dominant ecocritical vision of nature as something pure and beyond the human domain. This approach implicitly unsettles the Enlightenment's rigid human-nature ontological structure, a structure which resonates in ecocritical discourse and New Zealand literary criticism alike. Rethinking the quotidian conceptualisation of nature and relocating nature within the New Zealand urban novel allows me not only to extend the parameters of ecocriticism, but also to read Chidgey's fiction within the broader context of New Zealand literature which has been historically dominated by representations of the natural world.

In adopting this expanded ecocritical approach toward contemporary New Zealand literature, I seek to fulfil three primary functions. First, I seek to demonstrate a model of ecocriticism that disrupts the Enlightenment human-nature ontologies.²⁶

Following Latour and Haraway, I will problematise the human-nature divide by locating an agentic nature within the close proximity of humans, a nature that is fractured and rebellious, relentlessly blended with humans and their culture, but simultaneously other despite being moulded to fit modernity's agenda. My second purpose in adopting this mode of ecocriticism is to theorise about the role of nature within contemporary modernity, the ways it is modified and controlled, and the ways it reasserts its agency within metropolitan space. Finally, my third purpose is to survey the development of human-nature relations within New Zealand literature. While Chidgey's novels only momentarily engage with the version of sublime nature that has typically featured in colonial and cultural nationalist literature, my reading approach locates a pervasive natural presence within her fiction, a presence that both challenges and enriches the lives of her human characters, offering a revised vision of the position of nature not only within the urban literary text, but within the lives of New Zealand's overwhelmingly urban population.

Chapter Two

In a Fishbone Church and the Variable Sublime

Urban life was, and is, confusedly disoriented.... But among the greater and remoter features of the landscape of this country, there might be found a rugged way through the dilemmas of trans-oceanic provincialism a real transaction upon that plane of reality. (Allen Curnow, "Dance of the Seasons" 223)

Of Chidgey's three novels, *In a Fishbone Church* most explicitly reflects the author's national origins. Spanning six decades and three generations of a single family, the novel is a tiny fictional encapsulation of New Zealand's culture and history. As the narrative unfolds, Chidgey presents her reader with a family album of snapshots and images from twentieth-century New Zealand culture: an isolated rural farmstead, a Christchurch neighbourhood butchery, a 1960s suburban family home, a girls' high school in the 1980s, and, finally, the international settings that comprise the great kiwi overseas experience. These snapshots are, of course, very different from the images of the natural world catalogued by many of Chidgey's literary predecessors: rather than being concerned with realistically depicting New Zealand nature, Chidgey locates her characters' experiences primarily within domestic space. Nevertheless, while the characters of *In a Fishbone Church* function within a society that is wholly urbanised on the day-to-day level, they also regularly visit and interact with New Zealand's wild and rural settings, places that are entirely absent in Chidgey's subsequent two novels.

Although the prevalence of wild and rural settings within historical New Zealand literature suggests the contrary, *In a Fishbone Church* shows that urbanisation is

nothing new in New Zealand. Even in the novel's 1940s settings, at the zenith of cultural nationalism, Chidgey suggests that the prevalence of wilderness is something of a cultural charade, since her provincial characters are just as tied to urban culture as the contemporary generation. The transgenerational plot structure of the novel facilitates this kind of critique, allowing Chidgey to examine the relationship between contemporary New Zealand and the provincial and colonial cultures of its past. Lawrence Jones notes that post-provincial novelists frequently employ this plot device as a means of examining the nature of their society and the historical remnants that continue to lurk within it (184).¹ Although Chidgey does not explicitly link the events of her novel to the political and cultural events taking place in New Zealand during the decades she covers, these events exist just beyond the narrative to inform the attitudes of her characters. Thus each generation of the family typifies the cultural attitudes conventionally associated with its time: Clifford Stilton comes to represent the insularity and parochialism of mid-twentieth-century provincial New Zealand; Etta and Gene Stilton epitomise the conforming acquiescence of the 1950s and early 60s; and their daughters, Bridget and Christina, capitalise upon the relative cultural freedom of the late twentieth century, a condition enabled by the social revolutions of the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as by the increasing globalisation of New Zealand.

Alongside the dominant urbanised settings and themes of *In a Fishbone Church* there also exists a powerful natural presence that corresponds in many ways to the historical literary representations that writers of Chidgey's generation generally avoid. Nature in this novel is remote, often wild, always earthy and genuine; for all three generations of the Stilton family, it represents a realm of authenticity beyond the everyday borders of their cultured lives. This is, of course, precisely the assumption that infuses cultural nationalist writing and one that is deeply indebted to Romanti-

cism. For Chidgey's characters, the cultural nationalists and the Romantics alike, nature is a sublime entity, an antidote to the slings and arrows of culture's outrageous fortune, something pure and separate from human society. While the novel's three generations contact this pure nature on very different terms, what remains constant is the notion of nature's separation from culture and, ultimately, the assumption that nature may be visited and left behind when the weekend or holiday terminates.

In this chapter I examine the ways in which this rather simple human-nature relationship develops across the three generations of Chidgey's fictitious family. I offer an analysis of each generation in turn, suggesting that each engages with a different flavour of sublime nature in which the human and the natural worlds remain ontologically separate. I analyse these interactions not only from an ecocritical perspective, but also from a literary historical perspective that connects the characters' vastly divergent modes of operation with the cultural and literary climates of their individual lifetimes. This perspective allows me to link each generation to a particular historical moment and to examine the way Chidgey portrays these historical periods interacting with the natural world. Thus, I read Clifford Stilton's rapacious *modus operandi* as a commentary on the cultural nationalists' approach toward nature, a masculine-based interaction that is predicated upon the domination of the natural world. In contrast, I argue that Etta and Gene's generation possesses a more sympathetic attitude toward nature, one that gravitates toward a feminised spiritual union with the natural world, but which is ultimately lost due to their victimisation at the hands of the dominant culture. Finally, I suggest that the contemporary generation exists somewhere between the poles represented by their parents and grandparents' cultures, offering a kind of simplistic compromise to the dilemma of living in harmony with nature in a world of urbanity and global capitalism. In all of the vicissitudes of the sublime in Chidgey's

first novel, the humans retain control of the interaction: whether nature is conceived as hunting ground or spiritual shelter, it remains a realm that exists for human utility. It is not until the final page of the novel, I argue, that Chidgey presents another more complicated version of the sublime, one that problematises human ascendancy and anticipates the various rebellious varieties of nature that pervade her later fiction.

1. Clifford: The Neo-colonial Masculinist Sublime

Hunter, rock collector, wilderness-lover and friendly Christchurch butcher, Clifford Stilton is a representative of New Zealand's provincial dominant culture. Born at the turn of the century, he is both temporally and ideologically linked to the cultural nationalist generation, whose melancholy nature-centred writing deified the kind of stoic wilderness experiences that Clifford seeks out at every opportunity. The cultural nationalists idealised the working-class men of Clifford's generation, the resourceful aspiring Man Alone figures who were anxious to get out into nature beyond the insularity of the provincial suburbs. Although this writing ostensibly critiqued New Zealand's provincial culture and its colonial history, the neo-colonial quality of cultural nationalist literature is now well-established in New Zealand literary discourse. These writers are preoccupied with the conquest of sublime landscapes and with obtaining a sense of belonging that is gained through sacrifice and physical endurance. Patrick Evans argues that this endeavour re-enacts settlement via a process he calls "the masculinist sublime", an interaction with nature that is predicated upon the experience of manly suffering in the face of a punishing, hostile natural foe ("Whipping" 149). Clifford's idealisation of colonial hardship and his recreational altercations with nature show him to be invested in the masculinist mindset of the cultural nationalist generation, a mindset that compels this figure of modernity to seek control and power in

every aspect of his life. By investing her most manipulative and power-hungry character with a crude form of cultural nationalist ideology, Chidgey critically assesses New Zealand provincialism and reveals the connections between this culture and modernity's wider tendency to control and manipulate nature.

In assessing the neo-colonial quality of cultural nationalist ideology, both John Newton and Patrick Evans have established a link between the cultural nationalists' quest to "create" New Zealand literary culture and the colonial attempts to establish and create New Zealand one hundred years earlier (Evans, "Whipping" 139; Newton, "Myth" 25). Clifford, like the cultural nationalist writers, is separated by several generations from the colonisers who originally settled the cities in which the majority of New Zealanders lived by the 1930s. Inheriting what they saw to be an empty, insular culture of comfort, the men of Clifford's generation were possessed of a need to validate their existence and to resolve "the dilemmas of a trans-oceanic provincialism"—the lack of a cohesive national identity, the sense of cultural alienation that plagued the country and, above all, the need to find a platform of belonging, an authentic place to stand within New Zealand (Curnow, "Dance of the Seasons" 223). In the essay that Evans calls "the heart of cultural nationalism", Allen Curnow articulates these ideas, suggesting that any New Zealander who felt "his own land and people, his footing on the earth, to be in any way inadequate, unstable, unreal, [was] bound to attempt a resolution of the problems set down by his birth" (Evans, "Whipping" 142; Curnow, "Introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse*" 49). Curnow and his contemporaries embraced poetry as the nexus of their attempt to resolve their problematic New Zealand-ness. Attempting to represent the "real New Zealand", these men saw themselves as literary pioneers who invented the country on the page: "Strictly speaking", Curnow famously stated, "New Zealand doesn't exist yet, though some possible New

Zealands glimmer in some poems and on some canvases. It remains to be created—should I say invented—by writers, musicians, artists, architects, publishers” (Curnow and Marsh, “A Dialogue By Way of Introduction” 2).

Curnow’s famous declaration of New Zealand’s existential absence makes obvious the connections between the cultural nationalists’ literary creation of New Zealand and the colonists’ literal one. While one creation takes place in a cultural sense and the other takes place in a material sense, both groups essentially seek the same thing—a footing on the earth that is gained through a sense of invention and establishment. Moreover, as Newton shows, both groups’ quest for this footing involves a confrontation with an identical foe, a “sublimely inhospitable” landscape that Man must conquer in order to belong (“Myth” 25). As an example of the fight between man and nature, Newton draws on the poem “A Colonist in his Garden”, by William Pember Reeves:

We stand where none have stood
 And braving tempest, drought and flood
 Fight nature for a home. (497)

For Newton, this poem is an anticipation of the cultural nationalists’ re-enactment of “the violence of colonial settlement... [where the fight for establishment transpires] not between peoples, but ... between Man and a hostile landscape” (Newton, “Myth” 26). In cultural nationalist literature, this fight most frequently takes place within the “frozen deserts” of the South Island, those areas that are “far-flung and alien, wind-swept and ice-bound” (Newton, “Myth” 26). The sublimely inhospitable nature of the South Island Myth recasts Romantic religiously inflected notions of nature’s significance, replacing the eighteenth-century spiritualised nature discourse with a secular-

ised one in which the wrath of nature comes to stand in for the wrath of God (Newton, “Colonialism Above the Snowline” 89).

While colonists like Reeves may have been forced to axe their way through nature in order to plant their gardens, the cultural nationalist generation voluntarily ventures beyond the shelter of the city to seek out nature’s wrath. The masochistic act of facing a sublimely hostile nature is at the heart of the masculinist sublime; according to Evans, this act involves the embrace of manly suffering through which humans might earn their place of belonging in New Zealand (Evans, “Whipping” 146; Mansfield 8). In emphasising suffering in relation to nature, the masculinist sublime replaces the benign nineteenth-century sublimity which dominated early New Zealand literature, and reverts instead to eighteenth-century notions of nature as a sublimely frightening and awe-inspiring realm. Here, as in Burke and Kant’s philosophical writings, the sublime is contradictory, a “delightfully horrific” experience that involves pain and suffering, but that also offers the satisfaction of resolution (Burke 73). For Newton, the masculinist sublime signals the final moment of Pakeha possession and arrival; it is what Evans calls “the *settlement* of settlement”, the moment when colonisation is completed in a cultural sense (Newton, “Homophobia” 93; Evans, “Good Keen Men” 12). The New Zealand man may have to face possible death in confronting hostile nature, but the spoils of his battle are those highly coveted cultural prizes that Curnow identifies as most lacking in provincial society.

Clifford is a parody of the cultural nationalists’ stoic manly sufferer, a kind of pathetic aspiring Man Alone figure who seeks out confrontations with nature in the confidence that he can retreat to the warmth of his car at any point during the battle. A passionate hunter and rock-collecting enthusiast, Clifford takes every opportunity to escape the confines of his employment in order to “[pit his] wits” against nature by

eeling in the Heathcote, fishing in Kaikoura or duck shooting on private farms. Although he expects to return home each day to his slippers, a “virgin newspaper” and a chilled bottle of beer, Clifford simultaneously strives to escape the domestic comforts of his home and suburban business (10). “Mum looked after the shop today so I got [to go] out to the lake”, he writes in 1955.

A lot [of swans] flew over me & I shot 10 in a few minutes. Finished up with 35 Swans & 1 big Grey Duck. A great bit of fun it is different in a paddock to the open Lake, when you see the Swans coming right to you getting lower & lower until they are only 20 or 30 yards away. More comfortable in a paddock too.... The car is left only 100 yards away. (40 – 41)

Far from risking his life in facing the natural world, Clifford engages in a rather unfair battle with nature, touting a rifle against his unarmed avian opponents and then dragging their small bodies to his waiting vehicle. With minimal physical exertion and in the relative comfort of a paddock, Clifford’s supremacy over nature is a foregone conclusion.

The coexistence of comfort and battle in Clifford’s life signifies the wider conflict of the two models of masculinity in operation in New Zealand during the 1940s and 50s. As Jock Phillips shows, provincial culture expected males to be loyal family men on one hand, but on the other, it idealised “an exclusive culture of men” and awarded the Man Alone figure mythic status (259). Embodying the characteristics idealised within New Zealand masculine culture, the Man Alone’s qualities of resourcefulness, independence, social aloofness and knowledge of nature were capitalised upon by the cultural nationalist generation in their critique of the provincial society they saw to be “homogeneous, dull, conformist, philistine, puritanical, bourgeois, materialistic [and so on]” (Phillips 252 – 55; Simpson 59). Despite the cultural deifi-

cation of the figure, however, in real life the Man Alone was perceived as socially antagonistic. In 1941, Stanley Graham, a Koiterangi farmer, killed seven people when police attempted to seize his artillery; before being eventually gunned down by police, he survived in the bush for thirteen days, exhibiting the kind of resourceful knowledge of nature that the cultural nationalists so admired.² This historical example of bush survival casts a decidedly malevolent hue over the cultural figure popularised by Alan Mulgan's 1939 novel *Man Alone*. Chidgey covers the incident in her novel, assigning Clifford a reverence and imagined mateship with Graham:

Gene's mother and sisters were scared. Stanley Graham was possibly heading for Christchurch; his only escape route was through Browning Pass and over the Southern Alps to Canterbury.

‘If that bugger shows up here I’ll give him the biggest steak in the place’, said Clifford. ‘Poor bastard must be starving.... Reckon I could go into business with Stan Graham.... It says here that he slit some calves’ throats, and shot a bullock for steak. I reckon he’d be useful around the shop’. (133; 139 – 137)

Clifford's sympathetic attitude to the original, murderous Man Alone problematises his attempts to emulate Graham's stoicism and physical endurance, casting them as potentially sadistic and asocial behaviour.

When viewed through the lens of Phillips's discussion, the austere dawn risings and raging Southerlies that Clifford faces become more than mere recreational hardship: hostile nature becomes the site in which the parodied Man Alone might reclaim his masculinity from an emasculating suburban culture. For Clifford, the physical toil involved in his recreational pursuits is as significant as his hunting bounty:

It was good to be alive on a morning like this & having my son with me. Once again the dark shapes of the Swans could be seen against the mountain.

Closer, closer, 100yds 80yds 60yds 40yds hell let
loose range zero. Bang – Swan – Bang – Swan Bang Bang – Swans more
Swans our stockpile grew high. Around 8 a.m. the wind picked up without
warning & soon it was blowing a gale but do you think we packed up, no
fear.... When we got to 90 we decided we would stop at 100 as the wind was
not letting up at times we could hardly stand & that's tough work. (41 – 42)

The fact that most of the hundred swans are later given away to the local orphanage suggests that the yield of the hunt is less important to Clifford than the hunting experience. Physical hardship is irrevocably tied to this experience and is aestheticised by Clifford: the proof of endurance, determination and macho resilience are rewards valued far and above the meat procured. Because these exercises are performed on a voluntary basis and as a means of recreation, the novel suggests that they are a kind of game and that the “reclaimed masculinity” is a costume which the domesticated man throws over his everyday household garb. Chidgey’s novel satirises Clifford’s imagined endurance, suggesting that his austerities are an empty performance on a stage of nature, a boisterous and hypocritical show of manhood that he performs by simply getting up early and going whitebaiting at the river close to his home. With a hot breakfast waiting at home, Clifford risks nothing in this endeavour, displays no mythic stamina: this man is alone primarily in his own imagination.

If Clifford’s hardship functions as a parody in the novel, this portrayal also satirises the cultural nationalist perception that voluntary physical toil in nature might yield a sense of identity and belonging. Like Evans and Newton, Chidgey associates Clifford’s physical hardship with the initial colonial endeavour. While visiting the es-

tate of Colonel Milton at Birch Hill, near Oxford, Clifford expresses his admiration for the labour undertaken by Canterbury's nineteenth-century colonists:

We left the cemetery with a feeling that here lay some real pioneers. Our next visit proved this, we had a look at the original home of these famous people. It was built of boulders evidently carried from the river. Rough but homely & very strong, a tribute to the days when men were tough I wonder how far away the nearest Doctor was. No telephone, no wireless, no lighting except the Moon, no motor cars & roads, nothing except strong hearts & will to live....
The Old Colonel must have been a wise old man... he built that Boulder Home with his blistered hands. (35 – 36)

After residing for some time in his boulder house, the Colonel goes on to build for himself a twenty-five room mansion surrounded by gardens and supported by two additional farms, a living facility that Clifford calls “a Dream Come True” (35 – 36). Although Clifford laments the loss of the “days when men were tough”, he nevertheless admires the comfortable situation the Colonel creates: by his hand-blistering, back-breaking work the Colonel earns the right to live in relative comfort, a right that the Man Alone of Clifford's generation mimics in his imitative interactions with nature.

The footing on the earth that Clifford gains via the neo-colonial masculinist sublime is highly problematic from an ecocritical perspective because it involves uncritically adopting Enlightenment assumptions about humans' pre-eminence over nature. Whether settlement is achieved by a literal eradication of nature or by a symbolic conquering of the wild, nature remains a resource for both colonists and cultural nationalists, valuable primarily for its usefulness in the human agenda. Although cultural nationalist rhetoric relied upon an understanding of nature's power, it was also

invested in the battle narrative and the imperative need for Man to emerge as victor from the war with nature. As in any battle, lives would surely be lost, but the conqueror would win the privilege of placing his foot upon the toppled natural enemy, a footing on the earth which casts Man as the hunter and the earth itself as his game. This vision of nature as conquerable and ultimately passive is, of course, precisely the understanding that radiates outward from Enlightenment philosophy and rears its head not only in the colonial project discussed by Evans and Newton, but in all of modernity's progressive ventures—industrialism, science, natural history and so on. While Newton and Evans reveal the implications of this vision of nature in terms of its New Zealand cultural significance, from an ecocritical perspective it may also be regarded as the local, provincial version of humans' global subordination of nature, part of modernity's tacit acceptance of nature's separation from human culture and the pre-eminence of the latter.

Given the inseparable connection between the masculinist sublime and the wider project of modernity, it is hardly surprising that Clifford exhibits an affinity not only for New Zealand's colonial domination of nature, but for many of the other forms of nature control associated with modernity. If his recreational hardship repeats in a very graphic manner the cultural nationalist urge to conquer nature, this urge repeatedly appears in only slightly less visible ways to insidiously inform his day-to-day life. As a butcher, his vocation contains a considerable overlap with his recreational hunting pursuits: it is aesthetically appropriate, for example, that he displays above the bacon slices in his shop the stuffed head of a trophy boar whose tusks double as an apron hook (88). The meticulous shop displays deflect attention from the uglier side of meat production, an industry examined by George Chamier in his 1891 novel *Philosopher Dick*: in contrast to Clifford's shop where the "chops all [overlap] the same

amount, [and] sausages [are] evenly looped”, Chamier presents a picture of “dirt, disorder and muddle..., Post and rail fences... hung with reeking sheepskins, and the slaughteryard, with a blood-stained scaffold... close by” (*Fishbone* 10; Chamier 6).

The processed meat is distanced from this ugliness in Clifford’s aesthetic displays, but the presence of the severed boar head inevitably casts a shadow of brutality upon the bacon slices that lie beneath it. While one is associated with Clifford’s vocation and one with his recreation, these by-products of the pig’s body arrive in the shop through a similar mode of violence: the only difference between the head and the bacon is their distance from the ugliness Chamier portrays and the degree to which they have been processed.

Chidgey’s decision to make Clifford a butcher seems a significant one, given the centrality of the meat industry in the development of New Zealand’s modern economy. Evans describes New Zealand’s economic structure as “a slaughterhouse economy” and suggests that the violence involved in meat production epitomises the country’s governing relationship with its environment. He argues that the establishment of the frozen meat trade in 1882 “formalised the European New Zealander’s relationship with the land, condensing into symbol the processes of exploitation and despoliation that had been at the heart of colonisation from the first” (“Paradise or Slaughterhouse” 76). From this perspective, the relationship between Clifford’s vocation and his recreational battles with nature become deeper than the killing involved in both. The vocational processing of nature displays in a literal way colonial modernity’s wider rapacious relationship with nature, revealing a pervasive colonisation of nature occurring well beyond settlement. Whether nature is valued for its meat and game as it is for Clifford, for its timber or pastureland as it is for the colonials, or as a

source of identity as it is for the cultural nationalists, there remains a preoccupation with what may be obtained and processed from it.

Clifford's colonisation of nature also functions at an apparently benign ideological level, not dissimilar from the cultural nationalists' writing. Newton argues that the cultural nationalists' particular way of seeing nature (as empty and sublimely uninhabitable) is an example of what Mary Louise Pratt has called "anti-conquest", the modes of operation by which Europeans "secure their innocence" and naturalise their presence in a new place (Newton, "Myth" 26; Pratt 7).³ Clifford's cataloguing of nature directly repeats Pratt's primary example of anti-conquest, that is, the work of natural history in the development of European imperialism. Pratt argues that although natural historians like Linnaeus did not literally conquer territory, their gathering and cataloguing of natural specimens implemented an understated but potent form of European hegemony over the rest of the globe (33). This is an epistemological conquest that mobilises a default European, scientific understanding of the world, thus displacing—conquering—other modes of cultural understanding, all without overt violence or bloodshed. As an avid rock and fossil collector, Clifford is not far removed, at least in motivation, from the vast majority of non-professional "herbersors" who intrepidly fanned out across the globe during the eighteenth century with the express intention of cataloguing the natural world in its totality. His discovery of a unique genus and species of fossilised crab, named *Atinotocarcinius stiltoni* after him, shows the durability of Linnaeus's mode of anti-conquest: no battle is fought, yet this tiny piece of nature is claimed through the process of naming, officially inscribed as *his* discovery, *his* property, *his* cultural cache.⁴

Although this kind of claiming implicitly invests the discoverer with power, Alex Calder, Jonathan Lamb and Bridgit Orr suggest that the historical urge to clas-

sify nature springs from a sense of insecurity, at least in the South Pacific, where the project to define and tabulate nature was a reaction to the extreme sense of political instability felt by Europeans (11).⁵ Straddling the two masculine worlds of domesticity and wild nature, Clifford records inconsequential data, like his heart rate, bowel activity and sexual liaisons, suggesting a need to offset his own insecurity by imagining that he is compiling a valuable written record for future generations of his family.⁶ The written documentation performs a similar role in his life to the crab species in that both work to affirm his own sense of significance and self-worth in the world of the Christchurch suburbs. For Clifford, as for New Zealand's early naturalists, classification provides an illusion of control over the environment by converting the observed entity into data, pinning it under one or another of modernity's rigid grid-like systems of understanding.

In a Fishbone Church suggests that this approach toward the environment strips living nature of its dynamism, rendering it inert in the face of modernity's controlling processes. Although the novel's urban environments abound with natural entities, they are processed like the bacon and the boar's head in Clifford's shop, documented and immobilised under pressure of the controlling urges that Clifford represents: the 721 pears from his pear tree are preserved, the fish and fowl he shoots are frozen, the fossils and stones he collects displayed in museums and as jewellery on his family's bodies (70; 20; 126). Preserved, frozen and displayed, the previously living flora and fauna become solidified into a stone-like state via their contact with modernity. As these natural entities take their places in museums, scientific labs and freezers, they are incorporated into human history: the fossils are pronounced by a scientist "approximately twenty million years old" and the birds are labelled with species name, place and date of death, details that are relayed by the hunters over the body at

the dinner table (20). Without a relevant history of their own, deprived of agency and fully absorbed into human culture, these urban natural entities are controlled and victimised by provincial culture, forced to perform the utilitarian role prescribed to nature by modernity.

2. *Etta and Gene: Cultural Victimisation and the Maternal Sublime*

If Clifford's modus operandi represents modernity's default utilitarian approach toward nature, Chidgey implicitly critiques this aggressive interaction by contrasting it to an alternative human-nature relationship which is most explicitly assigned to the adolescent Etta. In place of the masculinist, controlling relationship that Clifford epitomises, Etta experiences a more feminine manifestation of nature, one that encourages a sense of union between humans and the natural world. Victimised by the masculine dominant culture that Clifford represents, Etta is sheltered by a form of nature that functions in a quasi-maternal role, soothing her cultural injuries and giving her a glimpse into a holistic, spiritualised world of nature. Although she goes on to relinquish this vision as an adult, succumbing to the culture of her abusers, her momentary alternative vision of nature is privileged by Chidgey and is contrasted through a series of binary opposites to the human-nature interaction that Clifford represents.

New Zealand provincial culture is a powerful force in Chidgey's first novel, immobilising to humans in the same way that it is immobilising to nature. The children born to Clifford's generation experience a kind of victimisation at the hands of their parents, bullied into duplicating provincial culture, despite their ambitions and imaginings of a reality beyond the model of existence given to them. Etta and Gene Stilton adhere to their parents' expectations, faithfully reproducing the family model

of the previous generation: Etta remains tied to the home as wife and mother, just as her mother had, and Gene adopts a working-class vocation like his father, Clifford. As teenagers, however, both Etta and Gene are conscious of the relativism of their parents' priorities, and while Etta obliterates this consciousness from her memory as an adult, Gene harbours an ongoing subliminal resentment toward his father for insisting that he abandon his ambition to study journalism in favour of becoming "*a builder like the Palmer boy [because the] country needs houses, not bludging university students*" (10, italics in original).⁷ Gene is not suited to building; he has "soft hands... [that are] not like a builder's at all", hands that would be better engaged vocationally with a typewriter than with an electric saw (262).

Gene remains dissatisfied in the vocation that Clifford imposes upon him, but he is nevertheless comfortable with Clifford's mode of recreation and preserves a passion for hunting and fishing throughout his life. However, while he immobilises nature exactly as Clifford does, there is a significant difference in his approach to nature at the emotional level. Whereas Clifford is obsessed with recording facts (the number of birds shot, the quality of the stones he finds and so on), Gene is able to consider nature outside of the bounty it will offer him: years later, while remembering a hunting trip with his father, he recalls "the warbling of the magpies", "kicking up leaves with the toes of his blunt boots", "the dark centre of [a] fern, where new fronds lay curled like small, hairy fists" (89; 87; 88). Such observations hint at a sensitivity undeveloped in Clifford's wholly instrumentalist approach toward nature. It is as though hunting, like building, is something of a cultural imposition upon Gene; in another time, perhaps he could relinquish his *Man Alone* recreation for something more suited to his soft hands, something creative and intellectual. Gene is a kind of sacrificial figure who literally surrenders his life to New Zealand modernity: his resigned agree-

ment to build the country's houses results in years of exposure to asbestos and a subsequent development of mesothelioma, a cancer that develops between the lungs and the chest wall (*Fishbone* 173 – 74). Given his cultural victimisation, Gene's processing and immobilising of nature take on a significantly different hue from his father's: he is a victim repeating the behaviour inflicted upon his own person and his perpetration stems less from his own volition than it does from his conditioning.

Whereas Gene is culturally conditioned to play out the parodied Man Alone role of his father, Etta is victimised by the norms of a different culture, that of Irish Catholicism. Etta's childhood is a deeply unhappy one, her life dominated by her frustrated mother, Maggie Moynihan, who was "raised to be a lady", taught in the arts of crochet, needlepoint and conversation, but who finds herself the mistress of an isolated rural home and the sheep farm surrounding it. Maggie is a profoundly conflicted individual: devoutly religious on one hand and a violent alcoholic on the other, she beats Etta during the day for minor offences and vows in the dark of night to be "more gracious. More serene. More Christian" (54). Such night-time repentance only serves to increase the likelihood of further violence by reinforcing Maggie's own sense of failure in living up to her religious ideals. While religion and violence may be juxtaposed in Maggie's head, in practice the two blend together with surprising ease to exacerbate the abuse Etta receives at her mother's hands: even when she is bruised from the beatings, Maggie refuses to let her powder her face, because she "will not have [her thirteen-year old] daughter looking like a hussy" (53). Here Maggie's restrictive morals exert another level of violence upon Etta, upgrading her punishment from a private beating to a public humiliation.

The religious repression symbolised in the character of Maggie extends beyond the family home and into Etta's Catholic primary school where other religiously

committed women exercise a similar means of control over their subordinates. The nuns are only slightly less violent than Maggie and even more frightening from Etta's five year-old perspective:

[The nuns] had white-framed faces and plain, sensible hands.... They were, in fact, mostly robes. Black and floor-length, these both concealed and created mysteries, such as whether nuns had any legs at all....

The nuns had an astonishing range of powers vested in them. The wooden pointer, in particular, was a versatile tool.... It could be used to single out the disobedient, and pointed like a dried bone at the trouble maker. It could be rapped across insolent buttocks or visited upon lazy, scale-fumbling fingers. (171 – 72)

These women are severe and vaguely inhuman, with their rumoured lack of legs and their witch-like, dried bone pointing sticks. Although Chidgey does not explicitly show a sense of repression in the nuns personally, she does show them engaging in an active repression of their students. Already having marked "Ettie" as a bright, eager new entrant, the nuns discover "a flaw" in her technique when the class begins to learn how to write:

Ettie would have gripped the pencil in her left hand, ready to express her five-year-old self. This was not a good sign. Sister Ignatius prised it from Ettie's fingers and inserted it into Etta's clumsy right fist. (172)

The nun's enforcing of right-handedness upon Etta is a powerful symbol of the more pervasive shaping that she is undergoing at the hands of the women associated with Catholicism. While the five-year old student resists control, forcing the Sister to violently prise the pencil from her hand, by the time Etta leaves home she has relinquished the creativity, the unorthodox vision of the world that Chidgey associates

with left-handedness. “Etta might have become an actor, a dancer, a painter, had she been allowed to describe her world back-to-front”, but because she is not allowed, she meekly accepts her allotted role as wife, mother and church-goer (172). Right-handedness comes to symbolise the accepted model of being, the standard to which the children must conform, while left-handedness represents “the creative side; the female side” (173). The association Chidgey makes between left-handedness and femininity implicitly aligns right-handedness with masculinity, the quality which characterises the provincial dominant culture that Clifford represents.

Therefore, although the culture imposed upon Etta is of a different quality than the one imposed upon Gene, and although it is imposed upon her by women rather than men, Chidgey casts Catholicism as “masculine”, binding Clifford’s Man Alone culture with Maggie’s religious culture and presenting both as domineering and repressive forces that destroy any mode of cultural existence that does not correspond to their narrow vision. Just as Gene becomes the victim of his domineering father’s cultural priorities, Etta similarly follows the illogical behaviour of the victim by embracing the culture of her abusive mother. Her acceptance of victimhood culminates in the family bathroom when a drunken Maggie attempts to drown Etta in the dark green bathtub that came with the previous generation on the ship from Ireland. The only way Etta can escape from the “beautiful, pale [hand]” holding her head under the water is to bite it (263). This act represents the peak of the women’s cultural victimisation of Etta. In the bathtub, the water-filled receptacle of the Old World, Etta undergoes a violent baptism that seals her sense of guilt and, by implication, her investment in Catholicism: she accepts responsibility for the incident, and her guilt becomes one of the primary motivations to leave home, since “she [can] not bear to stay there any longer, not with the taste of blood in her mouth” (264).

Throughout Etta's adolescence, before she succumbs entirely to her role as victim, nature functions as a shelter from the violent cultural environment of her home. At night, she ventures away from the house that represents Maggie's repressive regime, and, crossing the cattle stop at the end of the driveway, enters a shadowy, temperate world of nature that soothes her cultural injuries:

The air is cool on her bruises.... A velvet moth lands on her thigh and is beating its wings, as slowly as a heart. Another one is on her foot, fanning her toes with cool breaths. She can feel them settling on her back, her arms. (53; 56)

As the moths cover Etta's body, she receives a kind of caress that is the antithesis of the beatings she receives at home, a place that smells like mothballs from which the gentleness symbolised by the moths is banished (57). In the night-time world of nature, Etta undergoes a quasi-religious transformation that is a positive, gentle version of her violent baptism at Maggie's hands:

She goes to the stream. She stands on the bank and dips one foot in the water.... Under the water her foot is luminous. She steps from the bank, pulls off her skirt. She stands thigh-deep in water. Her legs are made of moon.... She inches down into the water, into the bed of the stream.... She glows. (53)

Although Etta later harbours an ingrained fear of water following her near-drowning experience, here she is "not afraid of the stream": entering the waters of nature, her clothes "[crumble] from her shoulders and [dissolve]" and, free of her cultural encumbrances, she symbolically shrugs off her material body and becomes "a ghost of herself" (49; 53; 56). This experience is a kind of alternative communion, a natural baptism in which Etta becomes one with nature.

Etta's experience within nature reiterates Clifford's in several ways. Both characters conceive of nature as an antidote to culture: Clifford echoes the cultural

nationalists' need to escape the emasculating domestic world, while Etta feels the need to escape her mother's tyranny. Both of them find a sense of refuge or authenticity within remote, non-urban locales; nature is a sublime entity that allows a glimpse into something beyond the mundane realities of the characters' everyday lives. However, the quality of Etta's and Clifford's sublime experience could not be more different. Chidgey replaces Clifford's masculinist, punishing sublime with a maternal sublime that blends motherhood and spirituality in a counter to Maggie's mix of violence and religion. The soothing, caressing quality of the natural world suggests that it functions as a kind of substitute mother that compensates for the inadequacies of Etta's birth mother.

As an adult, Etta herself accepts this compensatory maternal role for her daughter Christina, whose biological mother conceives her drunk at a student party and later gives her up for adoption (203). The lack of shared DNA between Etta and Christina does not hinder the development of the parent-child bond between them, the strength of which is portrayed in a verse hanging in Etta's kitchen:

Not flesh of my flesh
 Nor bone of my bone
 But still completely mine alone
 Never forget for a single minute

You didn't grow under my heart but in it. (109 – 110)

If Christina belongs to her adopted mother solely on the basis of the emotional bond between them, this suggests that the adolescent Etta might find a similar bond with nature despite the biological dissimilarity between her and the natural world. As she surrenders herself to the night-time natural world, nature provides a safe home in which she revises her vision of herself and, in an emotional or psychological sense,

grows in the heart of her adopted nature-mother much like the adopted child in the kitchen verse.

The association Chidgey makes between nature and motherhood draws on the prevalent “Mother Nature” trope, which evokes widely disparate and contradictory attitudes toward the environment. In her analysis of American popular cultural representations of nature, Catherine Roach argues that Mother Nature imagery functions as a site within which humans’ ambivalent attitudes toward nature might be scrutinised (8). In *a Fishbone Church*’s nurturing, kind Mother Nature features prominently in the texts examined by Roach: such “Good Mother” portrayals of nature adopt the premise that “nature is our sweet mother; she loves us and we her” (Roach 8). In literary historical terms, Chidgey’s Good Mother Nature signals a significant departure from the inhospitable, punishing (and punished) version of nature that dominates in New Zealand’s cultural nationalist literature.⁸ The cultural nationalists’ portrayals of nature conform more to Roach’s “Bad Mother” model of nature, which assumes “nature is our treacherous enemy; she needs taming now” (8). Nature is for the cultural nationalist what Maggie is for Etta, a callous, powerful entity that will beat its subordinates into submission. Whereas Etta strives to escape from the pain of her association with the Bad Mother, the cultural nationalists embrace the pain of the beating in order to assert their masculinity and, derivationally, their sense of belonging (Evans, “Whipping” 144). In other words, although proponents of the masculinist sublime seek to dominate nature, this domination is predicated upon having a powerful Maggie-like Bad Mother Nature to dominate in the first place, as well as upon her resistance to their control.

The two different versions of the sublime therefore seek out two entirely different interactions with a similar, non-urban nature. Whereas Clifford’s masculinist

sublime embraces punishment and strives to conquer the punisher, Etta's feminised maternal sublime seeks just the opposite—shelter from punishment and a sense of spiritualised union with nature. This portrayal of nature is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century romanticised sublime which offered a sentimentalised version of the “delightful horror” that had dominated eighteenth-century perceptions of wild nature (Burke 73). By feminising the sublime, Chidgey problematically draws on the correlation made between women and gentleness within modernity, and simultaneously tames the cultural nationalists' hostile nature in the same way that nineteenth-century tourism recast the eighteenth-century sublime in gentle, muted tones. The alignment made by Chidgey between women, nature and spirituality has appeared in numerous incarnations over thousands of years in cultural depictions that have portrayed women as being close to nature, and nature itself as a feminine being. Carolyn Merchant shows the prevalence of animism and fertility cults during the classical and medieval periods, cults that variously conceptualised nature as virgin nymph, fertile mother and vengeful witch capable of bringing famine and disasters upon her child-like human dependants (*Death of Nature* 127). Merchant draws an association between the loss of this perception and the rise of modernity, when the increasingly aggressive actions upon nature made the maternal imagery difficult to uphold (*Death of Nature* 3). From the early modern period onward, theologians offered an interpretation of the Bible that justified modernity's extractive approaches toward nature by emphasising humans' God-given dominion over the earth (Thomas 17). Given that Chidgey herself establishes a relationship between masculine-dominated modernity and conventional Christianity, it is hardly surprising that her feminised natural setting harks back to pre-modern modes of worship that conceptualise nature as a feminine entity.

In the age of environmental catastrophe, the feminine-nature association has become ubiquitous in offering critiques and alternatives to the masculine-culture axis that ecofeminists perceive as responsible for environmental degradation. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood assigns primary responsibility for environmental damage to what she calls “the Master”, a figure who combines the powerful side of the binary structure that cuts through modernity from the Enlightenment onward: white, male, rational and cultured, the master figure exudes authority over those entities that are his opposite—non-white, female, emotional and natural (42). Despite her critique of the master figure, however, Plumwood finds the woman-nature alternative equally problematic; she argues that the utopian image of woman as the guardian or friend of nature repeats Victorian assumptions of women’s social morality, their purity, patience, self-sacrifice, inherent spirituality and their capability to redeem wayward male culture. In her analysis, the Victorian “angel in the house” becomes the “angel in the ecosystem” (*Feminism* 9). Such rhetoric, she argues, ultimately reinscribes the structure of dualism and fails to question the basic premises of the modern episteme (*Feminism* 33). More helpful is an active challenging to the various opposites upon which modernity is based: in her own ecofeminist work, for example, she puts forth a model of human-nature relations that destabilises the masculine/feminine and nature/culture binaries by suggesting that “both women and men are part of both nature and culture” (*Feminism* 35).

In aligning women with nature and men with the culture of modernity, then, Chidgey runs the risk of offering a sentimentalised version of the sublime that relies on dualistic assumptions and draws its strength from the set of binaries Plumwood sees as problematic to theorising an alternative human-nature relationship. In *a Fishbone Church* is full of juxtapositions and polar opposites that can be divided ac-

ording to the two contradictory modes of human-nature interaction represented by Clifford and Etta. While Clifford thrives on a macho subjugation of a powerful natural enemy, Etta glows in her union with a feminised and gentle natural friend. Like so many of the men of his generation, Clifford seeks “a footing on the earth”, a footing *on* nature, while Etta achieves an (albeit temporary) sense of identity through entering water, getting *into* nature. Earth/water; masculine/feminine; enemy/friend; subjugation/union; right/left; modern religion/pre-modern spirituality—the binaries permeate every chapter and every relationship within the novel. Thus, although Chidgey offers a critique of the dominant culture represented by Clifford and articulates an alternative represented by Etta, her first novel’s impact is dependent upon the reader’s understanding of and investment in modernity’s quotidian binaries. Eventually, Chidgey goes on to adopt a version of Plumwood’s nature/culture destabilisation, but this occurs in her later novels; in her first novel, the only tentative breaching of the binary structure arises in relation to Chidgey’s contemporary generation.

3. *Bridget and Christina: A foot on the pavement, a foot in the water*

The daughters of Etta and Gene Stilton occupy a space somewhere between the binaries represented respectively by their grandfather and their mother. Clifford’s approach toward nature represents an earlier version of mainstream New Zealand culture, a culture that Chidgey associates with masculinity, Catholicism and right-handedness, and which my literary historical approach links to the cultural nationalists’ emphasis on nature subjugation and a footing on the earth. Etta’s natural experience, on the other hand, is characterised by femininity (and explicitly motherhood), spirituality, water and left-handedness, a portrayal that I read in ecofeminist terms as being a (problematic) female union with the natural world. Bridget and Christina Stil-

ton do not fully adopt either of these two positions. As envoys of New Zealand's culturally savvy Generation-X, they simultaneously partake in the contemporary version of their grandfather's mainstream culture, all the while remaining receptive to the kind of nature-spirituality that their mother experienced as a young adult. With one foot on Clifford's earth-bound culture and one foot in Etta's watery utopia, these women are portrayed by Chidgey as those most capable of transgressing the binaries that pervade *In a Fishbone Church*.

It seems no coincidence that those characters capable of finding a middle ground—a third way in human-nature interaction—belong to Chidgey's generation. In making her contemporary characters the most balanced and enlightened characters in the novel, Chidgey repeats to some extent the narcissistic weaknesses of the cultural nationalist and revolutionary baby-boomer generations, each of whom operated under an assumption of their own pre-eminent cultural perceptiveness. The contemporary segments of *In a Fishbone Church* are, apparently, where Chidgey follows the first half of Bill Manhire's advice to his creative writing students: "write what you know" (9).⁹ The Stilton sisters are partially autobiographical characters who, like Chidgey, are raised in Wellington and who travel overseas for further study as young adults, one of them to Germany where Chidgey studied as a postgraduate student.¹⁰ Like their parents and grandparents, the women are urban dwellers, but the city they inhabit pulses with a different feeling than the previous generations' urban environments. With its university and its motorways (two of the only urban landmarks the novel contains), Wellington is an only slightly smaller version of Sydney and Berlin, the cities the women live in or visit as adults. The vast majority of the novel takes place inside, in family homes, in hospital wards, in scientific labs, in cars: in some ways, *In a*

Fishbone Church could be set almost anywhere in the first world because there is little to designate its indoor settings as distinctly “New Zealand”.

Given the globalised quality of Chidgey’s urban New Zealand, it is unsurprising that Bridget and Christina are able to adapt to life in Sydney and Berlin with minimal difficulty. In Sydney, Christina puts on a heavier sun-cream and continues to deliver babies just as she would have in New Zealand (195). Meanwhile, Bridget deals with the polar opposite of Christina’s Sydney heat, insulating herself against the Berlin winter during the months she spends studying German at the university there. At the time of Bridget’s residence, pivotal events of history are fresh in Berlin where the East German skyline is “dark with cranes” renovating the city after the collapse of the Wall (190). Berlin is more violent than Wellington, more cosmopolitan with its multi-lingual residents and European cuisines (193). But in Germany, Bridget, like Christina, lives another version of her New Zealand life, in a world where young women attend university, go to clubs and worry about being fat (193). Both Bridget and Christina have the ability to adapt to these divergent locales because the places they visit are different flavours of the globalised culture they have at home.

Chidgey’s novels only become more globalised as her career progresses. This tendency typifies her generation and its predilection for avoiding historical New Zealand literature’s most persistent settings and themes. On the surface, the writers of Chidgey’s generation break free from their literary ancestors: gone are the emblematic wilderness settings, the self-consciously polemical social agendas and the frighteningly serious issues of identity and belonging. Many of Chidgey’s contemporaries seem determined to ignore the icons classically associated with New Zealand and instead engage in a literary redefinition of what New Zealand is. While this brand of globalised literature may reflect what the urban-bound, consumer-oriented Genera-

tion-X knows, and in this sense be a genuine reflection of New Zealand urban existence, critics have suggested that it affects the loss of an authentic New Zealand literature to the wider forces of global postmodernity. For Temple, this loss centres on contemporary authors' neglect of the nature-writing thematic, while Evans more sceptically suggests that globalised settings and themes signal a need on the part of young writers and their publishers to widen their reading base and thus their profit (Temple 9; "Baby Factory" 52). From this perspective, contemporary writers' rejection of nature-focused, identity-obsessed literature in favour of a more cosmopolitan, urban literature may be seen as exchanging an historical, local conformity for a much more pervasive contemporary one—that of global consumer culture. It would seem that Chidgey's generation has found the confident footing on the earth that Curnow craved, but it is an earth that is paved, and one that is more or less the same wherever they find themselves in the world.

Because Bridget and Christina's lives largely revolve around mainstream commodity-oriented culture, they possess a strong connection to their grandfather who is himself a producer of commodities and who sedulously adheres to the mainstream culture of his day. Nevertheless, they also retain a connection to the spiritualised maternal nature that their mother encountered as an adolescent. Indeed, their experiences with nature directly reflect their mother's in that they involve contact with the same agents of nature that Etta encounters—water and moths. Christina achieves a sense of peace and unity with nature by entering a body of water, the lake at which she and her family would spend their summer holidays:

[The lake is] still there—what was she expecting?—and is just as cold as she wades in. Her hair furls around her in the water like a slow secret. She lies on her back, only her face breaking the surface, moving her arms as if in flight.

All she can here is the sound of her own breathing.... Christina laughs, and the sound seems to come from a great distance. And she floats on her back, catching accidental garlands in her hair, and watches the sky for changes. (166; 168)

For Christina, the lake functions as a place of shelter, just as the stream had for Etta decades earlier. In the lake, “surrounded by sun, clear water and... wheat field[s]”, Christina is relieved of the pressure and elitism of her life in Sydney’s medical world: alone and focused on her own breathing, she broodingly contemplates her own life, her mother’s childhood and her father’s developing cancer (164). It is only in the solitude of the lake that she may engage in this quasi-meditation, away from her job, her family and her boyfriend. Here, as for Etta, a watery nature soothes and nurtures, offering Christina shelter from the particular cultural encumbrances that plague her consciousness.

Bridget experiences a similar echo of her mother’s adolescent encounter with nature, although her encounter takes place not within the isolated regions of New Zealand, but in a natural history museum in downtown Berlin. Making her way past the giant insect models and the talking Darwin mannequin, Bridget follows a stream of people through a doorway hung with strips of cloth. From the harsh German winter, she crosses through the layers of cloth into a “small, manufactured summer”, a journey that reverses the Pevensie children’s entrance into the snow-covered world of Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*:

The air is heavy and still and warm, and she is surrounded by trees and tropical flowers. There’s even a small pond, dotted with water lilies. A path arcs through the green, and here and there along its edges are tree stumps patterned with sliced fruit. Someone has taken a lot of care in laying out the slices, en-

sureing there is a combination of colours and shapes... like stills from a turned kaleidoscope. There are banana flowers with apple-wedge leaves, fanned orange segments, discs of kiwifruit circled by grapes, fingers of mango and pineapple.... Bridget realises that the enclosure is full of butterflies; that they are on the flowers and the trees and the fruit, and fluttering all around her as she walks. (189)

This place is immensely attractive to Bridget: she walks through it three times, much to the bewilderment of her Turkish friend Gülten, who prefers “real sightseeing” interests like Unter den Linden and the historic square Alexanderplatz (190). Despite being an urban dweller, Bridget has not lost her affinity for nature: as the butterflies in the enclosure flutter around her body, she experiences a multi-coloured version of Etta’s moth caress, and glimpses a similar sense of joy and peacefulness in a paradisaical environment that is a kind of tropical reflection of her mother’s adolescent nature utopia.

In so explicitly aligning her contemporary characters’ nature experiences to that of their mother, Chidgey suggests that Bridget and Christina possess the spiritualised understanding of nature that is lost in the course of Etta’s unequivocal acceptance of the dominant culture as an adult. The young women live in a society that is liberal enough to allow them to retain this understanding, whereas Etta’s retention of her adolescent vision of nature would have required a radical break with provincial culture. The text implies that Etta would have had to become like Eileen Styles, a painter who lives alone at the lake and functions as a kind of alter-ego for Etta. Eileen is everything that Etta was before being repressed by the dominant culture: left-handed, artistic and unafraid of water, Eileen even claims Etta’s middle name, the name her father wanted for her before being overruled by Maggie. The unorthodoxy symbolised

by Eileen's left-handedness does not stop her from interacting with the culture that Chidgey associates with right-handedness: breaking her arm one summer, Eileen teaches herself to paint with her right hand. Her ambidexterity indicates a sense of wholeness that is missing in both Etta and Clifford's generations, an ability to cross boundaries, breach dualism and see the world from multiple perspectives. As Christina contemplates Eileen years later and tries to remember the word for being able to write with both hands, the only word she can think of is "amphibian" (175). The association between the words "ambidextrous" and "amphibian" establishes a connection between being able to write with both hands and being able to exist on both the earth and in the water. In other words, Eileen is a cultural amphibian who is able to negotiate Clifford's earth-bound culture and Etta's watery one.

If Bridget and Christina are capable of cohabitating their grandfather's and their mother's cultures, as I have argued, an intractable link is established between them and Eileen in that all three possess the amphibious capacity to negotiate the earth-bound culture of modernity and the alternative one that Chidgey associates with water. Unlike the young women, though, Eileen remains on the fringes of society, despite her ability to interact with it. She is a kind of Woman Alone living in harmony with nature:

[The woman is] a little stooped, leathered arms bare in a brown swimsuit. An Indian print skirt flaps around her ankles, and the flesh on her back has been scalloped by gravity. Long, smoky strands of hair trail behind her. She shades her eyes and looks out across the lake. (173)

Lawrence Jones points out that Man Alone and Woman Alone figures in post-provincial novels shrug off their status as social victims and instead take responsibility for their choice to exist beyond the boundaries of society (204). This emphasis on

individualism and responsibility vindicates Eileen, casting her in an idealised light as a free, spiritually aware artist, rather than an anti-social, reclusive misfit.¹¹ She exhibits in the most committed and complete manner the mode of human-nature interaction privileged by Chidgey, embracing with her whole life the vision of nature that Etta was able to only access in her youth. While Bridget and Christina are not inclined to structure their lives separately from mainstream culture as Eileen does, the connection between the three of them implies that the two young women possess at a spiritual level Eileen's awareness and sympathy for the natural world. Mainstream and alternative, consumer-driven and spiritual Women Alone, Bridget and Christina demonstrate Chidgey's pragmatic compensation for how New Zealanders might have the best of both worlds.

While this appears to offer a reconciliation of the binaries represented by Clifford and Etta, modernity's fundamental nature/culture binary remains intact throughout *In a Fishbone Church*, irrespective of the apparent generational progressiveness taking place as the novel unfolds. In the novel, the concept of "nature" is consistently associated with the wild or rural settings that all three generations seek out as an antidote to their cultural situations: the hunting ground, the spiritual stream and the moth/butterfly cloud all offer an "authenticity" that is unavailable in the characters' daily urban environments. This is, of course, the understanding of nature that appears within much of New Zealand's historical literature and, indeed, the tourism advertising campaigns of the present. In a move that reflects the public image promoted by such campaigns, Chidgey implicitly casts "authentic nature" as a distinctly New Zealand phenomenon. Bridget's visit to the butterfly enclosure in Berlin may reflect her mother's experience, but there is an unnatural, manufactured quality about the German version. Whereas Etta's experience occurs outdoors, cast in shadow and

moonlight, Bridget's indoor experience is too bright, too surreal, too perfect with its intricate fruit collages and its luminous red and blue butterflies. Carolyn Merchant argues that such manufactured environments represent postmodern culture's attempts to create a perfect world, in a continuation of the Garden of Eden quest that has captivated humanity for at least two thousand years. Whereas previous attempts to recapture Eden have centred within religion and science, she argues that the quintessential Eden of the postmodern world is the mall, a body she sees as a controlled re-creation of the original garden:

Surrounded by a desert of parking lots, malls comprise gardens of shops covered by glass domes, accessed by spiral staircases and escalators reaching upward toward heaven. Today's malls feature life-sized trees, trellises decorated with flowers, stone grottoes, birds, animals and even indoor beaches that simulate nature as a cultivated, benign garden. (*Eden* 167)

As in Merchant's account of the mall-Eden, the butterfly enclosure boasts a body of water, manicured plants, perfect weather, fruit not only fallen from the trees, but already cut as well. Etta's night-time environment is far less glamorous than this, but the implication is that the lack of garish colour makes it more valuable because it is real. New Zealanders need not manufacture nature as Europeans must: Eden in New Zealand still exists just beyond the boundaries of culture.

Despite their overwhelming preference for urban environments, several of Chidgey's contemporaries adhere to the "authentic New Zealand nature" narrative, suggesting in their fiction that nature gives humans access to a level of clarity inaccessible within cultured space. For example, Tim Corballis's protagonist in *Below* confronts the ambiguities of his life deep inside the earth while he pursues his passion for caving. Todd's journey through the earth's geological layers enables a similar

journey through the layers of his life: getting right inside nature in a very literal sense, he is able to “‘return to zero’—located as a blackness layered below other experience” (203). Similarly, in *The Miserables*, Damien Wilkins’s protagonist explores a stream network that threads through the suburbs of Lower Hutt, passing beneath the streets, through people’s back gardens and so on. This water network is portrayed by Wilkins as an alternative streetscape that subverts the mundane predictability of the Hutt: “these were the only real streets in the city, the only places where people actually lived and became what they had previously become only when they imagined themselves acting in front of their perfect audience” (106 – 07). If Wilkins, Chidgey and Corballis all persist in casting nature as “real”, as a place where people can find themselves, Wilkins complicates this assumption by locating the “real” domain of nature not within wild space, but within the bounds of the city. Chidgey’s German butterfly enclosure similarly anticipates a kind of nature that is intimately bound up with human cultural space: although the butterfly enclosure primarily functions as a means by which to connect Bridget to the spiritualised sublime nature that her mother experiences, its presence within the city also illustrates the complex portrayal of nature in Chidgey’s later novels—nature that is never entirely distinct or separate from culture.

Despite the brief anticipation of city-nature in the butterfly enclosure, *In a Fishbone Church*’s portrayal of nature remains fundamentally indebted to Romantic notions of the sublime, which deify remote locales as sites within which humans might grasp authentic experiences unavailable within the city. Even when nature appears within the city, it still functions in a Romanticised manner because its value rests in the reprieve it provides Bridget from culture. For Chidgey, as for Rousseau and the thousands of writers and wilderness lovers that pursued his ideals, nature is something separate from culture, an idealised space that is associated with spirituality

and transcendence. The durability of this notion results in a rather simple interaction between humans and nature in Chidgey's first novel: nature is something other than culture, something to be visited and then left behind, something that humans contact on their own terms, regardless of whether they seek domination or union.

4. *From Fishbone Church to Rainbow Trout: The Ecological Sublime*

In contacting nature on their own terms, humans implicitly remain in control in all of the human-nature interactions discussed thus far. Although both the masculinist and the maternal sublimines rely on a juxtaposition between "authentic" nature and "trivial" or "injuring" culture, culture remains pre-eminent in these sublime experiences since all of the characters, except Eileen, must return to their "real" cultured lives, no matter how shallow or damaging they might be. Because *In a Fishbone Church* equates nature to non-urban space, it remains deeply invested in the Romantic sublime and repeats the asymmetrical balance of power between humans and nature inherent within Romanticism. Utterly dependent upon Enlightenment assumptions of the differentiation between nature and culture, *In a Fishbone Church* privileges the Romantic understanding of nature as "God's own temple", a place of worship or communion symbolised by the novel's key trope, the fishbone church. Although this symbol momentarily provides a glimpse of another human-nature relationship, one in which human supremacy is challenged, it is not until the final page of the novel that this relationship is realised to allow nature to breach the passive, utilitarian role ascribed to it by modernity.

If both the masculinist and maternal sublimines are related to Romanticism, as I argue, they are a kind of shadow derivative of the Romantic sublime in the same way that the nineteenth-century version was. Whereas sublime nature evoked a sense of

fear and wonder in eighteenth-century observers, the increasing popularity of wilderness during the nineteenth century resulted in its domestication: wilderness became spectacle, something to be appreciated and enjoyed, rather than feared (Cronon 75). Like their Romantic predecessors, the Victorians still invested nature with spirituality, but as Cronon shows, the temple of nature became more like a pleasant country parish rather than the grand nature cathedral of the eighteenth century (75). Like Victorian nature-seekers, Chidgey's characters are comfortably assured of their position in relation to nature. Although Etta and Clifford interact with nature in very different ways and for different purposes, they retain control over nature in the sense that they define the interaction and may retreat from it at any time. Even when nature functions as a hostile, punishing force, as it does in the masculinist sublime, its hostility is only effective as long as Clifford chooses to stay and face it. In other words, neither the maternal nor the masculinist sublime involves the same sense of destabilisation that characterised the Romantic sublime; rather, the characters encounter a de-fanged nature that performs according to their will.

Etta's fishbone church experience represents a different kind of human-nature interaction, one that more closely corresponds to the frightening, destabilising Romantic sublime. The key scene from which the novel takes its title shows Etta hallucinating a confrontation between herself and the trout she is stuffing for a family meal:

‘You're pathetic’, says the trout. ‘What will they say about you? *Made a delightful baked cheesecake? Folded dinner napkins with flair?*’

The trout grows bigger and bigger until it covers the whole floor, and it's still growing as Etta walks into its mouth where pointed fish teeth rise around her like mountains. She can see through the cloudy fish eyes to her kitchen, where things look swollen and silver, the way they do in a curved

mirror, or the back of a spoon. Through the gill slits she feels a cool rush of air, and she walks on, touching the pink walls, surprised to find that they are warm. Fishbones arch above her, as if she is in a fishbone church, and she wonders where fish hearts are kept; if she is standing where this one used to be. (114 – 15)

Unlike Etta's experiences in the soothing maternal sublime, this encounter is destabilising, uncanny and challenging. Here, the fish is the powerful, agentive subject, a colossal, awe-inspiring entity that overpowers Etta in terms of its physical stature and casts her cultural priorities of baking and entertaining into insignificance. As in Etta's maternal sublime, nature is invested with a spiritual significance, but with its warm flesh walls and mountainous teeth, the fishbone church is a confusing manifestation of nature's sublimity. Quite literally a temple of nature—a church built of fish bones—this structure is a version of the Romantic sublime's grand cathedral of nature within which Etta experiences a radical confrontation with something wholly other.

This encounter reverses the human-nature relationship that prevails throughout the rest of the novel: instead of the human retaining control of the interaction, nature becomes dominant and shakes the human's grasp on her reality. This reversal, however, is only momentary. Etta's intense feelings of bewilderment and insignificance are replaced with a familiar domestic world the moment she returns to consciousness and the fishbone experience is explained in rational terms—that she had an allergic reaction to her flu antibiotics and was found by her friend Shirley Davis on the kitchen floor (115). The prosaic details of the event serve to detract from the impact of the sublime fishbone church experience: reason prevails, humans regain their safe pre-eminence over nature, normality is restored. The trajectory from bewilderment to rationality repeats exactly the stages of the Romantic sublime, which works to con-

firm the authority of the human over the threatening other (Cronon 69; Hitt 603).

Drawing on Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*, Christopher Hitt explains how the frightening natural world ultimately reinscribes human supremacy in the Romantic sublime:

According to the *Critique*, the sublime experience begins with the apprehension of a natural object which the imagination is unable to grasp. The result is a kind of cognitive dissonance, a rift between perception and conception. This rift is then overcome by the triumphant emergence of reason, revealing to us, finally our "pre-eminence over nature". (608)

Thus, although Romantic nature-lovers may seek out transcendent experience in nature, Hitt suggests that the ultimate outcome of their disorientation within nature is a reinscription of rationalism, because the pleasure to be had in the sublime revolves around the restoration of mental equilibrium and a return to civilisation as a more enlightened individual. Etta's return to consciousness symbolically indicates the Kantian return to reason discussed by Hitt, casting her disequilibrium to the realms of hallucination and dream: in the rational world, the trout poses no challenge, but exists only to be stuffed and eaten.

Nevertheless, Hitt argues that the sublime need not necessarily work in this way. Rather, he offers a theory of "an ecological sublime" which "would provide a new kind of transcendence [that] would resist the traditional reinscription of humankind's supremacy over nature" (609). This new transcendence, he theorises, would involve preserving nature's radical alterity through acknowledging that sublime nature lies "outside the realm of conceptualisation", a point expanded by deep ecologist Peter Reed:

[In the encounter with sublime nature] *there is no room, no time, for reflection*. We are seized by the relationship; we cannot think about it as we would an object. It is here, now, and while it lasts, there is only now. Since we have no time to ourselves to think about the relationship, there is never any question of doubting its reality.... [It] is outside the thinker, not inside her or his own consciousness. (57, italics in original)

What Reed proposes is an unmediated interaction with a sublime nature, an interaction that defies conceptualisation and resists incorporation into any symbolic human order. The fishbone church experience, of course, loses its sublimity the moment that Etta identifies it as a hallucination and conceptualises it in rational terms. However, in the here-and-now of her hallucination, the experience works in precisely the way Reed describes—she does not objectify the fish, does not doubt its reality, but accepts her relationship with the incomprehensible structure of nature that surrounds her. Moreover, she unhesitatingly identifies with her nature enclosure, accepting a radically reconfigured vision of the world that she perceives, literally, through the eyes of nature—the eyes of the fish.

Because Etta ultimately effaces this understanding with rationalism, the fishbone church experience remains an incomplete sublime encounter according to the model proposed by Hitt and Reed. The text itself also suggests that the fishbone church functions as a kind of compensatory sublime, a replacement for another, more complete variety of nature that closely corresponds to Hitt's theory of the ecological sublime. If the fishbone church represents a sublime temple of nature, the principal characteristic of this temple is its emptiness: with an empty concave where its heart once was, the trout is a hollow shell of nature stripped of its innards by the lone mem-

ber of its congregation. In contrast, the novel closes with Gene releasing a whole rainbow trout at the request of his young daughters:

Their father calls; he's dangling a trout from a line that's too far away to see. The fish seems to jump and dance in mid-air. It flashes rainbows at them.

Don't kill it, don't kill it, they cry, hiding in the lupin bushes under the leaves shaped like running tears. The poor fish, Dad, let him go.

So he does. (271)

This sequence is a powerful enactment of the ecological sublime in the terms outlined by Hitt and Reed: the characters momentarily hold dynamic nature within their hands, glimpse the magic of its flashing rainbows and choose to set it free, resisting the urge to objectify it and incorporate it into their culture as food or trophy. Chidgey's placement of the sequence on the final page of the novel affects the kind of instantaneous encounter that Reed sees as so important in the maintenance of nature's absolute alterity: the fish is "here, now" and then it is suddenly gone, and the narrative closes without attempting to mediate between the characters, the reader and the nature they have just encountered. The trout swims free and resists being incorporated either into the character's agenda or the novelist's structure of language and ideas.

The Man Alone's act of releasing the fish may be interpreted in two ways: from one perspective, this act works to undermine all of the various instances of human supremacy that I have discussed in this chapter, not only the overt control of nature that Clifford represents, but also the spiritualised interaction of Etta and her daughters, both of which are predicated upon nature being passive and available for human annexation. The release of the fish is a different kind of interaction, one in which nature retains its independence and is released to pursue its own agenda, quite

separate from humans. It is here, the novel seems to imply, that the real magic of nature is to be found—not in Clifford’s punishing masculinist sublime, not in Etta’s momentary spiritual experiences, not even in the sublime hallucination of the fishbone church. The true sublimity of nature is located not in the empty concave left in the church by the fish’s missing heart; it is located in the beating heart of the free rainbow trout.

It is possible to read this sequence from another more cynical perspective, however, and to interpret the release of the fish as being part of the human manipulation of nature. In catching and then releasing the trout, Gene practices the increasingly common “catch-and-release” fishing method which allows anglers to enjoy their sport and at the same time not deplete the species. In his news feature on fly fishing, Steve Burnham quotes a keen angler who argues that “‘it’s the pursuit, not the catch that is important. These days, the mindset is more catch-and-release and all that goes along with it. You’ll find the fly fisherman will be the one carefully stalking his fish, trying not to make a big impact on the surroundings’” (78). While this method of fishing may not involve the death of the animal, it does involve pursuit and injury; it also recasts an apparent act of sympathy as an act of selfishness which is more about prolonging the sport than sparing suffering. From this perspective, the act of release does not free nature to pursue *its own* agenda; instead, the release becomes part of the *human* agenda for the species. It is unclear whether Chidgey is aware of this kind of fishing, or whether Gene releases the trout to ensure he has something to catch on his next fishing trip. What is certain is that an angler of his experience will know that he may well have another opportunity to catch the same fish: unlike brown trout, who quickly learn to avoid anglers’ flies, rainbow trout are slow learners and are repeatedly caught, often by the same person (Turnbull 21).¹²

Although this cynical reading casts a shadow over the rainbow-trout finale, the more readily accessible interpretation remains that Gene sympathetically responds to the pleas of his young daughters and releases the fish to live its own life. The title of the final chapter, “The Rainbow Catcher”, not only hints at the magical quality of the fish, but also suggests Gene’s selflessness in relinquishing the valuable possession that he momentarily holds in his hands: he has caught something miraculous, something precious, and yet he sets it free. Despite the emotionally gratifying quality of this conclusion, it is too neat, too easy, because it ignores the implications of humans’ co-existence with this kind of agentic nature. Like Reed and Hitt, Chidgey seems content with offering an idealised account of how humans might contact the “wholly other”, blithely glimpsing its radical alterity and then acknowledging its right to preserve the dignity of a free life. Not so in her second two novels: as her fiction becomes increasingly globalised and urbanised, with fewer and fewer wild settings, it becomes harder to romanticise or evade what it might mean for humans to live alongside the ecological sublime. The trout swims freely beyond the final page of *In a Fishbone Church* and into Chidgey’s subsequent novels, where it reincarnates as a myriad of recalcitrant natural entities whose autonomy poses a significant threat in the urbanised settings of *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*.

Chapter Three

Transformations of Nature: Modern Mastery and Medieval Metaphysics

Knowing the nature and behaviour of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens and all bodies which surround us, as well as we now understand the different skills of our workers, we can... make ourselves the masters and possessors of nature. (Descartes 151)

I learned to hide all evidence of workmanship so that each peruke seemed formed by the hand of Nature or God, whichever you prefer... I felt all powerful. (Monsieur Goulet in *The Transformation* 113)

The relatively simple interaction between humans and sublime nature in Chidgey's first novel becomes considerably complicated in her second and third. Whereas the Stiltons of *In a Fishbone Church* conceive of "nature" as something beyond the boundaries of the city, the characters of *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation* are much more conscious of the presence of nature within their urban environments. In these novels, Chidgey widens the parameters of "nature", converting *In a Fishbone Church*'s predominantly non-urban definition into a fractured, multifaceted entity: instead of equating "nature" simply to lakes, streams and remote hunting grounds, Chidgey liberally intersperses cultured spaces with a dynamic form of nature, developing the tentative engagement with city-nature that appears in the Berlin butterfly enclosure. While nature certainly occupies the urban settings of the first novel in the form of frozen meat products and fossil displays, the urban natural entities in the sec-

ond and third novels are unfrozen, mobilised and invested with a kind of potential recalcitrance.¹ The living, autonomous quality gifted exclusively to the free trout in the first novel is recognised within other natural entities that are more intimately related to the human characters and situated within their day-to-day proximity, a textual move that transfers “free” nature from the wilds of the first novel into the tamed cities of the second and third.

I read *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation* as two different instalments of the same story: that of how disorder and unpredictability disturb humans’ attempts to control their environments. My ecocritical reading of the novels identifies nature as one of the primary disrupters to this control and I assess how Chidgey’s characters negotiate their urban co-existence alongside autonomous nature. The novels are, of course, vastly different in terms of plot and setting. *Golden Deeds* is almost exclusively urban-based and contains few of the emblematic natural settings that Chidgey sprinkles throughout her first novel. The intertwined plot lines of this novel are both focused upon contemporary humans: Patrick Mercer, a retired English museum curator who is recovering throughout the novel from a serious car accident, and Laura Pearse, a North Island teenager who is almost entirely absent from the text, but whose disappearance and suspected murder continue to dominate the life of her parents, Ruth and Malcolm. In many ways, *The Transformation* could not be more different from *Golden Deeds*: set in the final years of the nineteenth century in the budding frontier township of Tampa, Florida, the novel traces the relationships that develop between the three main characters—Marion Unger, a beautiful young widow from Detroit; Rafael Mendez, a Cuban teenage cigar roller; and Monsieur Lucien Goulet, a French wig-maker whose dubious propensities are repressed beneath an exterior of polished sophistication. Although these two novels are temporally and geographically at odds

with each other, there is a thematic continuity between them, one that examines in two different fictional contexts modernity's inherent difficulty in accommodating the kind of nature represented by the trout in the first novel. In Chidgey's second and third novels, nature traverses the boundaries between city and country and, as it invades England, Tampa and the North Island's domestic spaces, the characters confront the daily possibility of encountering a volatile nature with its own agenda.

This possibility is particularly prominent in the colonial setting of *The Transformation* where the characters are engaged in an overt process of seizing control and overlaying wild space with the order of Western civilisation. As Tampa expands, the threatening agents of nature—the alligators, the strange swampy landscape and so on—are pushed further and further to the edge of human habitation. This process remains incomplete in *The Transformation*: nature retains a palpable volatility in this novel, pervading the consciousness of characters who tread a razor-thin line between their safe developing urban space and the dangerous, threatening wilderness that exists just beyond the town's borders. The characters in this novel cannot afford romantically to privilege “free” nature as the Stilton daughters do at the end of *In a Fishbone Church*; the novel's setting suggests a kind of competition between the colonial characters and agentive nature, one which involves subduing it before it subsumes human culture. This process is apparently complete in the English and North Island urban centres of *Golden Deeds*. However, reading the second novel alongside the third suggests that the setting of *The Transformation* is (in an historical sense) an earlier version of the fully developed urbanity of *Golden Deeds*, and that the “controlled” quality of Chidgey's contemporary urban settings is only slightly less tenuous than it is in the colonial setting.

In each novel, then, there exist two divergent agendas on the part of nature and culture. On the one hand, urban space (and modernity more generally) relies on the control and subordination of the natural world that surrounds it. On the other, the control and very foundation of modernity are continually threatened by an agentive natural realm which may assert its own rebellious independence at any time. In this chapter and the next, I will examine each of these agendas in turn: in Chapter Four, I will consider how nature overflows the boundaries that modernity has attempted to place around it, but first, in this chapter, I will discuss the ways modernity imposes its boundaries and the manner by which it exerts its control over nature. I will examine the processes of colonisation and industrialisation taking place in *The Transformation* and suggest that these institutions are concerned with transforming the raw materials of nature into something manageable within modernity. While such human transformative practices are cast in a negative light in *The Transformation*, Chidgey presents an alternative mode of engaging with nature in *Golden Deeds*—that of medieval manuscript production. Reading the novels in conjunction with one another thus reveals two contradictory modes of nature transformation, one which Chidgey critically associates with modernity and one which is associated with pre-modernity and which she privileges as a more holistic and spiritual interaction. In this chapter I will argue that Chidgey's second and third novels establish a juxtaposition between medieval and post-Enlightenment interactions with nature, a juxtaposition that qualitatively corresponds to the utilitarian and spiritualised interactions that Clifford and Etta represent in the first novel.

1. Transformation as Control: Modernity's Mastery of Nature

Although the title of *The Transformation* refers to Monsieur Goulet's intricately crafted hairpieces—the aids by which his customers transform their appearances—it also encapsulates the processes of colonial modification taking place in Tampa, and indeed, across the globe, during the period in which Chidgey's third novel is set. The novel is situated on the cusp of the twentieth century, its characters balancing between the old world of Victorian imperialism and the new world of modern technology, transnational enterprise and American-centred global economy. Transformation is ubiquitous in this novel: colonialism's physical transformation of the land, industrial transformation of raw materials and corporate transformation of the economy make Goulet's transformation of his customers seem rather inconsequential in the broad scheme of things. A figure of the past, quaintly baroque in his superficial niceties, Goulet symbolises a world that is being lost in the tide of developing modernity. As a kind of colonial outpost, Tampa is uniquely positioned to accommodate both the old and the new: the processes of nineteenth-century colonialism still hold sway, yet its geographical location on the border between the United States and the Caribbean makes it a pivotal site for America's economic interest in its resource-rich neighbours. Here, as the nineteenth-century colonisers "civilise" the surrounding land, the economic superpower of the twentieth century also draws its first breath, a blend that enables Chidgey to critique both historical modernity and the new imperialism of the twentieth century.

i. Colonial Transformation

The colonial undertaking in Tampa in Chidgey's novel predictably reflects the assumptions that governed nineteenth-century colonisation across the globe in the

Americas, the Pacific, Africa and the Asian subcontinent. In each of these locations, European colonists approached newly discovered territories with the aim of claiming and harnessing resources for the benefit of the countries they represented. Charles Buller, an English member of parliament, captures modernity's tacit transformative agenda in a speech made to the House of Commons in praise of colonisation in 1843:

In your colonies you have... vast tracts of the most fertile land wanting only capital and labour to cover them with abundant harvests...In every part of the world [will rise] fresh towns, inhabited by our people; fresh ports [will be] crowded with our ships; and harvests [will wave] where the silence of the forest still reigns. (474; 489)²

Such rhetoric explicitly propagates the ideals of progress, which take “for granted that the growing domination of nature by [people is] the very measure of humanity's advancement” (Hobsbawm 261). For a card-carrying colonist like Buller, the transformation of forest into field signifies the successful establishment of European culture over the rest of the globe. Although Chidgey displaces the colonial venture from her country of origin to an exotic tropical locale, the colonial venture taking place in *The Transformation* resembles the transformation of nature in New Zealand where colonists took to heart the rhetoric of men like Buller and actively worked to convert the wild terrain into profit-generating pasturelands from the 1840s onwards (Pawson and Brooking, “Introduction” 3). Given that transformed forestland was predicted (and proved) to be the backbone of the New Zealand economy, the project was undertaken with a concentrated vigour that resulted in the conversion of over four million hectares of land by the turn of the century (Pawson, “Sustainability and Management” 457). The transformation of nature in such a setting becomes symbolic of the success

of the colonial mission: indeed, colonisation and transformation collaborate to the point of becoming synonymous.

From this perspective, Chidgey's novel might well be entitled *The Colonisation*, given that the most pervasive transformation in the novel occurs as the colonial entrepreneurs modify the landscape of Florida. With its mixture of rich resources and threatening wilderness, Florida inspires contradictory responses from the new arrivals, who vacillate between paranoia and voracity as they survey their surroundings. On the one hand, the colonisers are invested in imagining Florida to be the "land of flowers", a kind of utopian paradise, "quite as good as can be found this side of Heaven"; Florida will be, they hope, "a place where wonders [can] happen, where there [is] no winter worth mentioning, and where the soil [is] so fertile that dry sticks [take] root and [flower] like Aaron's staff" (23; 11). Chidgey's narrative here echoes statements of rhetoricians like Edward Gibbon Wakefield, New Zealand's colonial architect who imagined that the careful execution of colonisation which would "[transform] that which had been 'wilderness' into the Eden of the Book of Genesis" (Pawson and Brooking, "Introduction" 3). As in New Zealand, Tampa's actual geography fails to correspond to the rhetoric, and presents a rather different visage to new immigrants like Monsieur Goulet who travels on foot to Tampa from Miami:

I travelled south, following the flow of the sawgrass prairie as it made its way to Florida Bay. This was not grass as I knew it—soft, fragrant, manicured—but sharp-toothed and wild, a river full of knives. So this was the Land of Flowers. (147)

Although the new citizens of Tampa have begun to tame the frightening, "sharp-toothed" vegetation that surrounds them, nature continues to bare its fangs, threaten-

ing to bite via the malarial mosquitoes, alligators and snakes that share the environment.

The task of colonisation is to eradicate such threats, thereby transforming the deficient reality into the utopian dream. In *The Transformation*, this is achieved most completely within the compound of the Tampa Bay Hotel, “a fairy-tale castle” which ascends from the Florida swamps to dominate the cultural, physical and economic environment of the new town (11). The hotel is a kind of idyllic micro-colony that corresponds to the dreams and aspirations of colonisers like Wakefield, who envisioned in the New Zealand context that “a cross section of the very best of British society... be picked up and transplanted to a new environment, where... it would replicate the best of what it had come from” (Lamb 292; Evans *The Long Forgetting*). Henry B. Plant, the hotel owner and railroad magnate in Chidgey’s novel, adopts a version of this colonial dream in Tampa as he blends the cultured finery of the old world and the natural opulence of the new in an attempt to attract “the best sort of people” to his proto-resort (*Transformation* 11). The best sort of people are defined purely in terms of their money: bankers, industrialists, stockbrokers and celebrities who can afford to stay at the hotel buy the privilege of lounging on porcelain seats and furniture that once belonged to Napoleon, preening themselves in front of Venetian carved mirrors and walking on the red carpet woven with lions that was originally made for the English royal family (18 – 19). With telephones, running hot water and electric lighting, the hotel provides the latest technological comforts, all within a glamorous tropical setting that boasts “fruit and palm trees imported from Jamaica and the West Indies”, roses, oleanders, mangoes, papayas, pineapples and bamboos (21). Within this environment, Florida is transformed from sharp-toothed monster into the Land of Flowers, sealed from everything that does not correspond to the new world utopia. Leaving be-

hind wilderness and “the dirty, dangerous parts of town, where Negroes and Latins lived”, the guests cross into the hotel’s compound and enter a tiny, perfect community that is “a city unto itself”, replete with a drug store, a school house, a barber shop, a telegraph office, spa facilities, an exposition hall, a casino, a bowling alley, tennis and croquet courts, a beauty salon and stables (11 – 12).

In successfully unifying old world refinement, modern technology and new world exotic nature, the hotel not only represents the realisation of the colonial dream, but also epitomises colonialism’s urge to transform the environment. As the apex of colonialism in the novel, the hotel is an exhibition of the possibilities that the new territory affords. When the labourers arrive to build the hotel, there is “no grand resort and no bridge, just acres of swamp and brush to be cleared, and alligators prowling the sandy streets and serpents stirring in the palmetto scrub” (13). Ten years later, the hotel has “transformed the town”, injecting the area with capital and a population that converts the “primitive place” into the developing metropolis encircling the town’s foundational complex (15). The process of environmental transformation mobilised by the hotel’s very presence reflects the building’s physical structure and the procedures undertaken by Mr Plant in its creation. The hotel itself is an amalgamation of seemingly useless materials that the innovative Mr Plant “cannibalises” from other sources: its concrete walls bound with ground oyster shells, its floors fireproofed with submarine telegraph line and its walls and ceilings reinforced with outmoded railways tracks, the hotel is itself a structure of transformation (14 – 16). Mr Plant engages in an all-encompassing mode of transformation, entrepreneurially converting debris into an asset that in turn modifies the wider environment that surrounds it.

As well as being an economic and cultural hub, then, the hotel is also a hub of colonialism that radiates a transformative energy which inspires further modification

of nature. Mr Plant is a kind of entrepreneurial mentor to his employees, who imbibe his innovative utilitarianism in the hope of making their own fortune by transforming the raw materials that surround them in the frontier setting. Marion Unger's husband Jack is one such employee: originally a brick mason at the hotel, he extends his stay in Tampa with the intention of transplanting wild orange trees and grafting their sour fruit with a sweeter variety in order to develop a productive orchard:

Within two or three years, [he reasons], each acre would yield thousands of fruits, and eventually each of their seven hundred trees would be bearing between one thousand and three thousand oranges, perhaps more.... There was no end to the possibilities for profit. They could make orange-blossom honey if they bought some hives, and in Europe the extracts from the citrus were as valuable as the fruit itself. No part was wasted: essential oil was distilled from the rinds, the leaves and the tender shoots, and the most exquisite perfumes were manufactured from the flowers. (23 – 24)

Here Jack qualitatively repeats the transformative enterprise inherent within the building of the hotel; rather than creating something new, he, like Mr Plant, merely rearranges the raw materials around him, transforming them from waste to profit-generator. Like the hotel, Jack's orchard is a built entity, constructed from the plentiful but disorganised material that litters that Floridian landscape: he builds the orchard with the same technique used to build the hotel, using "his brick-layer's precision, measuring the grid with the brass set square, calculating the distance between trees as if he were building a house, where the misplacing of a single stone could set the whole structure out of true" (24). Gathering hundreds of haphazardly-distributed trees to him, he releases them in scrupulously controlled formation, "their lines converging to triangles when seen from above, arrowheads pointing at the house" (29). The

physical layout of the orchard gestures toward modernity's increasing manipulation of the natural environment: the geometric shape of the arrow pointing towards the domestic dwelling of humans is indicative of nature's inevitable trend toward domestication and, ultimately, of humans' control of it for the sake of profit.

ii. Industrial Transformation

Although both Jack and Mr Plant's transformations of the environment are tied to colonialism, Jack's orange-tree enterprise also anticipates the mass industrialisation of nature during the twentieth century. Imagining a healthy income from his scrupulously ordered lines of orange trees, Jack envisions nature as a factory that will industriously generate a marketable product, a view that converts the natural world into a kind of machine which is available for human control. The colonial vision of nature as a passive, controllable object is, of course, modernity's default understanding of the natural world from the Enlightenment onward, when Descartes' philosophical writings stripped nature of any dynamism and rendered it as inanimate as the machines that were being developed at the time. The Cartesian human/nature ontological demarcation informs Jack's work at both the theoretical and practical levels. His abstract conception of nature as controllable and himself as controller implicitly subscribes to the assumption that rational, intellectual and cultural power will prove capable of mastering the inferior material realm, an assumption inscribed by Descartes who wrote in the mid-seventeenth century that humans, "knowing the nature and behaviour of... all bodies which surround [them, could]... make [themselves] the masters and possessors of nature" (151). The Cartesian philosophical understanding of nature as resource deeply influences the practical historical modification of nature by men like Jack. Indeed, Raymond Williams argues that the emphasis on manipulation and con-

trol of nature is a precursor for the development of the modern economic structure: “agricultural improvement and the industrial revolution follow clearly from this emphasis [on control], and many of the practical effects depended on seeing nature quite clearly and even coldly as a set of objects on which man could operate” (“Ideas of Nature” 77).

When seen through this lens, Jack’s entrepreneurial utility of nature becomes a Cartesian-inflected objectification of nature that finds its endpoint in the modern agricultural industry’s pragmatic approach toward the natural world. If Jack’s orchards represent an initial stage in modernity’s industrialisation of nature, the cigar industry in *The Transformation* is a more developed version of the kind of productive nature factory that Jack aspires to create in Tampa. The production of the highly coveted Havana cigar begins in the Cuban tobacco fields where the crop is cultivated in vast plantations on the “green slopes that [lie] between the mountains and the Caribbean [where the soil is] the colour of roses. Mile after mile [is] covered with the lush tobacco plant” (102). It is here under the tutelage of his parents that Rafael Mendez begins his profession as a torcedor: as soon as he is old enough use a knife, he begins assisting his mother and father on the plantation where they are employed, planting the tobacco seeds, transferring the seedlings to permanent beds, harvesting the leaves from the mature plants, hanging the leaves upside down to dry, and finally sorting and bundling them into bales each containing sixteen thousand leaves of tobacco (39 – 40). This is a mammoth operation, one that requires the labour of many families on every plantation; these workers cultivate the raw materials that are subsequently bought by wealthy cigar manufacturers and transferred from the nature factory of the Cuban tobacco fields to a literal factory in America where rows of skilled torcedores

engage in the complex process of “[*manipulating*] the leaves, so that the finished cigar looks perfect” (243, italics in original).

Although tobacco is Cuba’s most important and lucrative natural export, and in this sense represents the developing industrialisation of nature, in another sense, the cigar industry fails to correspond to the cold, clear utilisation of nature that Raymond Williams associates with modernity. Far from being automated, the industry is dependent upon skilled artisans who train for four years in their craft: each cigar is painstakingly created, the torcedor selecting the appropriate leaves for the filler and the wrapper, which “is called the capa—the cape—and must be rolled with the smooth side facing out, like a fine cloak showing its lining of silk.... There are left-handed cigars and right-handed cigars... [depending] on which half of the leaf the torcedor uses” (243). The torcedor is less a factory worker than he is an artist, working with a natural material to create individually crafted works that exhibit his proficiency. Just as the torcedor approaches tobacco from a non-industrial perspective, so the Cuban plantation workers infuse their cultivation of the crop with a kind of emotional or spiritual significance that is absent from Jack’s utilitarian approach to his orange trees. The workers’ care for their tobacco plants reflects an almost parental concern: Rafael feels anxious as his father lifts the baby plants into their new beds and later, in Tampa, remembers the plants sheltered from the sun by white sheeting, “as if all the plants had been put to sleep” (40; 102). This is a crop that the cultivators nurture through its infancy, metaphorically tucking the plants into beds swathed in white sheets and making extravagant offerings to Orisha Oko, the god of crops, to elicit her protection of the harvest (41). Although the crop is eventually sold to the cigar manufacturers, the Cubans’ approach toward the tobacco plant indicates a respect for their crop and hints at an earlier mode of Cuban cigar production when growers were able

to nurture their plants from their infancy through to their maturation as cigars. Prior to the 1830s, when cigar production was consolidated as a factory-scale enterprise in Cuba, tobacco growers produced cigars as a cottage industry and participated in every stage of production from the parental nurturing of the seeds to the artistic creation of the final product (Westfall 18). Although the cottage industry has been displaced for seventy years in Chidgey's novel, there is a residue of some sentiment toward the crop, a memory of the time when the roles of parent and artist were united in one person.

This holistic mode of nature transformation is placed in jeopardy in Chidgey's novel. If the historical establishment of cigar factories in Cuba compromised the intimate relationship between the *torcedores* and nature, this situation was exacerbated by the transferral of factories to America during the 1870s. From 1868 – 78, during Cuba's Ten Year's War with its Spanish colonisers, a large portion of cigar production was relocated to Florida in order that production might continue in a less turbulent environment (Westfall 18). While this transferral greatly benefited the *torcedores* and their families on an individual basis by giving them the opportunity to continue their vocation and escape their war-torn country, it also served to transfer control of the industry from Cuban hands to those of American-based industrialists who regard the tobacco crop purely as resource. Cuba continues to produce its crop, but because of its poverty and political turmoil, it becomes dependent upon wealthy manufacturers to market it. In the novel, these men arrive in Cuba each year

from Tampa and Key West, Chicago and New York. Some were American, but many were Cuban, and Rafael would stand at the door of the *casa de tobacco* and watch them haggle in their brocade vests and their swallow-tail coats, sleek birds picking through the leaves. (40 – 41)

There is a sense of selfish avarice in these sleekly preened men, who are prepared to haggle with poor plantation workers as they select the leaves most suitable for the building of their own metaphorical nests. Like Jack and Mr Plant, the manufacturers are bereft of any emotional union with the nature they transform: regarding the tobacco leaves with the acquisitive eye of modernity, they value nature as a raw industrial material and understand it only in terms of its financial worth.

The transferral of the cigar industry from Cuba to America therefore symbolises a conceptual shift in understanding nature, as well as a socio-economic shift to capitalism: as the industry begins to globalise, the holistic understanding of nature associated with local production becomes increasingly marginalised and irrelevant. Instead, nature is figured in the pragmatic utilitarian terms that Raymond Williams associates with modernity: valued purely as a resource, nature is transformed into a kind of industrial machine which is driven by the wealthy capitalists in the novel. The material alteration of nature occurring via industrialisation is inseparable in Chidgey's novel from the social and political influences wrought by the men driving the nature machine. The transformation of nature, an ecological event, triggers political and social transformation in Chidgey's novel, a move that links the novel to the social ecological studies of theorists like Andrew Ross and Michael Bennett who have shown the effects of ecological degradation and global corporate interest on the poor (Ross 27; Bennett, "Manufacturing the Ghetto" 172).³ The association Chidgey makes between nature transformation and human effect is entirely appropriate from the social ecological perspective, which assumes that ecological concerns are always tied to social ones and that humans ought to be considered by environmentalists, given that environmental degradation affects humans as much as it does the non-human organic world (Ross 15).

As well as portraying capitalism's transformation of nature, then, the cigar industry in Chidgey's novel also illuminates the various transformative effects of capitalism on human culture, effects which are also worthy of environmental concern from the social ecological perspective. In social terms, the cigar industry functions in a Marxian sense to portray the gradual social oppression of the Cuban workers at the hands of the wealthy manufacturers. With divisions of its factory located on both sides of the Strait of Florida, the cigar industry comes to symbolise the development of modern production, and transnational agribusiness in particular, where commodities are assembled in one place from raw materials grown in another to be consumed in a third. The fragmented quality of the cigar industry epitomises the capitalistic mode of production criticised by Marx: instead of each man labouring on the land for his livelihood, capitalism converts land into the private property of the bourgeoisie who enslave the majority as their workers and thus sever them from the kind of economy symbolised in the Cuban cottage industry. Marx argues that within this framework workers become estranged from the products of their work, because their labour does not directly sustain their bodies: "someone else is master of [the object of his labour], someone who is alien, hostile, powerful and independent of him" (Marx 79). This capitalistic estrangement is exacerbated by the distances involved in the cigar industry: as raw nature crosses the Strait en route to America, the workers relinquish any sense of unity with their crop and instead must choose to contribute to one or another stage of the industrial process.⁴ The inherent alienation involved in transnational production affects a similar disassociation for the consumers who fail to appreciate the material realities involved in production. In *The Transformation*, Monsieur Goulet is informed by his tobacconist that "beautiful Gypsy girls roll [the cigars] on their thighs", a belief that is sustained by European and American smokers who are geo-

graphically removed from the site of production and who can thus avoid the fact that their cigars are crafted by Cubans exiled by war from their homes (104). The severance of product from source illustrates the completion of the industry's transformation of nature: the product is supplied with a false, exoticised natural origin (the thighs of gypsy girls), and in the consciousness of the consumer, the tobacco plant—nature—is finally and completely transformed into culture, signalling only the elite status of the consumer.⁵

The unequal power relations between the cigar manufacturers and the plantation workers also translate at the political level to reveal a global inequality of power between the corporate industrialised West and its developing resource-rich dependants. Just as the cigar manufacturers benefit on a personal level from their investment in the industrialisation of nature, America benefits on a national economic level from its apparent benevolence in allowing the transferral of the Cuban cigar industry to Florida. Historically speaking, America gained more from its act of generosity than Cuba ever did: at the dawn of the twentieth century, as Cuba was reeling with the effects of yellow fever, starvation and war, Florida was producing cigars of Cuban tobacco, rolled by Cuban hands to the tune of twenty-one million dollars (Eric Williams 420; Westfall 23). So great was the global demand for Havana tobacco that the cigar became the first mass market of the American industrial revolution, and by 1909, cigars represented 29.6 percent of the total value of manufactured products from Florida (Westfall 21). According to Adam Smith, this scenario in which rich countries capitalise upon the resources of the destitute is entirely typical of a capitalist economy: “profit, does not, like rent and wages, rise with the prosperity of and fall with the declension of a society. On the contrary, it is naturally low in rich and high in poor countries, and it is always highest in the countries which are going fastest to ruin”

(Smith 408).⁶ In *The Transformation*, Cuba is certainly well on its way to ruination: forced from their homes into relocation camps, the Cubans are liberated from their Spanish colonisers in a matter of days by the American troops that pass through Tampa in the novel. While America ostensibly plays the role of saviour, this act establishes an American presence in Cuba that capitalises upon its economic and agricultural resources until the rise of Fidel Castro in the 1950s.

While playing the role of saviour, then, America also becomes Cuba's new imperial power and masks its capitalisation on the ruined country's resources with an exterior benevolence that works to convince the Cuban people that their interests are aligned with America's.⁷ Smith argues that such benevolence is an illusion, because the interests of wealthy capitalists are always different from, and frequently in sharp opposition to those of the public:

To widen the market and to narrow the sellers' competition is always in the interest of the dealer.... [This is] an order of men whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who generally have an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public. (409 – 10)

This kind of bourgeois deception is rife in *The Transformation* where the implementation of the capitalist economy shows a displacement and overwriting of previous systems of national identification, generosity and aid. While wealthy Cubans capitalise upon the labour of poor Cubans, the apparently aloof Americans step forward to assist Cuba in its struggle for independence. The aid offered by America on a global scale is repeated on the local level in the novel when Mr Plant voluntarily sends his ships to Cuba to collect the tobacco harvest before the Spanish impose an export embargo on the crop (74). Caught up in the developing capitalist economy and desperate to earn a livelihood, some cigar workers like Señor Estrada fail to grasp the self-interest that

lies beneath American aid; for them “Mr Plant is a good man... [because] he brought... the tobacco” (74).

However, not all the cigar workers in the novel are as ignorant as Señor Estrada of the dynamics of capitalism. Rafael, for example, rejects the notion of Mr Plant’s disinterestedness and instead argues that the hotel owner’s concern for the cigar industry is actually a concern for his own investment:

‘Of course he agreed to send his ships!’ said Rafael. ‘He needed to keep the cigar factories in business so his guests would keep coming and he would keep making money! Do you think they would visit a ghost town? Do you know how much two nights at his Hotel cost?’ (74)

Rafael’s awareness aligns him with generations of his vocational predecessors who actively responded to the perceived risks facing workers in the developing industrial environment. From its inception in the 1830s, the Cuban cigar industry included a powerful faction of workers who were amongst the first to organise a prototype trade union in Cuba (Foner 139). Not only did they found *La Aurora*, Cuba’s first newspaper dedicated to the interests of the working class, but they also established in 1857 the Mutual Aid Society of Honest Workers and Day Labourers, a move that represented “the beginnings of an understanding in working class circles that in contemporary capitalist society, with its inevitable cycles of depression and unemployment... co-operation among workers for their mutual help was essential” (Foner 139 – 40). The torcedores’ political awareness is inextricably tied to the education they received in their craft via the institution of factory reading which was established in the Cuban workshops in 1866 (Foner 144). In Chidgey’s novel, this practice continues in the Tampa factory, where the torcedores employ a lector who reads to them from Spanish newspapers, economic and philosophic texts and from classic works by Zola, Hugo,

Tolstoy and Dickens (47). Given the potentially disruptive political agenda of the *torcedores* in their defence of workers' rights, it is hardly surprising that factory reading was vehemently opposed by the ruling class; indeed, the Political Governor of Cuba, Don Cipriano del Mazo, claimed in 1866 that "the meetings of the artisans were converted into political clubs" (Foner 145).⁸ Factory reading was entirely suspended during the 1870s on the grounds that the workers' exposure to literature fuelled potential revolution. This concern of the ruling class was not completely unfounded, for *torcedores* were indeed deeply involved in Cuba's revolutionary activities: Foner notes the monthly contributions made by Cuban émigrés during the Ten Year's war, a practice that persists amongst the cigar rollers in *The Transformation* who donate a sixth of their weekly wage to the independence effort (Foner 256; *Transformation* 45).

In *The Transformation*, Chidgey thus engages in a Marxian-inflected critique of capitalism's transformation of nature by juxtaposing the Cuban cigar labourers with the capitalists controlling the industry. Both in their holistic approach toward nature and in their literary-fuelled revolutionary tendencies, the cigar workers are idealised figures who possess the capacity to see through the allure of capitalism. These men combine the best elements of both communism and democracy: they possess an inherent urge to challenge the ruling bourgeoisie and at the same time encourage freedom of speech and opinion which they exercise in their selection of the texts which will be read in the factory:

The workers... selected the texts: when it was time for a new book, the lector moved from bench to bench, taking note of the titles suggested. He then read his list out loud, paring it down to the two most popular choices, and votes were cast to determine the winner.... [Rafael] began to understand why the ci-

gar workers were so painstaking: if they could not vote in Cuba, they would vote here, and if not for a government, then for a book. (47)

Both revolutionary and co-operative, communist and democratic, the cigar workers are aestheticised figures who communicate a somewhat romanticised and highly idealised political alternative, but who also—and more importantly—act as a foil to the dominant culture of capitalism represented by the men for whom they work, the men Marx calls “the master[s] of labour” (80).

iii. Monsieur Goulet: The Master Figure Unmasked

The apparently innovative and entrepreneurial colonial transformations of nature contain a covert malevolence that becomes visible only when considered alongside the attendant social and political outcomes of global industrialism. While Mr Plant and Jack’s transformations of nature appear detached from any immediately erosive consequences, they operate with an identical worldview to that of the industrialists in Chidgey’s novel: whether they transform discarded assets into a hotel, wild orange trees into an orchard, or tobacco into cigars, these men possess an assurance of their ability to manipulate the material environment for their own advantage. This assurance is a distinctly modern sentiment that develops as science demystifies the world from the early modern period onwards, transforming it from a divinely controlled, mysterious realm into a knowable, governable space. Val Plumwood argues that Cartesian dualism is particularly central to modernity’s sense of its ability to govern the world: not only does Descartes’ conceptualisation of nature as a machine establish a split between inanimate nature and animate humans, but it implicitly places humans in a position of control over nature. She suggests that this foundational split between rational humans and material nature is but one of “a set of interrelated and mutually re-

inforcing dualisms which permeate western culture” and fuel various forms of oppression by relying upon an assumption of one side’s ability to control the other (*Feminism* 42). Thus, dualism facilitates gender oppression (men dominating women), class oppression (mental labour dominating manual labour) and racial oppression (white dominating black), as well as the nature oppression that Descartes directly discusses (Plumwood, *Feminism* 43).⁹ In her analysis, Plumwood unites these various forms of oppression in “the multiple, complex cultural identity of the master formed in the context of class, race species and gender domination” (*Feminism* 5). In other words, rather than limiting her discussion to one aspect of oppression, be it race, gender, nature or class, Plumwood seeks to explore the interrelationship between the various forms of oppression conducted by modernity’s master figure.

Plumwood’s argument serves to unite the diverse instances of manipulation in *The Transformation*: it links the Marxist “masters of labour” to the colonial and industrial magnates modifying the natural world and defines all of these figures as “masters” on account of their manipulation of the world around them. The men in Chidgey’s novel, however, do not overtly exhibit the oppressive manipulation that Plumwood sees as characteristic of the master figure. On the contrary, Mr Plant, Jack and the cigar manufacturers are among the most refined, sophisticated characters in the novel; Jack may not be as rich as his mentor and the cigar tycoons, but his innate cultural elegance enables him to adeptly negotiate their world:

[Jack] was confident in society... able to transform himself into a gentleman whenever he wished, always wearing the right trousers with the right coat, the correct shade of gloves, the appropriate hat. He felt as comfortable at a grand ball or a ceremonious dinner as he did at home, and indeed, he sought out such

events, always delighted to make the acquaintance of members of the fashionable set. (14)

The world that Jack enters here is the one epitomised in Mr Plant's hotel—a world of beauty and luxury where the women are “wrapped in silk and velvet” and where the ugly aspects of life have been all but negated (20). The coercive manipulation in Plumwood's analysis would seem to have no place here amongst the waltzes and polite conversation of “the fashionable set”.

By the end of the novel, however, Chidgey reveals the ugliness beneath the surface of modernity's sophistication, and shows Jack and Mr Plant to be just as exploitative toward the natural world as American-based capitalism is toward its dependant neighbours. While Mr Plant's morals become apparent as he implicates himself in the cigar industry's exploitation of Cuba, Jack's reputation remains unscathed until his widow Marion stumbles upon a collection of slides in the attic years after his death. Placing the slides in the projector Marion is confronted with the unfaithfulness and lack of scruples that her husband so sedulously concealed from her:

Marion took a glass slide from the first little cardboard box... and slipped it into the projector.... It showed a woman with kohl-rimmed eyes.... Her loose trousers were gathered at the ankles, the outline of her legs clearly visible through the sheer fabric... and in her navel a jewel glittered.... Above the waist she was quite bare, save for a veil across her nose and mouth. (293 – 94)

Although Marion is shocked by this discovery of Jack's erotic dalliances with, as it turns out, her friend Adelina Flood, there are clues of his treachery sprinkled throughout the narrative from the outset: his admiration of Mr Plant, his emphatic insistence on fact and measurement, and his insatiable appetite for wealth and recognition all suggest his investment in modernity and his aspiration to become a master in his own

right. Similarly, the luxurious atmosphere of the hotel also contains a dubious undertone from the outset. There is something sinister about its “tangle of Moorish minarets, cupolas and arches, its Byzantine domes and its thirteen crescent moons”, architectural details which hint at a dark underside to the new world fairy-tale of luxury (11).

This dark underside would remain a rather oblique element in the text, were it not for the wig-maker Monsieur Goulet who functions as a kind of unmasked master figure. On one level, Goulet is the epitome of cultural refinement in the novel: born in France, a country which the American characters see as “exotic”, “quaint” and “romantic”, he is the only permanent resident of Mr Plant’s hotel and is an expert in fashion and genteel decorum, frequently advising his wealthy clientele in these matters in the course of their wig consultations (145). Beneath his immaculate dress and his smooth exterior, however, Goulet possesses a disturbing viciousness that stems from the troubled past he leaves behind in Europe. Abandoned by his mother at infancy, Goulet quickly learns that “it is best not to form strong attachments”; rather, he alienates people with his violent tendencies, which appear in his early childhood when he hangs and skins his adoptive parents’ cat (111). Eventually, he is re-adopted by a Parisian Perruquier from whom he learns the art of wig-making and whom he subsequently murders when the wig-maker jealously tries to sabotage his career (118). The subliminal effects of this history are apparent, as Goulet reveals a psychotic lack of emotion in his personality. Gathering the hair for his wigs from prisons, morgues and rubbish tips, he fails utterly to consider the suffering of his fellow humans: “Once I found a still-born child [in the rubbish heap]”, he confides in the reader, “but the little hair I could recover was too downy for my purposes” (62). This mercenary consideration of the dead child hints at a heartlessness in Goulet that is later confirmed when he

experiments with a stethoscope: “I held it to my own chest once”, he says, “[but] could locate no sound at all” (88).

Chidgey relates Goulet’s implicit heartlessness to modernity by casting his wig-making in terms that align the vocation with the transformations of nature occurring elsewhere in the novel. Like Jack and the cigar manufacturers, Goulet is involved in an industry that manipulates a natural raw material—hair—which he painstakingly arranges into a valuable commodity:

For my most delicate work I draw the strands through one at a time, knotting and weaving and knotting again. Each thread, finer than the finest embroidery silk, must be caught with the barb of my hook.... A Goulet hairpiece comprises between twenty thousand to one hundred and fifty thousand hairs. (105)

Here Goulet engages with his natural material in a manner comparable to the *torcedores*’ approach toward their tobacco, carefully crafting a work of art in a procedure which, like cigar rolling, “takes many years to master” (7). This vocation is itself a form of transformation that not only transforms the customers, but that also converts nature into art; after all, along with “peruke”, “toupee” and “invisible covering”, the word “transformation” is a synonym for “wig”.

Although Goulet’s artistic transformation of nature does, in one sense, reflect the *torcedores*’, his approach toward his raw material contains none of the reverence that they direct toward their crop. Rather, Goulet’s attitude toward nature more closely resembles the cigar manufacturers’: just as they journey to Cuba each year to purchase the tobacco harvest, a youthful Goulet travels throughout Europe every spring to “harvest hair” for his adopted father’s business. Gathering blonde hair from Germany and Sweden, and red and brunette from Italy, Spain and France, Goulet pragmatically views nature’s bounty as a source of capital, a view that justifies the

increasingly macabre methods he employs in collecting hair: “There is a limited amount of hair in the world”, he reasons. “Someone in my position must be canny and resourceful; it is a matter of survival” (61). Thus Goulet progresses from coercing European peasants into selling their tresses, to shearing cadavers, to robbing graves and mausoleums for the corpses’ hair, to imprisoning a child to grow hair for him (64 – 65; 58; 274 – 77; 280 – 81; 304). The treachery, intimidation and cruelty that lie at the heart of Goulet’s harvesting of nature significantly colour the other agricultural practices in the novel. In qualitatively aligning the resourcefulness of Goulet and the cigar manufacturers, Chidgey also unites the tobacco and the peasants’ hair as objects of modernity’s manipulation. There remains an important distinction between these objectified substances, however—the fact that the source of the hair, the peasant, is able to vocalise displeasure. As Goulet journeys through Europe, he is regarded with abhorrence by the people that grow his crop:

I remember a sidelong glance, a comment passed in another room or overheard at a tavern, or sometimes spoken right in front of me, as though I could not understand their peasant tongue: *The shearer has come again; she won’t marry now; what sort of man does this work with a smile?* I was given food and a bed, perhaps, but was I not as hated as a disease? (63, italics in original)

In expressing their objections through their words or glances, the peasants—the source of the crop—communicate nature’s wider discontent with the master figures’ manipulative practices and modernity’s tendency to celebrate the shearing of nature as “innovation” or “resourcefulness”.

Goulet’s urge for domination and superiority extends well beyond his dubious professional practices, appearing also in his attitudes toward women and non-white peoples—two of the most prominent subordinated groups that Plumwood aligns with

nature in her discussion of Cartesian dualism. For Goulet, Africa is the “Dark Continent”, inhabited by “one of the world’s most squalid populations”, people who are nevertheless useful to him as long as they yield the “filthy” hair transported from Africa to the European Perruquiers: “One should never dismiss a thing simply because it is dirty”, Goulet advises the reader in a display of twisted liberal-mindedness. “A prudent individual may yet bleed some profit from it, and the skilled Perruquier is able to transform that which is base and dead into an object of beauty” (60 – 61). Goulet’s skill for transforming the dead also plays a role in his oppression of women: when he arrives in Florida, he chances upon a female hurricane victim, whose organs he dissects and sketches. These sketches become the basis of *The Splendor of Eve*, a conduct book ostensibly compiled by a Dr Evangeline Montpellier, who provides advice to females on fashion, etiquette and grooming, as well as “more delicate topics” (33). Goulet’s ghost writing for the non-existent doctor functions as a means of controlling women, putting into print the behaviour which a misogynistic man like Goulet might expect of the women around him. Judged a “refreshing” text by its male publisher, *The Splendor of Eve* does not “[harp] on about the vote, [or]... the wearing of trousers”, but steers women away from the independence that these things symbolise and instead preaches the gospel of submission, good housekeeping, social restraint and obsessive attention to hair and attire (157). This kind of advice is entirely necessary in Goulet’s eyes, because he believes “after years of measuring the skulls of the weaker sex... [that] a woman is less agile intellectually than a man. Her brain is smaller” (56). Just as he manipulates discarded hair to transform his customers, then, Goulet also manipulates the body of the dead hurricane victim, transforming her from a mutilated corpse into the ideal woman,¹⁰ qualified to adorn the bookshelves of wealthy females who are, in turn, transformed and controlled by Goulet via

Dr Evangeline. Chidgey economically critiques nineteenth-century notions of femininity by having her most nefarious and misogynistic character dictate the guidelines of culture to which her female characters strive to conform. The novel suggests that such dictated guidelines of femininity produce a kind of hollow perfection represented in *The Transformation* by the life-size plaster of Paris mannequin that Goulet creates to model Marion's wig. Her dimensions based on the drawings from Dr Evangeline's book, the model woman not only comments upon the emptiness of "the ideal woman", but also reflects upon the hollow nature of modernity's "perfect" or "controlled" products because Chidgey associates the model woman with the Tampa Bay Hotel: Goulet states, "[My woman] is to be covered with plaster of Paris, and her skin, smoothed by my hand, will be reinforced on the inside with steel, like Mr Plant's Hotel" (248). This suggests that the hotel, the novel's most perfectly controlled space, is a similar empty model of perfection that fails to deliver any real satisfaction to the master figures who strive to enjoy it.

Goulet's racism and misogyny are merely additional facets of the mastery complex that grips the powerful male figures in the novel. His sense of superiority over women, black people and nature makes him the novel's most complete master figure, the person who most fully works to control the subordinated side of the binaries in Plumwood's analysis. Unlike the other master figures, Goulet is the only character who explicitly thinks of himself as "master", a position he usurps by killing the man who trains him in his craft, the man he himself calls "master":

After the initial blow he did not struggle, but looked at me as meekly as a child who knows he has done wrong. He said, "Master", but I did not know which of us he meant. (118)

This is the moment at which Goulet forcefully claims the position of master and although the master's utterance makes his gain an ambiguous one, in the years that follow he thinks: "How clever of my master to see that I had the talent to become a master myself" (51). While Goulet functions as a slightly over-written villain, his convictions also impact on the less overt villainous master figures in the novel by openly displaying behaviours and attitudes that Plumwood correlates with the domination of nature. Chidgey's decision to render Goulet in first person is significant in this connection: in taking the reader into his confidence, Goulet functions as the mouthpiece of the novel's collective master figures, verbalising the domineering mind-set that accompanies the mastery of nature according to Plumwood's theory.

Just as Goulet usurps his wig-master's position, both Chidgey and Plumwood suggest that modernity's ultimate goal is to claim a position of supreme mastery through the various modes of nature transformation discussed thus far in this chapter. In Chidgey's novel, Goulet's expertise in wig-making develops alongside a grandiose notion of power: "I learned to hide all evidence of my workmanship", he gloats. "Each peruke seemed formed by the hand of Nature or God, whichever you prefer.... I felt all-powerful" (113). Goulet's boastful statement, "I find I have a skill for improving upon nature" could equally have issued from Jack's mouth (181 – 82). After all, nature's trees produce only oranges *or* lemons, whereas Jack manages to create a tree that produces both:

Marion had to look twice to convince herself of what she saw: glinting through the leaves, speckling the branches in equal abundance, were both oranges and lemons. And she thought perhaps it would be successful, their sandy grove, for Jack, it appeared, could work miracles. (25)

In asserting their miraculous abilities, these men claim a semi-divine position, creating new species and turning back the tide of time in a nineteenth-century version of contemporary genetic engineering and cosmetic surgery. Plumwood associates this human urge for divinity with Cartesian modernity:

The new human task becomes that of remoulding nature to conform to the dictates of this form of reason and achieving salvation on earth rather than in heaven, since man now becomes his own god. It is now through science rather than religion that man will achieve salvation, in the form of freedom from death and bodily limitation. (*Environmental Culture* 49)

From this perspective, colonialism, industrialisation and even the minor transformative act of wig construction all become part of a wider modern quest for perfection and God-like control over the environment. Each of the master figures in *The Transformation* contributes in some way to the modern dream of supreme control that Plumwood associates with Cartesian philosophy, and each demonstrates in their own way the nineteenth-century rapacity for progress that produces the twentieth-century environmental crisis.

2. *From Skin and Bones to Divine Art: Medieval Transformations of Nature*

While Chidgey's third novel works to criticise modernity's quest for the mastery of nature, it does not explicitly articulate an alternative human-nature relationship within which nature might cease to be objectified. The other half of Chidgey's thematic focus on human-nature relationships is found in *Golden Deeds*, wherein she presents a pre-modern, religiously informed human-nature interaction which is concentrated in the production of medieval illuminated manuscripts—the laboriously created devo-

tional artworks which detail various biblical narratives and the lives of the saints. While the medieval illuminators transform nature in the course of creating their art, they do so with an entirely different consciousness from the master figures in *The Transformation*: whereas Jack and Goulet view *themselves* as miracle-workers in their ability to manipulate nature, the medieval artists manipulate natural ingredients with an assumption of *nature's* miraculous potential. In other words, within the medieval mind, nature is not merely a controllable material entity, but is a metaphysical one that possesses mystical properties extending beyond mundane observable reality. Reading *The Transformation* and *Golden Deeds* in conjunction with one another reveals two divergent methods of human-nature interaction: in contrast to modernity's malignant urge for mastery, Chidgey valorises a non-scientific, pre-modern understanding of nature and associates this attitude with the production of beautiful art.

The production of this art during the medieval period is, in material terms, not altogether dissimilar to Goulet's wig art. Just as Goulet prides himself on his ability to transform the dead into objects of beauty, so the medieval illuminators in *Golden Deeds* create art from dead body parts:

[The museum curator] told Patrick how an animal pelt—usually calf, sheep or goat—was soaked in lime for days on end, how the hair and fat and shreds of flesh were scraped away.... He told Patrick how the skin was rinsed in water for two more days to remove the caustic lime, how pebbles were twisted into the edges to form a sort of button, how the buttons were tied to a frame and the skin stretched taut. Then, he said, it was scraped again and again, the lunel-lum—the crescent-shaped knife—peeling away layer after layer.... He read... passages describing how to prepare parchment with powdered bone, how to compose colours with the juice of vegetables and flowers, how to make glue

from the bladder of a sturgeon, how to burnish gold with stones and teeth, how to make ink from thorns. (179; 260)

Comparing manuscript production and wig-making at face value, the medieval methods are even more grisly than Goulet's artistic production: instead of merely manipulating cut hair, the illuminators utilise skin, bones, teeth and organs in their craft, transforming them into worshipable works of art which are drawn in ink prepared from thorns, saffron, azurite and cinnabar, and speckled in gold leaf (196).

Despite these apparent material similarities, the medieval artists' approach to their craft is qualitatively different from Goulet's. While both medieval and modern art involve processing nature, the medieval method does not aspire for the control that the master figure seeks, but rather works with natural ingredients that are implicitly assumed to possess a spiritual potency that is beyond the control of humans. The medieval artist is an alchemist who manipulates matter in a kind of proto-scientific method which is never entirely separate from the metaphysical. The process of manuscript preparation is something akin to those outlined by William Eaton in his study of medieval "books of secrets"—recipe books that detail how to use nature for medicinal or magical practices and which take for granted nature's occult potential (15). Using an experimentally tested method taken from "a book of spells" that calls for ingredients to be boiled in a cauldron, all in pursuit of devout glorification of the divine, the medieval illuminators simultaneously engage with science, religion and the supernatural in a pre-modern process that exists prior to modernity's separation of the physical from the metaphysical (*Golden Deeds* 260).

The medieval fusion of the physical and the metaphysical manifests itself in the manuscript artists' mixing of everyday observable creatures with the fantastic:

Framing the two columns of text was a border alive with beasts and birds and curious figures: there was a mermaid, a man with bird's feet, a woman playing a tambourine, another with a unicorn in her lap.... Scattered through the text wherever there was space at the end of a line were winged serpents, dogs' heads, lizards with leaves in the place of tails. (178)

Blending dogs and lizards with mermaids, unicorns and winged serpents, this art emerges from a cultural environment that understood space and nature as being permeated with mythological and religious symbols. Raymond Williams points out that medieval people conceived of the world as a hierarchy descending from God, to human, to beast, a belief which discouraged scientific inquiry into nature because it instilled an assumption that the world was divinely controlled and ultimately unknowable in any complete way ("Ideas of Nature" 74). The most potent "truths" about nature during this period were drawn from scriptural and ancient authority, and consequently, there was a conspicuous absence of the empiricism that became so prominent during the Enlightenment. Medieval descriptions of nature and the environment were less concerned with developing a scientifically accurate blueprint of the world than they were with illustrating the spiritual significance of nature. Within this framework, therefore, the concept of "nature" was not limited to observable material reality, but was widened to include those spiritual or mythic beings that were "true" and "real" according to scripture, despite their being unobservable in the material sense.

The lack of concern for empirical truth within medieval art places the illuminated manuscripts in opposition to the rational, documenting systems of modernity. When Patrick first encounters the manuscripts, the museum curator warns him that he "mustn't believe a word. The lives were as untrustworthy as fairytales. They were mongrel blends of hearsay, fact and plain fabrication; they were Chinese whispers

written down” (181). In other words, from the modern perspective, while the manuscripts remain invaluable as ancient works of art, they are works that are more fiction than “fact” in the historical sense. Modernity’s emphasis on fact is unimportant for Patrick in the face of the artistic wonder that the manuscripts represent; despite the curator’s warning about their inherent fiction, “Patrick [doesn’t] mind. True or false, the manuscripts were beautiful things” (181). Patrick’s view minimises modernity’s emphasis on proof and fact, juxtaposing it with pre-modernity’s appreciation of faith and aesthetic value, a perspective that is echoed in Chidgey’s intertextual reference to Charlotte M. Yonge’s 1864 edition of *A Book of Golden Deeds*. The book documents acts of duty and heroism by people and animals, such as the nurses who attended the ill throughout the plague without regard for their own health and the dog who carried bread to a child trapped in a cave behind a waterfall (Chidgey, *Golden Deeds* 157). Like the tales in the manuscripts, these parables are unverifiable in historical terms.

Yonge admits

There is a cloud of doubt resting on a few of the tales, which it may be honest to mention, though they were far too beautiful not to tell. But it was not possible to give up such stories as these, and the thread of truth there must be in them has developed into such a beautiful tissue, that even if unsubstantial when tested, it is surely delightful to contemplate. (cited in Chidgey, *Golden Deeds* 250, italics in original)

Here, as in the manuscripts, the issue of truth is subordinated to the beauty of the artistic expression. Yonge, Patrick and the medieval artists are united against modernity’s rigid empirical criteria, preferring rather the exploration of the imaginative possibilities that lead to the production of beautiful art.

Given that the title of Chidgey's novel derives from Yonge's, the pitting of pre-modernity and art against modernity and truth must remain a central thematic of *Golden Deeds*, and one that is closely associated with the modernist art movement of the early twentieth century. Yonge's suggestion that liberation from the structures of modernity (in the form of truth) aids in the artistic creation of "beautiful tissue" replicates the perspectives of numerous modernist artists and thinkers who viewed modernity and industrialism as an impingement upon genuine expression. The effects of these structures upon art are explored by Walter Benjamin, for example, who argues that mechanical reproduction destroys "the aura of the work of art", or, in other words, that the ease of artistic reproduction in the age of industrialism detracts from the authenticity and authority of the original work of art, isolating it from its cultural and material locality (177). For Benjamin, mechanical reproduction has significance beyond the realm of art: the popular cultural substitution of the unique work with multiple copies shatters the "tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and the renewal of mankind" (177). Therefore, the loss of artistic aura also affects a breakdown of human cultural experience via the consumption of inauthentic copies. Taking into consideration the laborious preparatory processes, the hand-crafted manuscripts represent a form of art free of the corroding mechanistic influences of modernity. Medieval art production is a form of nature transformation that is the antithesis of the transnational mass-producing cigar corporation, the symbol of "the age of mechanical reproduction" in Chidgey's fiction.

However, from another perspective, the manuscripts are far from individually reproduced art: at least textually, they *are* copies in that the content of the manuscripts is comprised of unoriginal transcriptions of biblical passages and the reiteration of various miracles and visions. The copying of biblical passages, however, is of

an entirely different quality than that which takes place via mechanical reproduction. Benjamin acknowledges that, in principle, art has always been reproducible: “Man-made artefacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain” (175). The painstaking transcription of the sacred biblical texts is something akin to the submissive, disciplic modes of copying that Benjamin cites; instead of being concerned with “gain”, these artists copy text as an act of devotion in the same spirit as Saint Columba who, in one legend, copies the psalter of Saint Finnian in a dark church at night, his fingers shining to give him the light he needs (*Golden Deeds* 56). Although Finnian is angry at Columba for copying his psalter without permission, the glowing of Columba’s fingers suggests that this act is enshrouded with aura, and therefore that it is sanctioned in a divine sense because it will ultimately assist in the dissemination of God’s word. From the religious perspective, the faithful copying represents the culmination of artistic production, since the emphasis within the medieval context was placed not on the creation of new work, but on the faithful reproduction of divine revelations. In terms of Benjamin’s argument, this kind of copying does not deplete the aura of the art in the way that mechanical reproduction does; for Benjamin, the issue is not copying per se as much as it is the loss of aura via the cultural dislocation resulting from mass production. Despite being copied works, Finnian’s psalter and the entire body of illuminated manuscripts retain their aura due to their embeddedness in the medieval cultural tradition.

In the medieval context, this cultural embeddedness is fundamentally associated with the sacred understandings of space demonstrated in the manuscripts’ physical production and their textual and visual content. The manuscripts are a product of a culture that believed in the coexistence of demons, angels and domestic animals, a

culture that created recipes for ink that listed “dragon’s blood” as one of the ingredients, a culture that was consequently sceptical about humans’ ability to master the world (196). Chidgey’s valorisation of the illuminators’ mode of artistic production therefore also valorises pre-modern interactions with nature in a move that mobilises the critical paradigms of both modernism and environmentalism. Numerous environmentally oriented scholars draw on pre-modern interactions with nature as a means of theorising alternatives to modernity’s destructive approach to the natural world. Carolyn Merchant, for example, contrasts Enlightenment mechanistic understandings of nature with earlier, respectful modes, arguing specifically that the advent of modernity affected a loss of the model of nature as a living, organic mother (*Death of Nature* 20 – 28). Within pre-modern societies, during both the medieval and classical periods, “people considered themselves part of a finite cosmos, and animism and fertility cults that treated nature as sacred were numerous” (Merchant *Death of Nature* 3).¹¹ Although temporally disconnected from the environmental movement, the modernist school privileges precisely this kind of nature/culture interaction. According to Benjamin, the beauty of non-industrialised art is its connection to a holistic, genuine culture which stresses the interrelationship between art and spirituality:

We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. (179)

If Benjamin valorises ritualised art, it is because he envisions this kind of culturally embedded art as more authentic than the industrially produced variety: his Marxian-influenced definition of “authenticity” vilifies the alienation that results from mass production and instead advocates the observing subject’s cultural connectedness with

the artwork. If Benjamin's argument unites art with pre-modern ritual, Merchant's analysis synthesises pre-modern ritual with nature: as such, the production of auratic art becomes inexorably bound to a sense of union between the artist and the natural world.

The manuscripts are, therefore, a combination of culturally embedded artistic production and pre-modern interaction with nature. Liberated from the stifling affiliation to fact and truth, the pre-modern art in *Golden Deeds* is auratic—golden—and is itself a golden deed, one that is inseparable from the artists' holistic, respectful relationship with their natural environment. The narratives and art disconnected from the processes of modernity—capital accumulation, control of nature or the personal prestige associated with these—are the works that most fully realise the “truth” that seems from the modern perspective to be so conspicuously absent in the manuscripts' narratives. In *The Transformation* Marion and Miss Harrow delight in listening to the Cuban mythological stories related to them by Rafael, stories of warriors, saints and gods, like Eleggúa, who rescued the Yoruban deity Olodumare from a plague of mice by swallowing the animals. As she listens, Marion compares Rafael's stories to the narratives told to her by her husband when he was alive:

There was no deception to [Rafael's] stories...; they were designed to delight and to entertain and it was in this respect, Marion realised that they differed from Jack's discourses. They were not superimposed with motive, a desire to better himself, to transform himself from one thing to another. Rafael's stories were, in their way, truer than any of Jack's careful facts. (315)

Rafael's stories represent the method by which art might become a golden deed, disconnected from the ambition, fastidious control and malevolence associated with Jack's method of transformation. Beauty is valued over accuracy, belief over critical

thought, fiction over fact. The components of “truth” in scientific rationalism thus become subordinated to the golden nature of art, and sincere creativity becomes the only relevant measure of truth.

The implication of this kinship between art, pre-modernity and nature is that the contemporary artist may produce such golden art by cultivating both a sympathetic relationship with nature and an understanding of pre-modern holism. While Chidgey may offer a critique of modernity in both *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*, however, she seems acutely aware of the difficulties involved in artists isolating themselves from modernity’s structures. The text of *Golden Deeds* endorses the pursuit of art which will somehow retain a margin of the golden quality ascribed to the manuscripts, but entirely separating from the “real world” remains an impossibility. As *Golden Deeds* comes to a close, Colette prepares to write an account of the death of Laura Pearse, the murdered daughter of her employers. Her anticipation of the composition process evokes the pre-modern method of manuscript production:

[Colette] would like to write [Laura’s] life. She already had the photocopies from the library, the bones of the story, its animal shape. It would not be sensationalist; any colourful speculation would be tempered with facts, cool statistics. Colette would keep things balanced. There would be a spread of light and shadow, a little vitriol. She wouldn’t rush into it. She would allow the story to thicken, to form its own skin. And then she would make Laura shine.
(261)

Although Colette aspires to write a story which will have bones, skin and shining surface like the manuscripts, she is instinctively aware of the need to comply with modernity’s emphasis on facts and statistics, empirical truth and detachment. Her afterthought that the story “would probably sell very well” encapsulates the pragmatic ra-

tionale behind such compliance: every author requires a readership (261). The modernist emphasis on detached art becomes untenable from this perspective because financial concerns must always impinge upon the professional writer or artist.¹²

Chidgey's fiction suggests, therefore, that the artist must retain his or her connection to the real world and yet must simultaneously imbibe the pre-modern recognition of nature's latent spiritual significance. This conclusion is a restatement of the idealised human-nature interaction in Chidgey's first novel which privileges Bridget and Christina Stilton's ability to negotiate a modern version of their grandfather's "real" world, and concurrently to embrace on an intellectual or spiritual level their mother's holistic, quasi-pre-modern understandings of nature. In *Golden Deeds*, Chidgey develops this latter component more fully: explicitly privileging the pre-modern interaction with nature, she adheres to one of the more prominent axioms of deep ecology, a movement that acknowledges an indebtedness to "ancient spiritual practices" in its theoretical alternative to modernity's relationship with nature (Devall and Sessions 66). Given that deep ecology specifically sets out to problematise Western modernity's avarice, it is unsurprising that the ancient spiritual practices favoured by deep ecologists are generally non-Western: Gary Snyder, for example, presents a radical ecological vision that combines Zen Buddhism, American Indian ritual and wilderness values, while Chellis Glendinning suggests that Westerners need to "integrate into [their] lives a new philosophy that reflects... the kind of cultures that all humans once enjoyed—earth-based, ecological and indigenous" (40).¹³ Although Chidgey associates holism with pre-modernity, she parts ranks with deep ecology not only in her avoidance of non-Western cultures, but also in her evasion of "earth-based" tradition. Instead, her pre-modern holism is European and is located not in the wild or the agrarian sites of indigenous or Third World pastoral communities, but in

cultured space—the churches and monasteries which were some of the most thriving human institutions during the medieval period and which spawned the development of further cultural organisations.¹⁴ Valorising a pre-modern interaction with nature that is both European and urban, Chidgey imagines the precursor of dominant contemporary Western society and in effect critiques Western urban culture without actually departing from it at all.

In associating respectful holism with European pre-modernity, Chidgey succeeds in avoiding the risks of exoticisation inherent in Western representations of indigenous or Eastern cultures. The association made between urbanism, Europeanism and pre-modernity appeals to the cultural history of the white urban reader, a textual move that undoubtedly widens the accessibility of her critique of modernity beyond the New Zealand context. In Chidgey's country of origin, however, her idealised human-nature interaction remains problematic because it avoids the fact that New Zealand includes two cultures, only one of which is urban and European. In aligning her privileged human-nature interaction with Europeanism, Chidgey runs the risk of reiterating the universality of Western culture by ignoring other non-European modes of interacting with the natural world, most significantly, New Zealand's indigenous culture which historically cultivated nature with an assumption of its metaphysical significance. If Chidgey's work proposes a particular model of human-nature interaction, as I argue, it remains unclear how this explicitly urban model might be adapted or expanded in the New Zealand context to include the kind of spiritualised nature interaction that Geoff Park associates with Maori culture. In his landmark book *Nga Uruora*, Park journeys through the ravaged ecosystems of Aotearoa—farm lands and estuaries, and areas like the flood plains of the Hutt River and Hauraki—with the purpose of revealing the non-European, land-based human-nature interactions that were practiced

in New Zealand prior to European settlement. He discovers tiny survivors of *nga uruora*—the groves of life—the “tapu, food-rich labyrinth[s] of waterways, forest and swamp” that sustained (and were sustained by) Maori society (*Nga Uruora* 39). Park aims to reintroduce this modus operandi into New Zealand ecological discourse; he calls for a bicultural approach to conservation in New Zealand, a “re-enchantment” of human-nature relations in which matters of spirit and ritual might be considered alongside ecology and policy (*Nga Uruora* 332). From one perspective, Chidgey’s exclusively European model could be criticised on the grounds that it seems unaware of such considerations, and oblivious of the political ramifications involved in promoting a monocultural approach to human-nature relations in a supposedly bicultural society.

From another perspective, however, this criticism seems spurious, given that Chidgey is not an environmental or cultural theorist, but a novelist whose craft involves the creation of “beautiful tissue” which, by her novel’s own admission, may or may not attend to “reality”. In *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*, she shows that the utilisation of nature is an inevitable part of being human, that the human processing of nature has taken place for thousands of years. What has changed, she suggests, are the attitudes accompanying the act of transformation, attitudes that have progressed from respectful holism to fanatical control. While she locates this holism in a different cultural realm than Park does, her project is closely aligned to his in that it critiques modernity’s rapacity and articulates an alternative method of interacting with nature, one that acknowledges the value and dynamism of the nonhuman world. If her various portrayals of nature transformation work to critique European modernity in general terms, Park extends her portrayal to theorise a model of human-nature interaction that is culturally applicable in the local New Zealand context.

Chapter Four

Fearing the Feral: The Threat of Recalcitrant Nature

European expansion... has tended to be understood as the imposition of a new order, the linear expansion, for better or worse, of a regime of intentionality, intelligence gathering and control.... If the narratives of colonisation have largely concerned themselves with the new being rendered intelligible, with the disorderly being organised and the wild domesticated, their counterparts are the tales of the visible devolving into opacity, the familiar turning strange... the civilised going feral. (Nigel Clark, "Wild Life: Ferality and the Frontier with Chaos" 136 – 37)

Despite their striking qualitative differences, the modern and medieval transformers of nature discussed in Chapter Three engage in the same fundamental process. Whether the transformation of nature entails extractive industrialisation or spiritualised art, both modes of production involve an interaction between humans and nature in which the humans shape raw materials in the service of their cultural agenda: tobacco is transformed into cigars, hair into wigs, animal skin into medieval art, the Florida swamps into the luxurious Tampa Bay Hotel. While there are vast differences between the modern and medieval transformations of nature—the scale of the operation, the attitudes and beliefs that accompany the act, the intensity of the aggression levelled against nature and so on—there remains a commonality between the interactions across time: the human participants convert nature into something quite differ-

ent—culture—thus performing a process that ostensibly transfers their raw material from one ontological category to another.

Chidgey's fiction suggests that the process of ontological transferral remains always incomplete and that nature always retains some trace of its original wildness irrespective of how thoroughly humans alter its superficial appearance. If modernity's perception of its own power increases in tandem with its mass transformation of nature, as I argue, the retention of natural traces in apparently cultured objects nevertheless still works to remind modernity of the incompleteness of the transformative venture and hence the fragility of its mastery of the wider environment. This suggests that wild nature exists in opposition to human culture within the Enlightenment epistemological framework, a model to which Chidgey adheres in her first novel. As I show in Chapter Two, the Stilton family's interaction with nature involves a number of temporary departures from the human cultural environment and a connection with something completely other; in each instance, *In a Fishbone Church*'s human characters cross a boundary between their everyday existence and the world of nature, a boundary that both reinforces the ontological differentiation between nature and culture and permits the pervasive romanticisation of nature that I locate within the first novel. In *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation* the firm division between wild nature and human culture becomes problematised: although the virtual boundary between humans and nature becomes an actual physical structure in *The Transformation*—the wall that seals the Tampa Bay Hotel from the wilderness—untamed nature continually infiltrates human cultural space in a manner that challenges the various methods of human control discussed in Chapter Three. Thus, *In a Fishbone Church*'s romantic representation of “free nature” becomes difficult to maintain in the urban settings of

Chidgey's subsequent two novels because autonomous nature threatens to destabilise humans' control of their environment.

In this final chapter, I will discuss the diverse ways in which agentic nature appears in *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation* and the ways in which it challenges and complicates modernity's Cartesian dream of mastery. This rebellious variety of nature impacts upon the human characters in two primary ways which I will discuss in turn. First, the novels' human environments are threatened by catastrophic natural events that disrupt the characters' sense of control. In both novels, the natural elements appear as powerful adversaries capable of wreaking havoc upon human civilisation. Instead of behaving passively or mechanically in accordance with the Cartesian conceptualisation of nature, the elements demonstrate nature's latent recalcitrance, a quality which is ubiquitous in Latour's theorisation of nature, and one which Nigel Clark juxtaposes with the progressive ambitions of modernity (Latour, *Politics* 80; Clark, "Wild Life" 137). Rather than seeing nature as the embodiment of all good, both of these theorists argue that nature possesses a refractory potential which is the wildcard in modernity's quest for control. Clark argues that nature continually presents a challenge to the ordering impulses of modernity: if colonisation is concerned primarily with organising and domesticating an environment perceived to be disordered, he suggests that nature possesses the potential to subvert these endeavours by behaving in a refractory, unpredictable and feral manner ("Wild Life" 137). While the natural elements may exhibit this kind of ferality on a grand scale, this potential also exists in a more clandestine and insidious manner in Chidgey's fiction, covertly residing within objects that have apparently been transformed from nature into culture. This second kind of recalcitrant nature may be less threatening in material terms than the powerful natural elements, but in the consciousness of the characters, the potential

reanimation of this nature is a horrific prospect that threatens to destabilise the very foundations of their culture. Converted nature becomes a strange, uncanny hybrid that is no longer purely natural, but which is not entirely cultured either; for the characters most invested in the culture of modernity, the nature-culture hybrid is a kind of sleeping monster that threatens to wake and seek vengeance upon those who have tampered with its condition of being. Whichever way Chidgey's characters turn, feral nature whispers beneath the surface of culture, threatening to assert the agency that modernity so sedulously strives to contain.

1. Elemental Fertility: The Might of the Hurricane, The Strength of the Sun

If the advancement of modernity is predicated upon the control of nature, as I argue in Chapter Three, the meteorological elements remain an ongoing challenge to its stability because they represent a dimension of nature that is beyond human control. While Jack may possess the ability to transplant wild orange trees into orchards in *The Transformation*, he is unable to prevent the onslaught of a rare Arctic blizzard which whips through Tampa in 1895, killing his young orange trees and symbolically causing his own death via a brain haemorrhage as he tries to salvage some remnant of his crop (27). Jack's lost battle against the blizzard is but one instance in a series of recurring confrontations that take place between humans and the elements in Chidgey's second two novels. As their homes are consumed by fire or torn apart by the wind, the characters encounter an aspect of nature that simultaneously defies the Cartesian notion of nature and exposes the temerity of the human quest for supreme control.

While modernity's hold on the environment remains tenuous throughout both *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*, it is particularly fragile in nineteenth-century Florida, where colonisers are still in the early stages of ordering and shaping nature.

On “this savage peninsula, in this state shaped like a pistol”, humans begin to interact with an unfamiliar environment that rests in their inexperienced hands like a loaded weapon (153). The unpredictability pervades every aspect of the new colony: this is an environment where “everything is accelerating”, where bricklayers can quickly earn their fortune and become gentlemen, where wars can be fought and won in a matter of weeks, where the most refined sophisticates can resort to murder, exploitation and sexual licentiousness (348). If the social, political and cultural mores of the old world become threatened in this new place, a still more pervasive menace is posed by the volatile natural environment that threatens to engulf the new civilisation. Plagued on a daily basis by the searing heat and by the alligators that boldly walk the sandy streets, the Floridians face an aggressive nature whose power culminates in the hurricane experienced by Monsieur Goulet when he arrives in the United States (13). Instead of finding an ordered colony, Goulet encounters

[a] topsy-turvy place, where the hurricane had left great licks in the grass like the whorls in an infant’s hair.... There was much wreckage scattered by the hurricane—broken china, scraps of clothing, a brocade curtain with brass rings still attached.... As I took my drifting course through the Land of Flowers, I came upon more evidence of the hurricane’s might: I would spy a hand protruding from a tangle of mangroves, or a foot caught in low-hanging branches, or a dishevelled head nestled in the sawgrass blades. (148; 151)

The might of the hurricane is such that it effortlessly tears apart modernity’s physical structures; in its destruction, it subverts the human order imposed by colonisation, symbolically threatening the Enlightenment ordering systems which are described by Foucault as “grids” by which humans “distribute the multiplicity of existing things into... categories that make it possible for [them] to name, speak and think” (xix). The

result of this subversion is a chaotic taxonomy that is unspeakable and unthinkable in Enlightenment terms, a classification system that is akin to the one portrayed by Foucault in the preface to *The Order of Things*.¹ Brazenly mixing household paraphernalia, flora and severed heads, the hurricane “[upsets] the natural order of things.... [It leaves] the roof on the floor and the floor on the roof; [it makes] leaves fall in the summer; [it] lets the tide take over the land” (*The Transformation* 38).

The fact that the hurricane interferes with the seasons and the tide suggests that its impact extends beyond its disruption of human order. This is an incarnation of nature that is prepared to break its own rules, prepared not only to disturb human order, but also to upset “the *natural* order of things” (38, my italics). In subverting the standard orders of nature as well as human ordering structures, the hurricane transcends all boundaries, exhibiting a universal recalcitrance that violently declares nature’s potential for action. Just as the human characters in *The Transformation* exercise their potential for nefarious activity—be it murder, economic abuse or deception—the hurricane parades nature’s ability to engage in reprehensible behaviour. This ability defines nature as an actor in a Latourian sense: while Latour uses the term “actor” generally to mean “any entity that modifies another in a trial”, he also argues that “actors are defined above all as obstacles, scandals, as what suspends mastery” (*Politics* 237; 81). In other words, Latour endows actors with the potential to perform acts which are not necessarily “good” in the quotidian sense of the word, a potential for action which also implicitly includes the possibility for cruelty. Indeed, the destructiveness of recalcitrant nature in *The Transformation* far exceeds that of any of the human characters: after all, Goulet kills only one person, but the hurricane kills 19,000 (*The Transformation* 146). Therefore, nature “suspends [human] mastery” by becoming a kind of master figure itself, one that beats the human master at his own

game and claims absolute control over the environment through a process that suspends the autonomy of others.

The establishment of modernity therefore involves a battle for mastery between humans and nature, a battle that is won by the hurricane both in Chidgey's nineteenth-century setting and in the contemporary world where colonisation is ostensibly complete. The developing superpower in *The Transformation* has proven in the twenty-first century to be just as pervious to agentive nature as it is in Chidgey's late nineteenth-century fictional locale. In August 2005, two states west of *The Transformation*'s setting, survivors of Hurricane Katrina confronted a version of the carnage experienced by Monsieur Goulet:

Nothing could prepare them for what the hurricane had left behind. With [New Orleans] all but emptied, it is no longer the party town of the popular imagination.... Much of it remains underwater, stewing in a putrid mix of chemicals and corpses.... [It is] part frontier outpost, part fetid deathscape. (Booth Thomas and Padgett 41)

As Katrina submerged the city in a lethal solution of water, faeces, battery acid and rotten corpses, Chris Carroll observed that "a world accustomed to global projections of American power... witnessed that same power reduced to impotence" (9).

Katrina's significance therefore extends beyond the fact that she destroys a city situated within close geographic proximity to Chidgey's fictional Floridian setting; the 2005 hurricane demonstrates the feral elements' ability to master the quintessential locus of capitalistic modernity regardless of humans' material, scientific or technological sophistication. Given the mobilisation of troops, the devastating loss of life and the quasi post-war deathscape in New Orleans, it is hardly surprising that Susan Jean Jackson, the spokesperson of the Army Corps of Engineers, likens the city to a

scene from *Apocalypse Now* (Cloud 44). Because it topples the icon of Western modernity, Katrina is indeed the end of the world in a symbolic sense, or rather, one more confirmation from nature that the human-mastered world never existed in the first place.

It is perhaps the forced acknowledgement of the impossibility of mastery that generates the invariable feeling of disbelief and unreality that attends disasters like Hurricane Katrina. In such events, the feral elements reclaim cultured space, performing a kind of counter-colonisation that undoes modern progress both at the material level by destroying the physical structures of human culture, and at the ideological level by destroying modernity's sense of control. Although the hurricane certainly performs this function in Chidgey's fiction, the colonial setting of *The Transformation* is so volatile on multiple levels that the feral intervention of nature is in keeping with the overall quality of nineteenth-century Tampa. More surprising is the appearance of feral nature in the Mercers' suburban family home in *Golden Deeds*, where, in the mid-twentieth-century United Kingdom, humans face none of the overt natural aggression present in Chidgey's Florida. Rather than being concerned with survival, the Mercers engross themselves in the mundane details of their day-to-day life: Patrick dries the dishes each evening and builds Meccano models in his spare time; his mother, Doreen, knits and tends her chrysanthemums; and his father, Graham, comes home from work in the evening pondering which purchases might be the best investment for the family (154; 61; 148; 156; 153). This is an environment akin to the Stiltons' in Chidgey's first novel, an environment where nature is processed and incorporated into human narratives to such an extent that even the flowers have human meanings attached to them: "White carnations for truth', [Patrick's mother would] say,

pushing a stem of blooms into the water. ‘Striped carnations for refusal, ambrosia for love returned, ivy for fidelity’” (147).

Feral nature invades this apparently controlled space one afternoon when Patrick accidentally sets fire to the family home by refracting sunlight through a magnifying glass on the back porch (150). The results are apocalyptic:

[Patrick had] never realised how loud fire could be. It was never that loud when contained by the hearth, but his fire—for he had created it—was furious: wood cracking like bullets, sap boiling and whistling, paint sizzling. One by one the windows of the house smashed and flames whooshed through them like ragged curtains.... The ash was the only silent thing about the fire. As it fell softly on his hair, his arms, his bare feet, he thought of moths. And each moth represented a part of their house, their old life. (251)

Despite the best efforts of the fire fighters, nature in the form of the fire completely consumes the Mercers’ home and all their possessions, leaving them dependent upon family until their insurance settlement clears and they begin unsuccessfully trying to recreate the home they have lost. There is something artificial about the new house that is “built on the foundations of the old one”: even though the wallpaper, carpet, china and furniture almost exactly match that which is burnt, Patrick sees the house as “a façade” and his parents as cardboard cut-outs “smiling in the ruins” (150 – 51; 154). The Mercers’ futile attempt to recreate “their old life” is less about the slightly wrong shade of wallpaper than it is about the loss of the past; the fire is a break in history, a force that consumes everything before it and changes their lives forever. As Doreen’s eventual breakdown and hospitalisation suggest, the replacement of the possessions is not enough, for the fire has destroyed something that is irreplaceable—a

sense of safety and security—leaving in its wake the psychological frailty and sense of disjuncture that pervades the new home.

This sense of insecurity stems from the sudden realisation of human culture's fragility in comparison to the strength of nature. Patrick's fire is not just any fire, but is a concentration of the sun, an element which in *Golden Deeds* obliterates the sense of human control as efficiently as the hurricane does in *The Transformation*. Re-published in America under the name *The Strength of the Sun*,² *Golden Deeds* shows the Mercers' heightened knowledge of the sun's power and their obsessive awareness of its omnipresence. In Patrick's professional capacity as an art curator, "light is the enemy", the element that erodes ancient works of art; however, his perception of the sunlight's antagonism also extends into his personal daily life:

[Patrick] flipped down the sun visor against the glare. He could feel the heat seeping through the roof of the car, softening the vinyl, making the steering wheel difficult to hold safely.... Get your moles checked, his mother used to scold him every time he visited her. Have you had your moles checked? She avoided the outdoors when the sun was shining. It's dangerous, she said, and you know it. (24)

Doreen's firsthand experience of the strength of the sun leads her to perceive the sun's ever-present ferality which lies dormant in the tiny microcosms of sunlight, just waiting to be ignited. Whether it destroys humans swiftly and efficiently, as it does in the house fire, or slowly and insidiously, as it does through melanoma, the sun is an element to be feared in Doreen's eyes.

In the case of the sun-fire, of course, this ferality is ignited through human manipulation: the sunlight only becomes refractory when it is refracted. The difference between the two examples of elemental ferality I discuss is the level of human

participation involved in their appearance: while the fire directly results from Patrick's magnification of the sun, the hurricane is an apparently independent display of nature's recalcitrance, one that develops without any human intervention. However, while disasters of the hurricane's magnitude lie beyond humanity's purview by definition, such events contain a greater degree of human involvement than it would superficially appear. Scientists studying the hurricane-prone region of America's Gulf Coast, for example, identify human impact on the environment as a contributing factor to disasters like Hurricane Katrina:

Soggy soil, eroding shorelines and sudden storms make the whole region an unstable mess even without human intervention. And the more people build there, the worse they seem to make things, clawing away the natural river routes and marshlands that replenish the land and sucking out the oil and other subterranean resources that hold up the surface. Now, many experts warn, with greenhouse gasses raising global temperatures, we are spawning more and deadlier hurricanes. (Kluger and Booth Thomas 46)

This perspective significantly complicates modernity's victimisation by recalcitrant nature. Not only does it reveal the human component to environmental disasters, but it also suggests that the sun-fire and the hurricane in Chidgey's fiction are both phenomena that occur, in part, as a result of the intensified human interaction with nature. In other words, these events cease to be purely "natural", but become nature-culture contortions—hybrids, in Latourian terms. The effects of such hybrid elemental entities resonate throughout Chidgey's novels, well beyond the dramatic desecration of the state of Florida and the destruction of the Mercers' house: indeed, Doreen's heightened fear of melanoma exists in response to the degradation of the ozone layer,

an entity that Latour sees as an exemplary hybrid in that it is both natural entity and human-induced phenomenon (*Never Been Modern* 1).

What is particularly disconcerting about the natural elements is that their displays of ferality seem so disproportionate and incongruous with the rather negligible incidents that provoke them. Chidgey's characters invite the fury of nature into their own local sphere through acts that appear incapable of producing such devastation. In *Golden Deeds* in particular, Patrick's magnification of a single ray of sunlight seems incommensurable with the monster that he lures into his home: in his eyes, "the sun [is] just a star.... [He] hadn't dreamed he could cause such damage with a star and a piece of glass" (24). This piece of glass, of course, is not just any piece of glass, but is an icon of modernity that involved in various branches of Baconian and Cartesian science during the seventeenth century; given the magnifying glass's historical significance, Patrick's act of manipulation becomes representative of modernity's wider tendency to interfere with the environment, a tendency which has historically produced disastrous results from seemingly inconsequential antecedents. For example, Clark observes phenomena in the Australian and New Zealand contexts where Acclimatisation Societies imported everything from sparrows to hedgehogs to rabbits with the aim of converting the alien environment into something more familiar (Morton and Smith 166). While the act of introduction involved the release of a very small number of animals, Clark notes the dramatic effect inflicted upon the environment by the rabbit in particular, a creature that exponentially reproduced to become a monster that costs New Zealand an estimated \$22 million per year, both in population control measures and in the destruction of pasture land and flora through rabbit grazing (Australian Commonwealth Scientific Research website; Kettle)³. In initiating this kind of destruction, acclimatisation societies enact the rupture that Patrick causes via the sun-

fire in Chidgey's novel: if the sun becomes a destructive feral monster by passing through the magnifying glass, the rabbit also passes through a metaphorical lens of modernity, a process that magnifies its power to such an extent that it definitively alters the environmental history of New Zealand.

If the release of a few animals or the refraction of a single ray of sunlight can produce such destructive retaliation against human culture, modernity's large-scale operations—urban development, mass industrialism, oil drilling and so on—can only serve to exacerbate this potential. Indeed, the German sociologist Ulrich Beck argues that the intense demand placed upon nature by contemporary culture has resulted in what he calls a “risk society” in which the outcomes of accidents and disasters repeatedly overflow expectation (1). In a society where “the smallest possible cause [results in] the greatest possible destruction”, modernity's familiar linear determinacy is challenged to the point that it becomes simplistic (Beck 4; Clark “Wild Life” 146). If the unpredictability of this formula destabilises rationalism, the foundational cornerstone of modernity, Clark suggests that the simple linearism relied upon by the scientific community since the birth of Newtonian mechanics is utterly inadequate in describing and predicting disasters in the risk society. Instead, he suggests that chaos theory offers an alternative explanation for the seemingly random occurrences that repeatedly catch modern culture off-guard: rather than seeing such events as the exception, chaos theory defines non-linearity as the prevailing rule of a universe that is deterministic, but which has a predisposition for “disorder, complexity and unpredictability” (“Wild Life” 146; Hall 8 – 9). This theory seeks to explain the proliferation of events like the fire and the rabbit infestation discussed above, events that are initiated with insignificant input but which result in cataclysmic consequences.⁴

As far as nature is concerned, the application of chaos theory serves to normalise the feral potential that Clark discusses. Instead of conceptualising ferality as a “shock and surprise” or as an unruly, disordering force in an otherwise ordered environment, Clark utilises chaos theory to suggest that feral nature (and disorder more generally) is the rule, rather than the exception, and that ferality exists as a result of human intervention (“Wild Life” 146). Whether this intervention involves refracting sunlight, “acclimatising” a new nation, or eroding the natural biosphere of a hurricane-prone region, the human quest to control the environment paradoxically increases the likelihood that nature will overflow the servile role allotted to it by modernity and instead become a powerful adversary which mocks modernity’s naive presumption of its own supremacy. As feral nature consistently subverts human expectation and reduces modernity’s mastery to ashes, the rigorous manipulations of nature both in Chidgey’s fiction and in contemporary culture looks less like development than they do like modernity playing with fire.

2. *Hybrid Ferality: Tracing the Ghosts of Nature*

The inclusion of natural disasters in *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation* may periodically remind modernity of its incomplete mastery of the natural world, but the presence of feral nature also tortures Chidgey’s characters on a much more immediate basis, and not only when their worlds are being obliterated by flames or hurricanes. The surprising, violent ferality wrought by the elements also covertly lurks within the commodities that litter the characters’ urban environments. The various transformations of nature discussed in Chapter Three—the wigs, the manuscripts, the cigars, the orchards—are all cultured objects made of controlled natural raw materials that have ostensibly been engaged in the service of a human agenda, be it art, colonisation or

agricultural industrialism. Although these entities are apparently immobile and inanimate, Chidgey shows that the nature component possesses a resilient tendency toward recalcitrance, particularly in the wigs and the manuscripts whose “high art” status is continually troubled by the traces of nature that remain in the skin and hair. In *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*, these entities are nature masquerading as culture, entities which appear transformed, but which surreptitiously harbour the ferality that is so ostentatiously flaunted by the elements in Chidgey’s fiction.

The various transformed objects in Chidgey’s novels are what Haraway would call “naturecultures” and Latour would call “hybrids”, objects within which nature and culture “are inseparable, integral to each other, infinitely bound up” (Swynedouw 66). Such creatures, they argue, are boundary crossers that breach the inflexible classificatory systems mobilised during the Enlightenment because they occupy a space “in the middle” between nature and culture (Latour, *Never Been Modern* 47; Haraway, “The Actors are Cyborg” 21 – 22). If, as Latour suggests, modernity is concerned with “purification”—his term for the rigid, definitive separation of nature from culture—the hybrid natureculture’s ontological promiscuity undermines modernity’s conceptual episteme, destabilising the foundational framework that underpins the assumption of control governing the various methods of transformation discussed in Chapter Three (*Never Been Modern* 10 – 11). The ongoing dynamism of nature within Chidgey’s hybrid entities relativises modernity’s pivotal institutions, suggesting that colonialism, urbanism and industrialisation do not finally or completely convert nature into something fundamentally different, but rather repress nature’s ferality until such a time that they can no longer do so.

The human interaction with commodities is thus transformed from a consumer’s ease into a kind of competition where nature pushes against the boundaries

imposed upon it by culture, and humans push back in an attempt to hold nature in its place. The human pushing takes on different guises: in some instances, the nature-culture is literally held under control, as it is in the vault in the museum where Patrick treats the manuscripts primarily as works of art, storing them in a temperature-controlled environment that minimises the likelihood of their damage by silverfish, rodents, sunlight, mould and fire. Part of this preservation of art involves holding the manuscripts under slight pressure:

After finishing with a book the cover was closed tight, the clasps secured....

Without clasps to hold them firm, the pages would cockle. They would return to the original shape of the animal. (181)

Both the environmental control and the pressurised storage serve to hold nature in its cultural role: pinned down and isolated from all contact with living animals, light or water, the manuscripts are forbidden their animal identity and are held firmly within the clasp of modernity.

The literal holding back of nature is repeated in an ideological sense by the characters who avoid acknowledging their indebtedness to nature. Although numerous commodities in Chidgey's fiction are composed of natural materials, these commodities are severed from their sources and are redeployed in apparently cultured forms that bear little or no resemblance to their original state. In *The Transformation*, for example, Goulet's wigs contain no obvious trace of the morgues, dumps, hospitals and graveyards from which he collects his raw material. He scrupulously fumigates every strand of hair, following the example of his vocational predecessors who also purified the hair they used: Goulet recounts how the

the recent lingering popularity of enormous chignons and waterfalls attached to the top of the head led to the harvesting of a great deal of hair on the Dark

Continent, for the peasant follicles of Europe could not keep pace with demand. This filthy material, clipped from the heads of one of the world's most squalid populations, was shipped to London for purification, after which it was perfectly serviceable (60 – 61).

This act of purification served to distance the wig-wearers from the “squalid” origin of the hair; instead, this hair was transformed into works of art, crafted by the great hair-artists of the eighteenth century who created

wigs topped with frigates in full sail, garlanded wigs with water bottles concealed in their folds so that the flowers might remain fresh, wigs so high that door openings had to be raised. Coiffures... featured a chignon in the form of a croix de chevalier with a curl à la Sultane falling onto the neck, two side curls and two shoulder curls, the whole being adorned with ribbon and a rose of diamonds crossed with a row of pearls.... There was no pretence that the hair was the wearer's own; the full-blown artifice signalled one's affluence. (84; 264)

This is a form of art that is deliberately artificial, one that signifies cultural elitism above all else and one in which materiality of the wig is obscured, the nature component occluded by the object's cultural significance. Although Goulet's wigs are plain in comparison to the wigs of the eighteenth century, he, like his vocational predecessors, conceals his indebtedness to nature because he knows that knowledge of the hair's origin will be destabilising to his customers, and hence to his financial situation. Coyly evading all inquires about his sources, Goulet deflects his customers' attention from the actual origin of the hair to an implausible natural source: “Where do you think it comes from?” I ask, smiling a little. ‘Do you think I secrete it myself, like a silkworm, like a spider, perhaps?’ And they laugh, and I laugh, and that is that”

(57). As well as physically purifying the hair, then, Goulet also performs an act of Latourian purification which works to separate his cultural creations from the natural world. Like the animal skins, the hair is denied all association with its previous natural existence and is instead conceptualised purely as a form of art.

Both the literal and ideological forms of purification remain unsuccessful in Chidgey's novels, for the nature component of the hybrid always retains traces of its previous autonomous existence. These trace elements form a network of narratives and histories that exist beneath the surface of the hybrid natureculture object. Entities like the manuscripts, for example, may be appreciated as high-art, their borders "strewn with dragonflies, strawberries, cornflowers and moths", but they also contain traces of another more ghastly natural history (21):

The hair side or grain side [of the parchment]... [was] darker... [and contained] tiny dots [that were] the traces of follicles from the animal's hair... [There were] tree-like vein marks which were the result of blood in the skin when the animal died. Sometimes, too, on larger pages, dense ridges could be made out; vestiges of the point at which the backbone transected the skin. And very occasionally, on one edge, a scalloped curve could be detected. That... indicated the animal's neck. (179 – 180)

These animal traces identify the manuscripts to be something other than pure culture, something linked to an ugly aspect of nature: they are strange, confusing entities which for Patrick are both "horrible" and the most beautiful things he has ever seen (180; 178).

While the simultaneous presence of cornflowers and vein marks problematises the manuscripts' art status in a very palpable way, this kind of art-nature doubleness is not limited to those entities which overtly parade their ontological transgressions. Pat-

rick's mentor at the museum alerts him to the animal traces which also covertly inhabit contemporary literature:

'Think about the shape of a calf, or a goat, or a sheep' [the manuscript curator said to Patrick]. 'Think about the shape of the pelts from those animals.

They're always going to be roughly oblong, aren't they? Always higher than they are wide.... That's why manuscripts are rectangular. And modern, printed books preserve the form. They echo the dimensions of a skin'. (180)

As a kind of embryonic literary product, the manuscripts function as ancestors of the contemporary book, as cultural products that have influenced the development of modern literary production. Although modern consumers may be unaware of this history, and although the natural processes and elements originally utilised in medieval literary production have been all but eradicated from the collective cultural memory, *Golden Deeds* suggests that the contemporary book contains traces or echoes of the manuscript animals which covertly lurk within the apparently pure cultural object as a kind of shadow natural presence.

The echoes, shadows and traces are the repositories of the hybrids' additional identity, the identity that is held back, denied, cleaned away or otherwise repressed by culture. In addition to being works of art, both the wigs and the manuscripts contain evidence of another history, the memory of another more natural existence in which the hair covered the head of its original grower and the skin covered the body of an animal. If Chidgey's portrayal of the hybrid suggests that the enculturation process inherently represses the memory of this natural history, her portrayal invites a psychoanalytic interpretation of the nature-culture relationship because it associates nature with memory and history, and culture with the force that represses that memory. Michel de Certeau draws on Freud's depth model of consciousness in his formation of

a psychoanalytic theory of history: just as Freud conceptualised the conscious mind to be but a thin covering over a cavernous store of memory, de Certeau suggests that the past exists just beneath the skin of the present, and that it, like the unconscious, unexpectedly “resurfaces”, “troubles” or otherwise disturbs the “clean” present (de Certeau 3 – 4). This model of history casts a revealing light upon Chidgey’s portrayal of the hybrid, suggesting that the natural traces in the objects perform the function of the Freudian unconscious by infiltrating the pure cultural present that modernity has constructed for itself. The cleansing of the hair and the pressurised storage of the skins may be read as efforts to repress the materials’ natural state, as preventative measures which obscure the ugly memory of prisons and morgues, putrefied flesh and death. From a psychoanalytic perspective, nature becomes the unconscious of culture: the natural history of the hybrid “is *repressed*, [yet] it *returns* in the present from which it was excluded, but it does so surreptitiously” (de Certeau 3, italics in original).

This rather simple psychoanalytic reading of the hybrid is tempting in the context of Chidgey’s fiction given the abundant number of psychoanalytic symbols and themes that appear in *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*. Both novels are fascinated with subliminal histories and with the traces of the past that reappear to disturb the present. If “every contact leaves a trace”, as *Golden Deeds* repeatedly asserts, an inordinate amount of the characters’ energy is expended in repressing or avoiding these traces (138). In *The Transformation*, Goulet’s entire existence is devoted to memory avoidance: the various fictitious identities he lives out—refined wig-maker, female physician, author—not only deceive his associates as to his shady past, but also serve to obscure the memory of the loveless childhood, the murder and the deception which comprise his life (151;146). These memories are buried in his con-

sciousness in a state similar to that of treasures he stores in his favourite wig-block as a child:

I filled it with things of my own, little keepsakes and mementoes—a buckle from my outgrown shoes, one of my master’s collar studs, some empty shells—until one day the head was so full it could accommodate nothing more, and when I shook it, it made no sound.... I tried to prise them out with a knotting hook, but I found I could not do so without damaging the contents.

And so, to preserve them, I secured the little door with steel block-points. (50)

As a storehouse of compressed, preserved memories, the wig-block functions as a Freudian symbol to encapsulate the disjuncture between Goulet’s sophisticated present and his repressed, denied past.

Given that the wig-block is the only object in any of Chidgey’s work to be visually represented as a drawing in the text, this symbol claims a special status and suggests the thematic primacy of repressed history in her fiction.⁵ The settings of *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation* are heavy with repressed events that leave smudgy traces across the texts’ surfaces. The characters repeatedly encounter historical “‘residue’ condemned to be forgotten... [that] re-infiltrates the place of its origin”: reading each others’ diaries and private mail, uncovering infidelity and affairs, discovering secrets hidden in rubbish heaps and newspapers and archives, the characters inhabit a complex environment in which past and present are intimately related (de Certeau 4). The most dramatic re-infiltration of history occurs on the final page of *Golden Deeds* when the body of Laura Pearse is exhumed, complete with the traces of a previously broken arm, to resolve the seven-year investigation into her disappearance and to disturb the life of denial her murder has constructed (270). From a psychoanalytic perspective, the murderer’s burial of the body and Goulet’s nailing of the

wig-block are qualitatively one: both actions serve to repress the truth of the past in an endeavour to create what de Certeau calls “a ‘clean’ place”—a present disconnected from the guilt and ugliness of history (4). For Goulet, of course, repressed history never literally emerges from beneath the surface in the way that Laura’s body does; he is confronted neither with his wig-block nor with the tangled childhood memories that are symbolised by the treasures within. Instead, the repressed memories rear up in the form of the erratic and often compulsive behaviours that threaten to destabilise and undermine his polished exterior. Were Freud to put Goulet on the couch, he would no doubt assess him as he did his other patients, and attribute his deviant sexuality, brutality and various psychoses to the multitude of repressed issues that are displaced and manifest in some other kind of behaviour.⁶

Although the nature component of the hybrid may be held down and smothered in a classically Freudian manner, the psychoanalytic tendency to interpret repressed elements as symbols of something else is inappropriate from an ecocritical perspective. A psychoanalytic interpretation of the hybrid would involve reading the traces of nature as symbols or representations of some kind of human or cultural anxiety. For example, after his car accident, Patrick has a hallucinated confrontation with a group of animals as he tries to explain the process of manuscript production:

Patrick told them how the skins were scraped of fat and hair, how they were immersed in lime, scraped again, stretched and dried. There was a flesh side and a hair side to any page of parchment, he said, and it was usually possible to tell which was which.

When he finished, there was silence. He scanned the audience, waiting for comments, perhaps a question or two, but the animals just stared at him. One or two of the lambs began crying....

‘I’ve offended you’, said Patrick. ‘I’m not sure what I’ve said, but I’m sorry. I’m sorry’.

The animals moved in closer, hoofs churning the snow. It whirled around them, a haze of silver and white, blurring their outlines. They could have been rocks. Patrick thought. Angry, advancing rocks. (51 – 52)

From a Freudian perspective, Patrick’s dream may involve facing the animals’ hostility, but this would not be regarded as a reaction to the process of enculturation; instead, in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud argues that appearances of animals within dreams “are as a rule employed by the dream-work to represent the libido” (573). A psychoanalytic reading would thus interpret the animals not as animals, but as symbols of sexual anxiety, perhaps stemming from Patrick’s failed marriage or his incestuous encounter with his cousin, Faye (161 – 62).

This method of reading not only perpetuates the pervasive anthropocentrism that ecocritics observe within literary discourse, but also undermines the ecocritical reading approach which strives to consider nature in its own right as something significant in itself. If the traces of nature within the hybrid object signal a repressed history, as I argue, that history is not a cultural or human one, but is a history of nature. The hybrid’s natural traces function as an ecocritical unconscious that works to remind humans of the aggression, death and cruelty levelled against the natural world. In terms of its appearance, the ecocritical unconscious manifests in forms similar to that of the psychoanalytic unconscious: Freud conceptualised the encounter with the repressed as an uncanny experience in which something presumed lost is unexpectedly rediscovered; his own favourite illustration of this was the scene from *Hamlet* in which the murdered king returns as a ghost to ask his son to avenge his death (de Certeau 3). The encounters with repressed nature in Chidgey’s fiction are similarly

portrayed as being a “communion with the dead”; appearing in various uncanny, monstrous and ghostly forms, repressed nature haunts modernity through whispers and echoes, troubling the present with reminders of the past (Armstrong, *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* 140).

Although these natural ghosts logically ought to inspire fear in the observer, Chidgey’s characters do not always exhibit the sense of anxiousness that characterises the return of the repressed in Freud’s theorisation (Armstrong, *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* 140). On the contrary, the natural traces within the hybrid object are often conceived in positive terms within Chidgey’s fiction. In *The Transformation*, for example, the hair that Goulet harvests as a young man in Europe evokes an aspect of nature that he finds decidedly appealing. As he collects the hair, he becomes attached to certain switches which he keeps “in the deep lid of [his] travelling case, for ease of access”:

I could recall the owner of each skein, and sometimes I would unbind them from their lengths of cotton and inhale their scent, and it would be as if Rosa or Birgit or Blanche were standing before me.... One smelled of grass and of freshly turned soil; another of fallen leaves; a third of clean straw; a fourth of walnuts. (65)

The details of Goulet’s “[enjoyment]... with these souvenirs” remain blessedly oblique, but the evocation of the natural is clear: the smells of nature—soil, leaves, straw and walnuts—not only align the individual women with the natural world, but also suggest that the hair functions as a portal by which Goulet accesses this world and the women that radiate its perfume (65). His perception of the women’s personal presence within the hair reflects the popular nineteenth-century belief in hair’s power to evoke the memory of its grower. As Elisabeth Gitter notes, “hair was powerful, and

the ubiquitous Victorian lock of hair, encased in a locket or ring or framed on the wall became... something to be treasured, a totem, a token of attachment, intrinsically valuable, as precious as gold” (492 – 93). While Goulet’s quasi-pornographic toying with the hair may be qualitatively different than the valuing of hair described by Gitter, both interactions operate under the assumption of the hair’s acquiescent accommodation of the human agenda. The hair is equally cooperative in Goulet’s licentious enjoyment as it is in the more pious attachments that Gitter discusses and which Goulet caters for in *The Transformation* in his sideline hair jewellery business. Inspired both by grief and love, Goulet’s customers bring him the locks of their loved ones to be woven into a brooch, earrings or cufflinks worn as a symbol of love and connection with the sweetheart or the deceased (81). For both Goulet and his customers, the evocations within the hair do not to inspire fear or apprehension, but arouse feelings of (both legitimate and illicit) intimacy and proximity. Living nature appears to offer itself up for consumption and seems no more dangerous than the hair Marion collects for her small hairpiece: the material may feel “almost alive” when touched, but its liveliness is so gentle and unchallenging that she leaves it unattended on her dressing table where “it slowly [untwists] itself... moving softly as a secret” (167; 169).

This living component of nature remains neither soft nor secret, however, but quickly evades human control, particularly in the case of Goulet, whose interaction with the hair involves a kind of desecration of a natural material that is intractably linked to the dead. Just as the harvested hair evokes the memory of the living women, so the hair he gathers from morgues, graves and prisons contains the memory of the person from whom it is clipped. Although Goulet’s hair jewellery business is based precisely on this assumption, his violation of the material works to turn the personal evocations of the dead against him. As he gleefully crafts memorial jewellery “fash-

ioned from the hair of donkeys, or from the locks of hale peasant girls who are presumably alive and well and milking cows in Sweden”, Goulet manipulates the natural material, the dead and his customers in synchrony, but in his guilty imagination, only the hair is powerful enough to revenge the desecration (85):

I imagined all this hair in its true state—not primped and curled, scented and pinned, but natural, as if it had just been cut. One could bury a man in it; one could fill a room floor to ceiling. I pictured it jamming doors shut, suffocating the inhabitants, pressing against the windows like mementoes in some giant locket. (117)

While in one sense, this aggressive substance punishes Goulet for his irreverence toward the dead, there is an uncanny weirdness about the animated hair that is not associated directly with the deceased. Gitter points out that Victorians conceived of hair as autonomously powerful, “in itself vital, independent, energetic”, a belief to which Goulet subscribes: “hair is a curious material [he tells the reader]. Although very slender, a single strand is immensely strong; it is not alive, yet it grows, and after death it is said to continue sprouting as if independent of the life of its host” (Gitter 941; *Transformation* 272). Curious and immensely strong, alive and independent, this material possesses a power that exceeds the human traces it contains: it has its own energy quite separate from the grower who acts merely as the host of an independent parasitical agent.

The agency possessed by the hair need not necessarily threaten the human characters; indeed, there is a vast difference between Goulet’s imagined victimisation by the hair and the soft liveliness that Marion perceives in her skein of combings. The vengeful quality of the hair is a corollary of Goulet’s manipulation of the material; rather than being merely “alive”, the hair becomes agitated as a result of his tamper-

ing with it. Here, as in Patrick's sun-fire and Clark's discussion of acclimatisation, the attempt to manipulate or control nature results in something that is quite the opposite; Clark's historical example of feral nature and Chidgey's fictional ones all suggest that ferality increases where ordering and improvement have been most rigorous and that the various processes of control engaged in by modernity exacerbate the latent agency of the nature (Clark, "Wild Life" 140). Whether these control measures involved the museumification and artistic production engaged in by Chidgey's characters or the ecological manipulation discussed in Clark's essay, the result is a great degree of threat from previously inconsequential entities, a threat which stems from the fact that the material has been altered and corrupted, and is no longer in its original state.

If ferality increases in tandem with manipulation, as Clark argues, this threat becomes greatly magnified within the context of the natureculture hybrid where nature is modified, held down and mixed with other components to the point that it becomes practically unrecognisable. Chidgey's hybrid entities are "disturbingly lively" entities that harbour a mutated, monstrous variety of nature which becomes more and more threatening as it is transformed ("Cyborg Manifesto" 10 – 11). Patrick has fearful visions of animated manuscripts which are far more menacing in his consciousness than the animals from whom the skin was originally stripped:

He wondered what would happen if every one was unclasped and left to revert to its animal form. He imagined painted goats springing from the shelves; rustling, reconstituted sheep wandering the manuscripts room; deer and calves and squirrels and hares filling the museum corridors. (209)

The intricate hair-sculpture that Goulet creates for Marion—the transformation alluded to in the novel's title—inspires a similar level of alarm in its intended owner:

Marion stared. The transformation was enormous, far bigger than her own head, a mass of twists and loops, thick ropes of hair, curls and braids and smooth scrolls, all spangled with diamond pins. She had ordered a much smaller piece, barely more than a curled fringe, but the structure she saw now—for there was an aspect of architecture about it—was a full wig....

There was a smooth area at each side, sweeping upward from the temples, as glossy and as gently curved as a pair of wings. Above these, the curls began, small and tight at the brow, growing larger and more elaborate as they ascended, then diminishing again to loose spirals at the very top. Diamond pins glistened at their core, droplets of dew caught in strange flowers. (325).

Although Marion admires the transformation as a work of art, her reluctant appreciation rapidly gives way to aversion: the hair she provided for her small, discreet hair-piece has, through Goulet's intervention, burgeoned into a structure that bears no resemblance to the "natural" transformation she originally requested. While this structure evokes nature metaphors within her mind—the curved wings of a bird, dew and flowers—these images are as uncanny and weird as Patrick's painted undead animals: the flowers are "strange", the presence of wings inappropriate in the context of the wig. This is an entity that may be natural in as much as it is formed of real hair, but it is a piece of nature gone wrong, one that Marion finds "grotesque... as she [imagines] it on her head, protruding from her skull like a tumour" (326). Just as tumours can develop as a result of healthy cells' contact with carcinogenic stimuli, the natural, healthy strands of hair are transformed through their contact with Goulet into a tumescent mass that indeed threatens Marion's life, given that her rejection of the hair-piece is the antecedent for the wigmaker's violence toward her.

In material terms, of course, the hair, the wigs and the manuscripts all remain immobile and do not at any point become literally recalcitrant or threatening in the manner of the meteorological elements. Their destabilising capacity is not exercised in a direct physical sense, but exists as a result of their status as “peculiar boundary creatures” which defy modernity’s systems of categorisation (Haraway “The Actors are Cyborg” 21 – 22). Like Frankenstein’s monster, these quasi-natural creatures destabilise their creators’ worlds by their very existence, challenging their emotional control and psychological stability with continual reminders of their potentially vengeful independence. If the hair in *The Transformation* functions as a kind of proxy-ghost—an emissary of the dead—as I argue, a similar haunting function is performed by the other various modified body parts which appear in *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation* and which repeatedly threaten the characters with reanimation. Goulet, for example, decorates his studio with stuffed birds that are

so lifelike that I can imagine them reanimated, plucking strands of hair from my workbench for their nests, and when first I positioned them I found myself starting each morning when I unlocked the door, and raising my hands to shield my face from their outstretched wings and claws. (200 – 201)

In rational terms, the stuffed birds pose no threat to Goulet; the feral exercises its power only in the instant at which Goulet opens his door, in the uncanny seconds before his reasoned mind takes control. This subliminal, instinctive fear of dead nature reappears in Adelina Flood’s apprehension of her husband’s snail-shell collection: “the house is so full of them that sometimes... at night, when I hear the fig tree rustling outside, or the movement of the waves, I think all the tree-snails are coming back to reclaim their shells” (190). Simultaneously natural material and cultural display, the shell-less snails and aggressive birds inflict destruction at a much more inva-

sive level than the meteorological elements, disturbing the epistemic foundations upon which modernity's material structures are built. In each of these encounters with the feral hybrid, the Enlightenment principle of rationality hangs in the balance, most precariously in the case of Goulet, whose madness increases in tandem with his obsessive manipulation of nature. As he gives in to his twisted desires, Goulet kidnaps and murders his way to psychological instability, a trajectory which culminates in his disturbing creation of the monster transformation and his destruction of the plaster effigy of Marion. He is mastered by a feral natural material so powerful that it exudes its destabilising influence without actually having to do anything at all.

Although the feral elements may cast a long, disturbing shadow over contemporary society, the insidious assault on the part of the feral hybrid object is, therefore, even more vicious. Embedded within the very fabric of human consumables, feral nature invades the novels' most cultured spaces—the suburban family home, the carefully controlled museum vault and the artist's workshop. If, as Clark argues, ferality is ubiquitous within the chaotic risk-prone world, Chidgey demonstrates its omnipresence beyond the ecological context that Clark discusses. Engaging in a kind of reverse acclimatisation, she imports the feral creature out of Clark's "wild" antipodean bush settings and introduces it into the controlled spaces of the Western-style metropolis where it wreaks a different kind of environmental catastrophe from the one discussed by Clark. This is a threat that extends beyond feral introduced species—the rabbit, the possum, the cane toad and so on—and one whose impact has more day-to-day relevance for contemporary urban-dwellers who retain the option of completely ignoring feral nature's destruction of native flora should they choose to do so. Chidgey's characters do not possess this option. Threatened from outside by meteorological catastrophes and from within their own homes by a vast army of semi-transformed nature, the

characters confront a natural force that cannot be pushed to the edges of human habitation. This nature gets under the skin of culture, occupies the characters' heads, gets tangled in their hair and pervades their lives with its power.

The aggressive ferality of modified nature is disturbingly pertinent to New Zealand, a nation that Clark sees as one of the most rapidly and thoroughly transformed environments on earth ("Shaky Islands" 8). Although the processes of colonisation have irrevocably altered the landscape and ecology of New Zealand,⁷ and have in progressive terms been "successful" in establishing human culture, Chidgey's ubiquitous feral problematises the effectiveness of settlement, implicitly suggesting that colonial culture's determined effort to control the wild paradoxically produces the uncontrollable, recalcitrant creatures populate her fiction. As *Golden Deeds* comes to a close, Patrick confronts what he perceives to be modernity's inability to control the world, the desperate inadequacy of its scientific, rational tools which fail to stop nature from consuming his childhood home, fail to locate Laura's body and fail, ultimately, to create the environment of mastery that Newton and Bacon, Descartes and Linnaeus, Cook and Ford each in their own way sought. Cleaning out his mother's property after her death, he discovers in her garden shed a huge Meccano ship that is composed of rational modernity's mechanical and scientific achievements:

Many standard parts had been used to build the ship—the common strips and girders that came in every box—but as Patrick looked more closely, he picked out all sorts of complex, advanced components.... There were pulley wheels and crank handles, propeller blades and sprocket chains, compression springs, tension springs, hinges, grilles. There were lamp holders, wiper arms, pawls, trunnions. There were bell cranks and pinions, wire hooks and flywheels and worm wheels and healds. No instructions had been followed. It was a ship

made of smaller ships, of motor cars, carousels, aeroplanes, clocks, cranes, looms, ferris wheels, searchlights, swing saws, windmills, bridges, light-houses. It was made of everything Patrick had once wanted.

It was unseaworthy, of course; it was full of holes. (264 – 65).

The unseaworthy nature of the ship suggests more than the mere limitations of modern technology; the model ship, crafted by an old woman in England, comes to function as a symbol of the culture which first departed from the Old World en route to the South Pacific. As a reminder of Cook's ark of modernity, the hole-ridden ship displays in a literal sense the porous nature of the transplanted culture and of its assumed ability to tame, civilise, improve and perfect the environment it discovered. Chidgey suggests that humans' cultural quest for perfection and their aggressive transformation of nature results in a situation where they themselves are transformed into some version of the figures that Patrick envisions aboard the Meccano ship in a dream, figures whose "bodies [are] Meccano too, [who aren't] people at all, just segments of metal bolted together to resemble human beings" (267).

While this interpretation of the Meccano ship may uncover a textual strand with which to bind the novel to its author's national heritage, any reading that prioritises settler cultural history as Chidgey's central concern is surely misguided, for her project is not to interrogate New Zealand modernity, but to problematise human modernity in its totality. Chidgey's privileged representation of nature—the recalcitrant feral that pervades her second and third novels—is not bound to a specific locale or nation state and, indeed, not even to a particular historical period. From nineteenth-century North America to the globalised world of the late twentieth century, feral nature reigns supreme, troubling the characters' lives and disturbing modernity's tidy epistemological divisions. Like Latour and Haraway, Chidgey complicates the hu-

man-nature relationship by breaking the boundaries between nature and culture, bringing the wild into the intimate association of humans and creating a textual space where the two parties interact, shape and modify one another in an atmosphere of continual conflict. Applying a distinctly social ecological stance that includes humans as victims of environmental degradation, Chidgey also offers a reconceptualisation of modernity's human-nature dichotomy by bringing the feral into the kind of collective that Latour proposes in his *Politics of Nature*. The natural world in *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation* does not require the condescending protection of humans: as in Latour's collective, the urban feral is a "full-fledged actor... [an] active agent whose potential is still unknown" (*Politics* 81 – 82). Intransigent and refractory, but also vital and animated, this living, breathing nature simultaneously rocks the boat of modernity and calls for a new ecology that might consider the autonomy of nature in its imaginings of an environmental future for the globe.

Conclusion

Environmentalism, in the deepest sense, is about more than wild, indigenous things defended. It is about the elemental union of self and other species and the land itself. (Geoff Park, *Nga Uruora* 21)

Catherine Chidgey's fiction contains very few glimpses of the variety of nature that has historically dominated New Zealand literature. Replacing craggy mountains with Meccano models, deserted beaches with kitchen benches and wind-whipped tussock with tangled hair, she constructs textual worlds that neglect New Zealand's iconic natural vistas in favour of thoroughly domesticated environments. Readers like Philip Temple who approach contemporary New Zealand literature searching for portrayals of pristine wilderness will almost always leave the reading experience feeling disappointed, for this literature appears to feel no compunction in ignoring those areas typically defined as "natural". However, with the application of an ecocritical reading lens, it is possible to locate—indeed, impossible to ignore—the pervasive presence of nature within the fictional urban environment. As I have demonstrated in my reading of *In a Fishbone Church*, *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*, urban ecocriticism unearths from within the contemporary New Zealand novel a myriad of feral natural entities that stimulate a reconfigured understanding not only of nature itself, but also of the parameters of the human-nature relationship within modern metropolitan space.

Although this feral incarnation of nature is ubiquitous within Chidgey's second and third novels, it appears only momentarily within her first novel. *In a Fishbone Church* functions as a testing ground within which the author and her characters tentatively encounter the dynamic nature that will seethe throughout *Golden*

Deeds and *The Transformation*. Of the various representations of nature within Chidgey's fiction, the natural world of *In a Fishbone Church* most closely corresponds to stereotypical portrayals of "New Zealand nature"; although the vast majority of the novel is centred within domestic space, the characters occasionally journey into the sublime non-urban environments that dominate colonial poetry, cultural nationalist literature and contemporary promotional images of New Zealand. It is here—at the lake, on the farm, in the bush and the mountains—that the characters encounter living nature. While Chidgey may cast sublime nature as an antidote to her characters' everyday cultural existences in a manner that is reminiscent of her literary predecessors' portrayals of nature, this does not suggest that her romanticised natural world may be aligned with theirs in any complete way; on the contrary, I suggest in Chapter Two that her sublime is the binary opposite of the cultural nationalists'—nurturing and maternal, instead of punishing and hostile. What remains constant between the two portrayals of sublime nature is the centrality of the human: whether nature is sought for nurturance or punishment, the human characters interact with it on their own terms, seeking out pristine settings to fulfil their own agendas. The implication of this portrayal is that humans retain control of the human-nature interaction; nature is something which may be accessed and then left behind, something separate from the human. It is not until the liberated rainbow trout appears on the final page of the novel that Chidgey gestures toward a resistant, autonomous nature, one that exists and lives independently of any human agenda.

In her first novel, then, Chidgey mobilises the two conflicting forms of nature that come to pervade *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*. On the one hand, nature is something that modernity ostensibly controls and holds separate from culture, but on the other hand, nature is a self-governing and free entity. If the free trout is the

privileged representation of nature in the first novel, as I have argued, Chidgey's subsequent two novels interrogate the implications of humanity's coexistence with this kind of self-governing nature. While it may be possible to romanticise "free" nature when it remains in its place beyond human habitation, this romanticisation becomes difficult within the boundaries of the city, a space that is established via the control and eradication of nature: when agentive, liberated nature invades human-dominated space, autonomy becomes rebellion, freedom becomes sedition. In situating rebellious nature within the apparently controlled environment of the city, Chidgey examines the complications and clashes that occur when the two contradictory impulses of control and rebellion come into contact with one another. I have examined each of these impulses in turn. In Chapter Three I discussed the ways in which humanity controls and transforms nature in the service of various cultural agendas, and I argued that *The Transformation's* portrayals of industrialism, colonialism and capitalism represent different flavours of the modern urge to master the natural world. I suggested that this mode of nature utility might be contrasted with the more holistic and spiritually informed utilisation of nature taking place in the production of the medieval devotional artworks in *Golden Deeds*. Although modernity claims a certain mastery over nature through the processes of transformation, this sense of control is challenged by the presence of a violent feral nature which continues to reside both within the urban environments created by colonialism and within the commodities produced by industrialism and capitalism. As I have shown in Chapter Four, this feral nature not only inflicts material destruction via the meteorological elements, but also exerts a powerful psychological destabilisation over modernity in the form of the natureculture hybrid monsters that inhabit Chidgey's second and third novels.

Chidgey's fiction thus engages in a dramatic reconceptualisation of modernity's nature and culture ontological demarcations. Instead of conceiving of nature and culture as polar opposites, Chidgey brings the two into closer and closer proximity with one another, creating an environment in which they become increasingly difficult to disentangle and distinguish from one another. In the first novel, as in much of New Zealand's historic literature, contact between humans and dynamic nature occurs only when the characters occasionally venture out into unpopulated, "natural" environments. In *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*, Chidgey resituates dynamic nature in the urban setting and in the place of the isolated sporadic encounter with nature, contact with the wild becomes a daily possibility. The conflict is intensified still further when the two are brought together in the single natureculture article: once they combine at the level of the individual entity, the conflict between nature and culture becomes a continuous, ongoing process. Thus, as I have shown in Chapter Four, hybrid entities like the wigs and the manuscripts incessantly oscillate back and forth between modernity's nature and culture poles; they are simultaneously the epitome of artistic culture and perhaps the crudest possible kind of natural material—the severed body part. I suggested that these hybrid entities represent the ultimate challenge to modernity: because they are not assignable to any one category, hybrids destabilise the foundational episteme of modernity, and with it, its entire conceptual structure.

In progressing from the sublime to the rebellious, Chidgey introduces to the New Zealand literary realm a variety of nature that subverts and destabilises both historical and contemporary idealisations of New Zealand's natural world. Instead of portraying nature as passive, beautiful and 100% pure, Chidgey's fiction reveals a natural world that is aggressively active, frequently ugly and almost always impure in that it is transformed and inseparable from its cultural cohabitants. This portrayal of

nature is a significant departure from the approaches of Chidgey's literary predecessors and the scholars critiquing them, most of whom remain largely preoccupied with assessing the sublime natural vistas that dominate both cultural nationalist and colonial New Zealand literature. Instead of utilising nature as a screen for human concerns, Chidgey introduces a kind of nature that is significant in its own right, a nature that demands a new mode of literary critique that will consider the significance of the natural world beyond what it illuminates about colonisation, settlement, identity, masculinity, postcolonialism or any other of the diverse human cultural concerns which have been projected onto nature by generations of New Zealand writers and literary scholars. Ecocriticism exposes an uncharted terrain within New Zealand literary discourse, a vast critical landscape that invites the exploration of a new series of questions in the study of New Zealand literature. For example, rather than considering whether or not New Zealanders have a footing on the earth, as Curnow did, an ecocritical scholar would also consider how that stance (or lack thereof) might affect the earth. How might a more nature-centred perspective alter the reading of colonial and cultural nationalist literature? How would an environmentally informed analysis of New Zealand literature reflect upon the fraught issue of identity and upon the more general condition of being human in New Zealand? In a country famous for its natural scenery, are writers other than Chidgey exhibiting in their fiction an awareness of modernity's irreversible degradation of nature? If not, why not? And if so, how and when does this awareness begin to appear in their poetry, novels, short stories and plays?

Although the answers to these questions are beyond the scope of my current project, I have attempted to provide in this thesis a theoretical and methodological foundation from which they might be addressed in the future. In demonstrating an

ecocritical method for the reading of New Zealand literature, this project has, in effect, bypassed the most logical area of investigation for an ecocritical scholar: ecocritics in most countries have generally begun their undertaking by reading nature-writing, but I have progressed immediately to analysing urban fiction, a domain that remains marginalised even within well-developed ecocritical circles. As such, the area of New Zealand nature-writing remains open for investigation and would certainly yield new perspectives on historical portrayals of nature by some of the country's most famous writers. Such a study would also fall more neatly within the conventional borders of ecocriticism than mine does; the hybrid feral that I uncover in Chidgey's novels offers a challenge to ecocritical theory because it subverts the default definition of nature employed within ecocriticism and New Zealand literature alike. The prominent deep ecological influences within ecocriticism tend to lead critics back to some version or other of the sublime and hence to a reinscription of modernity's dualistic conceptions of nature and culture; because the main body of ecocritical practitioners equate nature to wilderness, they, like Temple, would be inclined to overlook the natural entities I have identified in Chidgey's novels. The urban feral overflows the parameters of conventional ecocriticism and resists any tidy concluding rhapsodies about the value and beauty of the natural world: I have uncovered within Chidgey's fiction a kind of nature that is valuable and significant, certainly, but its value is not determinable in terms of its usefulness to any human agenda. On the contrary, the urban feral exists independently of human culture, all the while coexisting alongside humans in the metropolitan spaces constructed by modernity.

Independent from yet integrated with human culture, Chidgey's urban feral nature signals the need for an expanded theory of the human-nature relationship in the contemporary urban setting, one which recognises, as Geoff Park does, that "envi-

ronmentalism, in the deepest sense, is about more than wild, indigenous things defended. It is about the elemental union of self and other species and the land itself” (Park, *Nga Uruora* 21). Chidgey’s fictional re-casting of nature emerges from within a cultural context where New Zealand scholars like Park are rethinking modernity’s relationship with the natural world and recognising the presence of nature within spaces that have been imperatively marked by human presence. However, while Chidgey may locate nature within human space, she, unlike Park, seems little concerned with any elemental union between the self and the land. Whereas he sets out to map the local ecological history of a particular country, her increasingly globalised themes and settings could be viewed to represent what Evans reads as the loss of “connection between an individual writing sensibility and a comprehensive, meaningful localised world” (“Baby Factory” 53). The fact that Chidgey’s novels are not strewn with New Zealand references (natural or otherwise) does not necessarily mean, though, that she is uninterested in locale. Depicting the effects of nature at the most intimate level—in the suburban community and the individual family—Chidgey’s novels are indeed fascinated with what happens in small environments when nature and culture collide. In environmental terms, her lack of investment in the New Zealand local may be viewed as a strength rather than a weakness because it suggests the pervasiveness of the environmental crisis: her rebellious nature cannot be consigned to any particular geographic location, but rather shows that a globalised nature threatens modernity’s globalised culture.

Park’s expanded theory of environmentalism does not take into account this kind of all-pervasive aggression on the part of nature; in seeking a relationship between “self and other species and the land itself” he hopes for “a union”, a term that could hardly be applied to the human-nature relationship in Chidgey’s globalised lo-

cal settings. Whereas Park uncovers the memory of a reciprocal, land-based partnership between Maori and nature—an interaction that is rooted in an ongoing relationship with a particular locale—Chidgey reveals an urban human-nature relationship that is traumatic, tense and aggressive. In her novels, she may acknowledge the agency and dynamism of nature, but she, like Latour, associates this capacity with unpredictability and violence: instead of being a peaceful union, the human-nature collective becomes a kind of vicious, explosive marriage in which one partner retaliates against centuries of abuse inflicted upon it by the other. The question that arises from my analysis of Chidgey's work is whether reconciliation between nature and modernity is possible or whether the acknowledgment of nature within the globalised urban setting must always be attended by conflict. In a space that is established and maintained through the destruction of nature, can urban-based contemporary humans possibly find a union with nature? How might this union be conceived and what conceptual and behavioural modifications would it require from the human partner in the relationship? Theorising a peaceful urban human-nature relationship has not been my project in this thesis, but it is an issue that would appear to be especially pressing in developed countries like New Zealand where the vast majority of people live in urban centres. These questions require further consideration not only by humanities researchers like myself, but also by ecologists and environmental planners who could offer some practical perspectives as to how urban humans might reconcile their tense relationship with the natural world.

Chidgey's fiction suggests that one place to begin in healing the relationship between nature and modernity is to recognise the omnipresence of nature in the urban context, to respect its power and to appreciate the vital sustenance it provides to a culture that is so determined to neglect it on a daily basis. Literary scholars' reiteration

of the nature-less quality of New Zealand literature and urban culture defaces this awareness and re-inscribes humanity's alienation from the natural world. In his documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore suggests that this alienation is a global phenomenon that has fuelled the "collision between our civilisation and the earth". New Zealand barely features in Gore's account of global environmental degradation: positioned at the bottom right hand corner of his map, New Zealand is obscured by his back for most of the documentary, apparently exempt from any responsibility for the fuel consumption, species extinction and world poverty which he lays at the door of the northern superpowers. In situating nature within vastly divergent suburban locales, Chidgey puts New Zealand back on the map of the environmental crisis without ever having to explicitly mention the environmental predicament or New Zealand's role within it. Her universal, all-pervasive feral nature invites New Zealand readers to recognise the presence of nature in the city, to remember how it can unexpectedly resurface in the most unimaginably destructive forms, and to recognise how they are implicated in that destruction as consumers and modifiers of nature. The rebellious urban feral suggests that New Zealanders' sentimental affinity with the sublime is an inadequate response to the natural world. It is not enough to imagine the purity of our deep green islands anchored in the middle of the South Pacific, because, in environmental terms, no country is an island.

Notes

Introduction

¹ This scene is taken from a New Zealand Tourism Board publication which is devoted to describing the 100% Pure New Zealand marketing campaign.

² Brendon cites Frank Cook's perception of New Zealand from W. Fraser Rae's 1891 book *The Business of Travel*.

³ See Elizabeth Knox's *The Vintner's Luck*, Rachel King's *The Sound of Butterflies* and Karl Shuker's *The Method Actors*.

⁴ For a colonial portrayal of nature as foe, see Edward Tregear's haunting "Te Whetu Plains", originally composed during the early 1870s under the name "Midnight" when Tregear was working as a surveyor in the Coromandel and Taranaki (Howe 4; 12). For a particularly suffocating portrayal of New Zealand as paradise, see Alfred Domett's "Mount Tarawera". For interpretations of colonial poetry see Mac Jackson who utilises Northrope Frye's theorisation of Canadian literature to identify the presence of "a garrison mentality" within which settlers see themselves battling a hostile environment (406). See also Chapter Two, Section Thirteen ("The Colonial Sublime") and Section Fourteen ("The Scenic Wonderlands") of Patrick Evans's forthcoming book *The Long Forgetting* for a discussion of the significance of the sublimated landscape.

⁵ John Newton's foundational essay "The South Island Myth" concisely encapsulates this argument. I discuss the cultural nationalists' vision of nature more fully in Chapter Two of this thesis.

⁶ I am not the first person to undertake an ecocritical reading of New Zealand literature. See also Jocelyn Rennie's unpublished Masters' thesis "Writing the Environment" in which the author offers an environmentally centred survey of an extremely broad group of New Zealand texts, ranging from ship journal entries dated as early as 1770 to legislative documents of the late twentieth century. Rennie's thesis aims to assess how writers (primarily European ones) "write the environment", that is, how they have represented nature over the last two centuries. Due to the breadth of the thesis, Rennie cannot enter into a detailed analysis of her texts, but she does offer a brief ecocritical analysis of three novels: Janet Frame's *The Carpathians*, Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* and Patricia Grace's *Potiki*. In this sense, Rennie's work precedes mine, although it is worth noting that she implicitly engages with a definition of nature that is akin to Temple's, choosing to cast "the environment" as "native forest" (14). The equating of "nature" with "wilderness" or native flora is one of the perceptions that I write against in this thesis.

⁷ This statistic is taken from Statistics New Zealand's 2006 New Zealand Year Book (87). See page 88 for a table providing detailed figures on the urban drift from 1881 (when 40% of New Zealanders lived in urban centres) until 2001 (when the percentage had increased to 85.7%). Statistics New Zealand bases their analysis on figures drawn from census data, suggesting that urban-dwellers became the majority as early as 1916. See also <http://www.stats.govt.nz/urban-rural-profiles/historical-context/default.htm> for a concise overview of the trend toward urbanism in New Zealand.

Chapter One

¹ See for example, José Rabasa's "Allegories of the Atlas" which examines the philosophic and cultural implications of Mercator's *Atlas*; and Bernhard Klein's *Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland*, which traces the conceptual shift occurring in Europe as a result of modern map-making, and argues that the map "replaces a natural world beyond our physical control with the promise of mental order" (3). For an overview of his argument, see especially his introduction.

² As examples of competing systems of nature, Mary Louise Pratt cites Michel Adanson's *Familles des Plantes* (1763) and George-Louis Leclerc Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, a forty-four volume encyclopaedia that aimed to document the entire natural world. The first volume was published in 1749.

³ Plumwood lists what she sees to be the key elements in the dualistic structure of Western thought. The following binaries are included in her list:

Culture	/	Nature
Reason	/	Nature
Male	/	Female
Mind	/	Body (nature)
Master	/	Slave
Rationality	/	Animality (nature)
Universal	/	Particular
Human	/	Nature
Civilised	/	Primitive
Subject	/	Object

Self / Other

According to Plumwood, these dichotomies permeate Western cultures, forming a fault line that runs through the entire conceptual structure of modernity. The human/nature dualism, she argues, may be understood most completely when it is viewed as part of the set (*Feminism* 42 – 43).

⁴ In his emphasis on detached empiricism, Linnaeus exhibits the ethics of detachment adopted by the contemporary scientific community. Keith Thomas argues that this investigative approach represented a contrast to the “man-centred” view of the natural world that had prevailed prior to the eighteenth-century, when animals and plants were considered worthy of attention only if they were useful to humans in some way (for food, aesthetic merit and so on) (66).

⁵ Harriet Ritvo shows that newly discovered species were not only sketched and observed, but were also physically affected by the natural history project. Linnaeus’s disciples and subsequent generations of naturalists felt no qualms in killing their discoveries with a view to taking them back to the shores of Europe for scientific investigation or display. Charles Darwin, for example, wrote enthusiastically of a platypus-hunting expedition he attended; Ritvo notes that stuffed platypuses were amongst the most frequently displayed exotic animals in European museums (4 – 5). Often the killing of exotic animals also fulfilled a practical, non-scientific function: as Ritvo shows in her citation of Banks’ *Endeavour Journal*, one of the first European observations about kangaroos was catalogued by Banks and Cook in 1770, when they discovered that the kangaroo made “excellent food” (Ritvo 93 – 94).

⁶ Pratt points out that although the interests of commerce and science were not officially connected to one another, scientific and explorative ventures like Cook's were secretly instructed to look out for commercial opportunities. In her view, "that the orders were there, yet were secret, suggests the ideological dialectic between scientific and commercial enterprises. On the one hand, commerce was understood as at odds with the disinterestedness of science. On the other, the two were believed to mirror and legitimate each other's interests" (34).

⁷ Cook recounts in his journal the details of this first landing of Europeans on New Zealand soil: "*Monday, 9th [1769]*—Gentle breeze and Clear Weather.... I went ashore with a Party of men in the Pinnace and yawl accompanied by Mr Banks and Dr Solander.... We had not sooner left [the boat] than 4 men came out of the woods on the other side of the River, and would certainly have cut her off had not the People in the Pinnace discover'd them and called to her to drop down the Stream, which they did, being closely pursued by the Indians. The coxswain of the Pinnace, who had charge of the Boats, seeing this, fir'd 2 Musquets over their Heads; the first made them stop and Look round them, but the 2nd they took no notice of; upon which a third was fir'd and kill'd one of them upon the Spot just as he was going to dart a spear at the Boat.... In the morning, seeing a number of the Natives at the same place where we saw them last night, I went on shore with the Boats, mann'd and Arm'd, and landed on the opposite side of the river. Mr Banks, Dr Solander and myself only landed at first, and went to the side of the river, the natives being got together on the opposite side. We called to them in the George's Island Language, but they answer'd us by flourishing their weapons over their heads and dancing, as we supposed, the War Dance" (33 – 34).

⁸ See Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* for an extended study of the contrasts and interconnections between country and city; he argues that the perception of the two as fundamentally different modes of living reaches back to classical times.

⁹ William Cronon's 1995 essay "The Trouble With Wilderness" is both widely cited and intensively criticised on account of its overtly social constructivist stance. Cronon divisively suggests that while humans have not invented wild nature in the material sense, their perception of "wilderness" is a cultural invention that emerges in tandem with urbanisation and nineteenth-century tourism (70; 75; 77 – 78). His work has been vehemently opposed by environmental scientists who feel that he minimises the urgency of environmental preservation by suggesting that wilderness and endangered nature do not exist beyond humans' perceptions of it. See for example Bill Willers's "The Trouble With Cronon" and James D. Proctor's "The Social Construction of Nature" for a concise account of the two opposing arguments on nature's social component.

¹⁰ Obviously, environmental issues such as desertification, global warming and unpredictable weather also affect substantial portions of humanity as well as threatening "the natural world" as understood by the environmental movement.

¹¹ Some of the more famous early environmental publications include: Donella Meadows' 1972 book *Limits to Growth*, which used a quantitative computer model to predict population levels, food per capita, pollution and so on over the next century; Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which discussed the effects of pesticides on food chains; and Edward Goldsmith's *Blueprint for Survival* (1972), which criticised industrial society and speculated on alternative organic modes of

living. A number of international conferences were also held to discuss environmental issues during the early 1970s, including one in Stockholm in 1972, organised by the United Nations and attended by representatives of 119 nations (Irwin 36).

¹² In simultaneously acknowledging the need for sustainability and retaining modernity's urge for development, Irwin argues that the discourse of sustainable development "offers a note of radicalism... but without challenging the centrality of existing institutions" (46). The best known definition of sustainable development exemplifies the conflicted urges present in this mainstream solution to the environmental quandary: the Brundtland Report of 1987 defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (cited Irwin 39). For discussions of sustainable development see "Sustainability as Social Change" in Alan Irwin's book *The Sociology of the Environment*, and Eric Pawson's "Sustainability and the Management of the Environment", the latter of which specifically examines the implications of sustainable development for New Zealand in the late twentieth century.

¹³ Sabloff argues that this perception requires correcting: rather than analysing and seeking environmental solutions from a default scientific perspective, she suggests that environmental analysts might consider nature from perspectives outside of the Western habitus, and in doing so, "integrate more ambiguity, disorder and restraint into conceptions of order and systematicity" (157). This, she argues, would not only challenge Western systems of thought, but would also inspire a toleration of ambiguity which "might lead to the final realisation and acceptance that as human beings our understanding of order is forever limited, forcing us as a society to acknowledge and live with this limitation" (158).

¹⁴ The term “deep ecology” was coined by Arne Naess in his 1973 article “The Shallow and the Deep: Long-Range Ecology Movements”. In this article, Naess articulated his vision for a deeper, more holistic approach to nature, arguing that this could only be achieved through a more sensitive openness to oneself and the nonhuman environment. Other significant contributions to the philosophy of deep ecology include Bill Devall and George Sessions’ 1985 book *Deep Ecology* and a subsequent publication by Naess in 1989 entitled *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*.

¹⁵ Moreover, while deep ecologists’ spiritually inflected understanding of wilderness may be valuable on a personal level, these reflections not only marginalise the less aesthetically pleasing aspects of the environment, but also work to avoid discussion of how the dissolution of the nature-culture boundary is supposed to practically affect a new environmental ethic at the political level. In other words, deep ecology’s emphasis on individualised modification of human-nature relations results in a depoliticised strategy for change that underestimates the environmental quagmire by evading the economic and political forces that have shaped the environmental crisis in a far more significant way than individual people have (Plumwood, *Feminism* 13).

¹⁶ Critics of this more social approach to ecology frequently argue that insisting on the inseparability between ecological and social issues amounts to a “camouflaging red with green” (Ross 27; Bookchin 87).

¹⁷ Both of these writers discuss the role of the environmental justice movement in the United States, a grass-roots movement comprised largely of urban poor and minority communities. Bennett notes that it was only after the movement

developed that mainstream environmentalism began to seriously consider the biohazards affecting urbanites, devoting resources to inner-city problems like housing, health care and workplace safety (“Manufacturing the Ghetto” 169). Following Ross, Bennett suggests that the environmental justice movement has significantly changed the face of green politics, extending the base of the white dominated environmental movement (“Manufacturing the Ghetto” 169). The environmental involvement of non-white people has also served to subvert the racist notion that non-whites are unconcerned or unaware of environmental issues (see Bennett “Manufacturing the Ghetto” 172 – 176).

¹⁸ See “The Trouble With Wilderness”, in which Cronon argues that nature in the city is as other to humans as isolated nature is: “in the wilderness, we need to reminder that the tree has its own reasons for being, quite apart from us.... The tree in the garden is in reality no less other, no less worthy of our wonder and respect.... Both trees stand apart from us; both share our common world” (88). Tallmadge similarly suggests that a scaling-down of perspective reveals wild nature in city gardens, in parks, in icy gutters, in a spoonful of garden soil (63). See his pages 62 – 64. Both Sabloff and Wolch examine the co-existence of humans and animals in urban space; in their studies, the animal functions as a model of the wildness or alterity that Cronon and Tallmadge discuss in reference to the organic aspects of nature. Sabloff assesses the various ways in which Canadian urban dwellers interact with animals as pet, livestock and fellow citizen; she suggests that the relationship between humans and animals may work to reorder conceptions of nature and culture, self and other. See her “Introduction” and pages 171 – 77. Similarly, in her essay “Zoöpolis”, Wolch argues that while humans and animals exist within close confines, “animals have their own realities, their own worldviews—in short, they are *subjects*,

not objects” (25). She envisions a revised version of the city, a zoöpolis, in which animal agency is taken into account. See especially her pages 29 – 34. David Shumway’s article “Nature in the Apartment” explores human-animal relations in a similar vein, suggesting that “relations of humans and animals should be understood as a central instance of the inseparability of nature and culture” (258).

¹⁹ Swyngedouw draws on Neil Smith’s *Uneven Development* and Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* in theorising the increased interactions between nature and culture within the context of modernity.

²⁰ One need look only as far as the title of his essay to confirm this indebtedness: “The City as Hybrid: On Nature, Society and Cyborg Urbanization” draws on two of Latour and Haraway’s trademark figures, the hybrid and the cyborg.

²¹ Haraway’s discussions of nature-culture boundary crossing are, perhaps, the most well-known of her prolific writing. For an overview of her approach, see *How Like a Leaf* 104 – 06 and 140 ff.; and “The Actors are Cyborg” 21 – 22. More extended discussions of various nature-culture embodiments can be found in her *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* and *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the Reinvention of Nature*.

²² See for example, William Rueckert who coined the term “ecocriticism” in his 1978 essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”. Seven years later Frederick O. Waage edited *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources*, which summarised the course descriptions offered by various academics who were committed to fostering “a greater presence of environmental concern and awareness in literary disciplines” (viii).

²³ Dana Phillips argues that ecocritics' continuing assumption of ontological difference between nature and culture is an outcome of their emphasis on "real" nature and their scepticism toward theory. Phillips observes an affinity toward "the actual universe of rocks, trees and rivers" on the part of ecocritics, and an aversion toward the abstract world of "signs" and representation that circulates within literary theoretical discussions. He observes in Buell, for example, a repeated call for a return to realism, both by nature-writers and by the critics interested in assessing that literature (586). In Phillips' view, adopting this antitheoretical polemic results less in "a blessedly untheoretical discourse [than it does in] a discourse propped up here and there by some distinctly shaky theory" (579). Presumably a more vigorous application of theory within the discourse is necessary to correct what Phillips views as ecocriticism's somewhat sentimentalised identification with nature, an identification which inadvertently repeats the problematic tenets of Romanticism discussed above. See for example his statement on Buell's belief that "to think ecologically or environmentally is to recover the habits of thought of some era in the past before the disruption of the human and natural worlds by a heedless agriculture, a runaway industrialism, the loss of faith, the discovery of relativity, the embrace of modernism, and the advent of the postmodern" (598).

²⁴ Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* offers an example of how an ecocritical reading of such works might look. Marx's study is primarily interested in the American pastoral, a focus that leads him to consider *The Great Gatsby* from a kind of proto-ecocritical perspective; he suggests that Fitzgerald's narrator, Nick Carraway, must review the European dream of America as "the fresh, green breast of the new world", and reconcile the conflicting images of America as "garden" and "hideous wilderness" (356 – 357). See pages 356 – 365.

²⁵ See Rosendale's essay "In Search of Left Ecology's Usable Past" for American urban fiction; Alison Byerly's "Rivers, Journeys and the Construction of Place" for nineteenth-century English literature; James Kirwan's "Vicarious Edification: Radcliffe and the Sublime" for a discussion of the Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*; Helen Feder's "Ecocriticism, New Historicism and the Romantic Apostrophe" for a discussion of the relationship between ecocriticism and new historicism; the entire final section of the book "Rethinking Representation and the Sublime" for three different perspectives on the importance of the sublime for ecocriticism; and Louis H. Palmer III's essay "Articulating the Cyborg" for a poststructuralist application of Donna Haraway's theories to William Faulkner's "The Bear".

²⁶ Palmer's "Articulating the Cyborg" proposes a similar model of ontologically impurity in rethinking the nature-culture dualism that he sees as rampant within ecocriticism. For another example of environmentally inflected literary analysis that seeks to destabilise Enlightenment ontologies, see Philip Armstrong's "Leviathan is a Skein of Networks" in which the author draws on Latourian theory in his discussion of *Moby Dick*. See especially pages 1041 – 1042 and 1047 – 1048.

Chapter Two

¹ The transgenerational plot structure is used throughout the 1980s and 1990s as a means of critiquing the provincial past. See for example Fiona Farrell's *Six Clever Girls Who Became Women* in which the lives of a group of mid-1990s women are juxtaposed to their high school days in Oamaru; and Renée's *Does This Make*

Sense to You?, which contrasts provincial Auckland and Napier with mid-1990s Dunedin.

² For an overview of the events of the Stanley Graham case, see Tony Williams's *The Bad, The Very Bad and the Ugly*, pages 114 – 121.

³ See also Newton's "Colonialism Above the Snowline", which discusses the anti-conquest of mountaineering in New Zealand, and Chapter Two, Section Thirteen of Evan's forthcoming publication *The Long Forgetting*.

⁴ Because his taxonomic pursuits rotate around fossils, Clifford does not directly inflict any violence upon his collectables. Historical naturalists, however, were intimately acquainted with bloodshed, given that the most prominent method employed in collecting nature was to shoot and stuff specimens. While the effects of natural history may be regarded as "anti-conquest" within the human cultural domain, its effects on the natural world correspond to those of a conventional "conquest", one that involves killing and subjugation.

⁵ David Mackay explores this idea in his article "Myth, Science and Experience in the South Pacific", outlining the documenting ambitions of the many European nature-enthusiasts that journeyed through the South Pacific. He argues that the detailed classification of Pacific nature (and peoples) dispelled myths about the region, as well as aiding Europeans' understanding of the environment, resources, history and culture (106). This endeavour placed the Pacific within the empiric grid of Western understanding and opened its advantages to Europeans, thus quelling some of the insecurity felt by the colonisers.

⁶ Clifford's narcissistic attitude toward his diaries is apparent in the following quote:

Pulse 84, he would write in his diary, which he kept more as a record for future generations than for his own reference. He knew how facts could be buried over the years, how layers of interpretation could settle and harden. He fully expected the diaries to be published one day, and more than once in recent years he urged Gene to ‘look after them’ when he was gone. (123)

⁷ Gene’s resentment is inseparable from the guilt that his father imposes upon him for leaving Christchurch to work in Wellington and failing to visit on a regular basis. After his father dies, Gene has repeated visions of his father who, he thinks, is upset that he has forgotten the time they shared together hunting in Canterbury: “‘you think I’ve forgotten all that but I haven’t. I haven’t....I would have had more time. If you’d have let me go to university, I would have had more time’. Gene’s voice is rising. ‘I would have had a degree by then, and a job with the paper. They wanted me, they said I had talent. Age sixteen, and they told me I was journalist material. And you said houses are what we need, not stories about houses’” (28).

⁸ Michele Leggott argues that Robyn Hyde depicts nature in a similar manner in her poetry. Dismissed by her male literary contemporaries in the 1930s (the Caxton poets in particular), Hyde produced writing that portrayed nature as nurturing and feminine, as opposed to punishing and hostile. See for example, Leggott’s discussion of “The Dusky Hills” and “Zoological” in which Hyde describes the hills as being “upthrust like goddess-breasts” (277 – 78). Leggott reads nature in these poems as a source of sustenance and as a “reminder of gynocentric affinities with... place” (278).

⁹ It is not until parts of her second novel and, most significantly, her third, set in nineteenth-century Tampa, that she seriously begins to make use of his additional advice to “write what you don’t know” (9).

¹⁰ The autobiographical component of the characters was discussed in the course of personal communication with Chidgey, who confirmed that Bridget and Christina were “about fifty percent” autobiographical.

¹¹ Chidgey is not alone in her idealisation of the Woman Alone artist figure. In an interview about her recently published book, *The Sound of Butterflies*, Rachel King projects an imagined futuristic image of herself that closely corresponds to Chidgey’s Eileen: “I’d like to be known as a ‘lady novelist’. I can imagine myself at 75 swanning around with long grey hair writing novels” (Shepherd 109).

¹² See for example, John Turnbull’s article in which he remembers catching the same rainbow trout six times before it learned to “dive for cover” instead of biting (21).

Chapter Three

¹ Chidgey’s unfreezing of nature in the fictional realm echoes Annabelle Sabloff’s reflections on the presence of wild nature within the factual, real-world city of Toronto. She sees nonhuman living beings woven into the fabric of the city: “Cities teem with animal and vegetable presence. Rivers, creeks, and major bird migratory flyways trace their paths below ground and overhead. Wildflowers flourish between long-disused railway tracks [and so on]” (5). Sabloff’s observation suggests that humans need only slightly change their perspective in order to recognise the presence of nature within urban space; in her second and third novels, Chidgey adopts this altered perspective.

² Buller here exhibits the colonial assumption that Europe’s colonies are “empty”, the silence indicative of a dearth of life. In “Our Terra Nullius”, Geoff Park

subverts this perception, revealing signs of human habitation within the New Zealand forest: fragments of worked stone and transported shells and, most significantly, old garden groves where Maori cultivated crops. Park observes in these groves the presence of a kahikatea tree “its boughs laden with ferns and lilies and orchids” and notes that this foliage would have attracted large numbers of kereru and tui (54). In imagining “what an auspicious and birdy place this amalgam of grave and forest would have once been”, Park transforms the silent forest into a space populated by both humans and animals (55).

³ For a particularly vigorous example of this mode of critique see “The Greater Common Good”, Arundhati Roy’s polemical account of India’s Sardar Sarovar dam project in the Narmada Valley. Roy argues that the financial interests of the World Bank and the dam industry have fuelled the building of dams that have displaced fifty million people in India over the last fifty years. The work of Vandana Shiva, likewise, has addressed in multiple contexts the effects of global agribusiness on third world peoples. See her “How to End Poverty: Making Poverty History and the History of Poverty” for a recent example.

⁴ The separation between workers and the products of their work within a capitalist economy was solidified on American soil a decade or so after the action in *The Transformation* when Henry Ford institutionalised assembly line production in his Chicago automobile factories. The assembly line enabled the simultaneous assembly of multiple vehicles by workers engaging in repetitive micro-tasks that each contributed to the production of automobiles. Ford’s method revolutionised industrialism by generating reasonably priced commodities on an unprecedented level: by 1928 over half of the 30 million cars worldwide were made by the Ford Motor Company (Nevins 319). Ford’s model of production epitomises the alienation

which Marx critiques: not only does the assembly line sever workers from any relationship with the product they create, but the profits of their labour ultimately benefit Ford rather than themselves.

Fordist production occurs, of course, primarily within the mechanical realm, disconnected from the “nature factories” that I discuss here. However, it is worth noting that the inspiration for Ford’s assembly line factories originally came from his observation of a factory processing nature: in his autobiography, he recounts his visit to a Chicago slaughterhouse where he observed meat-processors each performing an individual task as the animals’ bodies passed them on a moving chain (Patterson 72). Patterson cites evidence from Henry Ford’s biography *My Life and Work* in which he states: “I believe [my assembly line] was the first moving line ever installed. The idea [of the assembly line] came in a general way from the overhead trolley that the Chicago packers use in dressing beef” (81). See also Carol Adams’ *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, to which Patterson is indebted in the associations he makes between Ford and meat production (52).

⁵ Contemporary consumers’ alienated position in relation to transformed nature is perhaps most evident in the meat industry that originally inspired Ford’s idea for assembly line production. Adrian Franklin points out that advertising and packaging of meat in Western countries works to obfuscate the ugly realities of the meat industry: instead of acknowledging the crowded, automated warehouse living conditions of stock, advertisers prefer to present idyllic images of farmyards or animated, happy animals that discourage consumers from associating their vacuum sealed meat with the living creature from which it was cut (128 – 131).

⁶ I cite Adam Smith’s economic philosophy following Marx, who drew on Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* in forming his own economic theories, and who cited

passages from this publication in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, an unfinished work which includes three manuscripts devoted to criticising the bourgeois political economy and economic system. The first of the manuscripts, which I cite from in this thesis, is a compilation of excerpts drawn from bourgeois economists and is interspersed with Marx's own observations and commentary. Although Smith advocated the capitalist division of labour (which Marx went on to oppose), he nevertheless acknowledged the potential harm caused to labourers whose jobs became narrower as the capitalist system took hold.

⁷ The Western world continues to play the dual role of exploiter and saviour in relation to Cuba. Lydia Chavez notes that twenty-first century Cuba “exists in a sort of never-never land between communism and capitalism”: the collapse of Cuba's Soviet patronage during the 1990s triggered an economic crisis that saw Castro relax many of his policies to allow Cubans to receive foreign currency (1; 7). With the long-standing American embargo partially lifted, twenty-first century Cubans exist in limbo, receiving insubstantial wages in pesos and supplementing their incomes with goods sold for greenbacks on the black market. Meanwhile, industries like cigar manufacturing remain controlled by the communist government, which seems content to engage in the capitalist market on its own account, even as it prohibits the people from doing the same: in 2003 the Cuba government earned \$240 million from cigar exports, but cigar workers received less than twenty dollars per month (Mohor 158).

⁸ Foner's citations of Don Cipriano del Mazo and the decree issued by him addressing the issue of cigar workshop reading are translations of José Antonio Portuondo's citation of them in his book *La Aurora y los Comienzo de la Prensa y de la Organizacion en Cuba*, La Habana, 1961, pp 39 – 42.

⁹ See my Chapter One, note 2 for a full table of the various dualisms discussed by Plumwood, or refer to *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Chapter Two:

“Dualism: the Logic of Colonisation”.

¹⁰ Chidgey’s source for *The Splendor of Eve* is *The Glory of Woman; or Love, Marriage and Maternity*, by Monfort B. Allen and Amelia C. McGregor, published in 1896. I am grateful to Annie Potts for loaning me her copy of an analogous volume, Mary R. Melendy’s *The Ideal Woman* first published in 1901. Like Goulet’s text, *The Ideal Woman* is a quasi-medical publication which provides information for women on “delicate” topics such as sex, menstruation and puberty (complete with diagrams of the reproductive organs and developing foetuses), as well as advice on courtship, marriage and motherhood.

¹¹ Similarly, John Berger traces what he considers to be a more holistic and honest pre-modern relationship between humans and animals. He argues that the culture of capitalism has resulted in an abyss dividing humans from animals: for him the pre-modern, specifically rural interaction with the animal (be it companionship or slaughter) is more authentic than the contemporary urban practices of meat consumption and pet keeping. This pre-industrial relationship is irredeemable for Berger; indeed, he argues the pre-modern cultural within which animals were “subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed” always contains an element of the real that is unobtainable in modernity’s largely urban culture (504, italics in original). Steve Baker objects to many of Berger’s points, in particular, “the inauthenticity of the urban experience, and the worrying implication that the urban pet is somehow inherently less worthy than the wild animal or the field animal” (14).

¹² Chidgey's own craft has certainly been influenced by such concerns, the Florida setting of *The Transformation* being the result of an award for writing-related travel to the United States. This award was gifted to Chidgey by British author Nick Hornby who received the E.M Forster Award administered by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The award stipulates that the US\$15,000 must be used in writing-related travel in the U.S. This information was obtained in the course of personal communication with Chidgey, who confirmed that award was the sole reason for her writing a novel set in the United States.

¹³ For a summary of Snyder's philosophic approach see Jack Turner's "Gary Snyder and the Practice of the Wild" or refer to Snyder's collection of essays *The Practice of the Wild* for a more extended account.

¹⁴ In his social history of medieval England, P.J.P Goldberg shows that the country included some 9500 parishes, each with its own church, as early as 1250 (52). Although congregation sizes varied considerably, the mere presence of such churches indicates the importance of religion in human communities during this period. Administering various sacraments, including baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial, as well as conducting daily worship, the parish church was a cultural hub. During the later medieval period, guilds of people with a common purpose or sense of identity formed to provide social and welfare functions to their members; these were often, though not always, focused on the parish, and most claimed allegiance to a particular saint or image of God. For example, Goldberg discusses the Norwich guild of barbers who claimed a common devotion to St John the Baptist, the patron saint of tailors and barbers (59). While the parish was an important organising social structure—one that was centred on a particular church—it also facilitated the

development of vocational organisations like the Norwich guild of barbers. See Goldberg's chapters 4 and 5 for a detailed discussion of the medieval church and the formation of guilds.

Chapter Four

¹ Foucault famously cites Borges' quotation from a "certain Chinese encyclopaedia" that categorises animals as: "(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pot, (n) that from a long way off look like flies". Foucault reflects upon how this system of classification shatters Enlightenment thought and the means by which modern humans make sense of their world. This is a taxonomy which breaks "up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things" (xv).

² Henry Holt and Company republished *Golden Deeds* under this title in 2000.

³ See <http://www.csiro.au/communication/rabbits/qa2.htm> for further information. This archival webpage of the Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation provides information to farmers and pet owners on the Australia and New Zealand Rabbit Calicivirus Disease Program, a biological eradication initiative aimed at controlling the rabbit populations in both countries. Young rabbits between five and nine weeks are often insusceptible to the virus, but the disease has been shown to be effective in eradicating up to ninety-five percent of adult rabbit populations, typically affecting death within twenty to forty hours of

contact. While advocates argue that this kind of solution attends to the consequences of historically irresponsible environmental activity, such solutions are themselves genealogically related to the original act of introduction in that they are conceived in the same scientific, rationalist tradition. If the colonial introduction of life has resulted in unforeseen environmental consequences, it is not inconceivable that the scientific execution of death may be attended by the same. Indeed, as Joan Druett shows in her book, *Exotic Intruders*, modernity's historical attempts to control rabbits have gone radically awry in New Zealand: mustelids were introduced as rabbit predators during the nineteenth century, but quickly became an environmental problem themselves. See her pages 167 – 175.

⁴ The most famous example of this incongruity between input and output is “the butterfly effect” theorised by Edward Lorenz, who suggested that a barely detectable initial action, such as the single flap of a butterfly's wings, has the potential to significantly alter weather patterns in another part of the world through a cumulative chain of events (Hawkins 2).

⁵ The visual depiction of the wig-block may be found on the page preceding *The Transformation's* frontispiece.

⁶ Similarly, in his essay “The Unconscious”, Freud suggests that compulsive behaviour is often a substitute for some other repressed anxiety, often of a sexual nature. For example, one of Freud's patients outwardly appears to be obsessed with his acne, but Freud reads this as a displaced sexual anxiety: “at first he worked at these blackheads remorselessly; and it gave him great satisfaction to squeeze them out, because, he said, something spurted out when he did so.... Pressing out the content of the blackheads is clearly to him a substitute for masturbation. The cavity

which then appears owing to his fault is the female genital, i.e. the fulfilment of the threat of castration (or the phantasy representing that threat) provoked by masturbation” (*On Metapsychology* 205).

⁷ See Geoff Park’s *Nga Uruora* for a detailed analysis of how settlers transformed the landscape and what was lost in the process.

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