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Healing words and the matter of our urban and rural moor

Abstract:

It may be that writing country can shift readers towards more positive relationships with the matter that surrounds and embeds them, if an awareness of the sentience of country increases the porosity of the bodies that ‘religiously’ read such topographies. Two productive revisions of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* differently offer this kind of reading. The Canadian moors of Anne Carson’s prose poem, ‘The Glass Essay’ speak with the powerfully communicative Yorkshire moors of *Wuthering Heights*, through the affect of the other-than-human on their protagonists. Such dialogues liberate an always-becoming eco-divine of generative change. Kathy Acker’s ‘Obsession’ starts a whole new conversation in her transposition of Brontë’s moor to the crush of New York dreamscapes. As I consider the tension and the synergies between Acker’s urban wilderness and Carson and Brontë’s rural commons, I am becoming aware of the ethical risk in privileging matter of different kinds. Is it possible to write to the pulsating moor of urban environments in ways that approach the eco-divine and can this equally move readers to new ways of nurturing country? I approach this question in my novel *The Dead Country* and consider it directly in my poem, ‘Pulse Sating’.

Biographical note

Susan Pyke teaches at the University of Melbourne, where she recently submitted her PhD in Creative Writing. Her scholarly work focuses on the interaction between literature and ecology and her poetry, short stories and essays have appeared in literary journals including *Descant*, *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* and *Overland*.

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The porous writing of country in the vicinity of Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

Emily Brontë's canonical yet disruptive *Wuthering Heights* is well known for its complex depiction of the love between dreamy volatile Cathy and the devoted ill-used Heathcliff (Brontë 1965 [1847]). Some readers add pompous Edgar to this mix to make a classic love triangle but to me the trajectories of desire depicted in this memorable nineteenth century novel go in much less fixed directions. The relations in Cathy's love have a rhythm that throbs with the feminist becoming-divine philosophised by Luce Irigaray (Irigaray 1996).¹ Cathy's attunement to the moor harmonises with this conceptualisation of an ever-evolving becoming-divine of continual growth and fulfillment. Cathy's love does not privilege the human above other living species and this collapses the inequitable and fixed hierarchies formed through theologies of human dominion marked as Father God.² Cathy's relationship with the moor gives readers the opportunity to differently think the places in which they are embedded. I describe this positive interaction between text, reader and country as the eco-divine, to support the movement of Irigaray's work towards alternative cultural symbolic orders. This eco-divine is activated when readers respond to a text's decentralisation of the human with a recognition that they, too, are out of fit with the containment of a fixed divine of judgment and dominance that puts man before all other beings. This discomfiture with human mastery lends itself to an inclusive mutual self which is, as Val Plumwood's eco-feminism describes it, a 'self' both of difference and of care beyond individuation (1993: 30, 196). The other is not integrated or assimilated, but shares a partial mutuality which works against assumptions of privilege.

The mutual self that emerges from the eco-divine relates specifically to artwork through active reading and can therefore be positioned with feminist theologian Heather Walton's idea of the 'extreme faith' that emerges from passionate 'religious' reading (40–50). Walton's exploration of devotional reading can be usefully applied to the posthuman textual decentralisations of the human.³ In Walton's personal reading and critical thinking, she adjusts terms associated with traditional Judeo-Christian thought, turning those tight-fitting terms 'religious' 'devotional' 'love' inside out, as a sheet might be remade with worn fabric that has much use left in it at the margins. In the passion of her writing and in the sense of her analysis, Walton shows the possibilities of reading affective texts as a 'divine encounter' that interferes with constrictive theologies and the hierarchical power embedded in these patterns of thought (2007: 3). In this context, a devotional reading of *Wuthering Heights* has the potential to move readers towards the multiplicities of an eco-divine and beyond the restrictive exclusivity of anthropocentricity and its requisite self-centred love.

Here I profess an 'extreme faith' in the eco-divine of *Wuthering Heights* and generalise my religious reading through two very different religious responses to the love Brontë depicts between Cathy, Heathcliff and the moor. The devotional poems of Anne Carson and Kathy Acker speak to the eco-divine because, like *Wuthering Heights*, they allow for cross-species relations that might release the bondage of human control. The visions in Anne Carson's 'The Glass Essay' (1995) and the nightmare of Kathy Acker's 'Obsession' (1992) accept and extend Brontë's suggestion of an exchange with country beyond the written word. Further, both

revisions are productive enough to startle, shift, and awaken their own religious readers to discern communications beyond human languages. There is no anthropomorphic ventriloquising of the utterances of country in Brontë's novel or in these two poems. Instead, more ethically, readers become aware of other-than-human communicative exchanges through the responses of the texts' protagonists. When religiously read together, the eco-divine in these three texts has the potential to 'shock' readers into knowing the world differently by depicting what has been felt through the skin all along.⁴

Brontë's critique of the masculine God in *Wuthering Heights* begins with her farcical depiction of the yeoman Joseph and his punitive King James sanctioned rants. This irony is doubled by a dream-scenario of dissent created through an interminable sermon of judgment (1965 [1847]: 65) However, it is Brontë's references to different possibilities for relations with country that point most effectively towards the disruptive eco-divine. These possibilities are not labored through detailed descriptions of resonating landscapes speaking in human tongues. Rather, most scenes in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* are set in kitchens, living rooms and bedchambers. Nonetheless the moor's powerful language is present, as Brontë scholar, Christopher Heywood puts it, as 'an underlay or carpet' (1992: 44, 47). The moor is always present, if not always centre scene and it influences Cathy's choices and emotions as its peat guides waterways, drains heavy rains, and offers nutrients to heath and grasses.

Brontë encourages readers to sense communications from the moor through its affect on Cathy. In her childhood, it is a 'chief amusement' of the unbiddable Cathy to 'run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day' with her beloved Heathcliff. She finds the rewards of this so great that consequent punishment is 'a mere thing to laugh at' (1965 [1847]: 87). Her mockery of the containment of her dysfunctional family home celebrates her connection with the moor.

As Cathy grows older she is torn between spending time coping with the variable tempers of Heathcliff and the moor or being held still in the life-sapping light of Edgar's stately Thrushcross Grange. Conflicted yet without choice, because her family circumstances demand she marry Edgar, she has a dream that runs through her mind 'like wine runs through water' (1965 [1847]: 120). The colour of her mind, she says, has been altered. This suggests something of a shift described by eco-educator Heesoon Bai where the 'habitual superimposition of the conceptual' is replaced with the other-than-human 'perceptual' (2009: 136). In this sensible state, Cathy finds heaven 'extremely miserable'. She is 'flung' back 'out into the middle of the heath' for her ingratitude and wakes, 'sobbing for joy' (1965 [1847]: 120).⁵ Cathy's dream allows her to depart from the deathly enclosure suggested by a gate-keeping heaven so she might find a more comfortable situation in the tactile welcome of the inclusive succor-giving heath. Her desire is so strong that after her death remains of her body and voice are seen and heard by others in the moor.

Later, set apart from the country that offers her life, as a result of the human choices she has made, laying in, confined by fever, nervous anxiety and pregnancy, Cathy rallies when presented with a 'golden crocus', the first flower after winter. This lush profusion of glowing yellow connects her to 'soft thaw winds, and warm sunshine,

and nearly melted snow', enabling her to move from the neutrality of her sickbed, and pursue a wish to live with the earth that she loves (1965 [1847]: 171) She opens herself and her windows to a life-snatching cold wind, and escapes the imprisonment of wifely expectations.

The way Cathy responds to the moor suggests the positive relations eco-philosopher Freya Mathews describes, that emerge when humans experience the surroundings they love through positive inaction, or attentive 'letting be' (2005: 9, 22). It takes time and sustained attention to 'let' country 'be' on its own terms but it is only through this dissolution of human containment that a new sense of mutuality is free to emerge (Bai 2009: 136). As anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose eloquently puts it, life is made possible when 'living things are connected with and amongst each other, and because they take care of each other' (1999a: 99). This emplaced mutuality is also approached by theologian Normal Wirzba, who makes much of human dependency on the other-than-human for survival, arguing an acknowledgement of human neediness is required to drive care for soil, air and water. This capacity and requirement for care is traceable in Cathy's responses, insofar as they are marked by celebration and offering, rather than dominion and mastery.

An exemplar of mutuality in emplacement is found in the connections described by many Indigenous communities of Australia and the Torres Straits islands. Rose speaks to these relationships through her involvement with some of these communities over the past three decades, celebrating a 'mutual intersubjectivity' between *all* that forms and populates the ground, water and air of the earth (1999b: 177). All active species. All inert materials. The eco-divine assembles with this sense of country because of the possibilities demonstrated in these relations. As Rose puts it, thinking country in this way has a 'great deal to say' about how other-than-human relations might develop in newly ethical ways (2012). I do not suggest that the specific relations that Indigenous Australian and Torres Straits peoples have with country are possible without the prerequisite ancestral connections and history of care that form this mutuality. Rather, my point is that the approaches to mutual intersubjectivity made by Brontë's Cathy, and the speakers in Carson and Acker's poems have potentiality because this sense of country is humanly possible. Their relinquishment of mastery is a step beyond the limiting sense of 'our' country ('our' place, 'our' home). Country is impossible to skive when humans are understood as *part of*, rather than *distinct from* other vitally interconnected companion species, equally dependent on the health of shared earth, water and air. While Brontë, Carson and Acker gesture towards the possibility of new relations to country, these relations will be as historically and culturally determined as the relations built between Indigenous peoples of Australia and the Torres Straits islands and other ancestral matter shared over millennia.

The context for understanding the possibilities of the eco-divine in the relationship between text and country also draws on Romanticism's recovery of the senses, systematically set aside over centuries of Western thought from Plato's desire to escape the cave of bodily desires to the Enlightenment's privileging of human 'reason'.⁶ Kate Rigby's description of Romantic topographies accepting the synergies between the written word and self-generative country (2004: 12) clears the way for me to see this dynamic of play between Brontë's text and Carson and Acker's

revisions. Both poems are shaped by their readings of *Wuthering Heights* and by their individual experiences of communications from country. Their vibrant intertextuality and emplacement illustrates Mathews' point that communicative exchange between the human and the other-than-human is most likely to occur through a process of invocation, or story-telling. Stories call 'psychic streaming' into being when and because each connection, or exchange, is 'uniquely referenced to the key significances' of specific lives (Mathews 2007). The eco-divine of 'The Glass Essay' and 'Obsession' builds on a doubling ec(h)o where both protagonists respond to their religious reading of *Wuthering Heights* through individual experiences they have had with country.

The shattering affect of 'The Glass Essay' through its mutuality with *Wuthering Heights*

The way readers can move towards generative human and other-than-human relations through text and country is stunningly demonstrated in Carson's response to Cathy's relations with the Yorkshire moor. The sentient Canadian moors in 'The Glass Essay' are cross-permeated with psychological shadows that emerge from the speaker's emplacement, which has been enhanced through her reading of *Wuthering Heights*. With Brontë, Carson accepts such a dialogue is a fragmented remnant of communications with significance that cannot be put into words. The 'graspable' is only part of the 'given', explains Rigby (2004: 13). Carson's speaker puts it this way, 'It is a two-way traffic, // the language of the unsaid' (1995: 24). The 'unsaid' infers the depth of that which cannot be articulated, when added to the mutuality present in the movement or 'traffic' enabled by such communications.

As with Brontë's Cathy, the 'graspable' of the unuttered affective communication of the moor in 'The Glass Essay' is shown through the feelings of Carson's protagonist. Like Cathy, she allows herself to be moved. Engaging with the moor in all weathers the speaker resists the enclosed patterns of her mother, who is bound to a problematic human-centred love that makes her laugh 'a strange laugh with ropes all over it' (Carson 1995: 36). She labels this bondage in a shout whispered over the phone to her women friends, 'YOU KNOW MEN' (1995: 37). Carson's visionary speaker brings these knotted restraints into focus as 'thorns' (1995: 37). Like her mother, and like the woman in her carefully meditated vision, 'Woman caught in a cage of thorns' (1995: 20) the speaker is enmeshed in the wreckage of a constrained relationship, finished through no choice of her own. Building on the relations sought by Cathy with the Yorkshire moors, Carson's speaker looks to country to free herself from the thorny enforcement of a hierarchy described in shorthand as 'MEN'. It is not just women who cannot move for fear of being hurt. Law, Carson's speaker's ex, suffers the blindness of mastery, and the same enclosure gags the speaker's father into a space beyond his senses. Heathcliff too, is also forced into acts of cruelty that keep him from the growth he desires through social limits that confine him to pain.

In close proximity to Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, 'The Glass Essay' suggests there are openings beyond 'MEN' offered up by country. The speaker goes 'out' to a harsh and frightening place 'paralyzed with ice' and this shifts her responses beyond

horizons that extend ‘as far as the eye can see’ (Carson 1995: 4). Over the course of the poem, Carson’s speaker becomes part of a seasonal shift as brutal as the shifts of a mad woman (angry woman) from depression to fury. She repeatedly walks to ‘the middle of the moor/where the ground goes down into a depression’ and it is here that the ice begins to ‘unclench. Black open water comes curdling up like anger’ (1995: 5). For much of this anguished poem the speaker seems unlikely to escape the black ‘swampy’ water of this ‘middle’, this ‘depression’ (1995: 21). Yet in the end, being with the moor produces a readiness for the melt, the rush, and it is this which allows her to heal. She waits for what will come, offering herself as part of an other-than-human pattern. ‘Crops of ice are changing to mud all around me’ (1995: 10). Her readiness to move, to shift, to ‘push on’ across the moor is enabled by her willingness to extricate herself from her ‘stale cage of sheets’; she will not lie in her mo(u)ning bed, choosing instead to take her grief and go ‘out in it’ (1995: 19). Like Cathy, Carson’s speaker enters the moor’s force with unspeaking faith and takes what her offering of self brings; a terrifying cure that opens her to a mutual self, ‘the body of us all’ (1995: 43). The empowerment of the Yorkshire moor, welcomed by Cathy, is present as Carson’s protagonist works through the two-way traffic of the cold and icy ‘black moor’ that lets her be. The moor lets her be and in this freedom she does not flounder nor does she sink, like Brontë’s masterful Lockwood. Instead, as a realised vision, she walks ‘out of the light’ in the spirit of the eco-divine (1995: 43). Like Cathy’s ghost on the moor, Carson’s speaker’s movement anticipates an other-than-human volition that can be sensed, if not put into words.

With Brontë’s Cathy, Carson’s speaker listens and responds in ways that assist a movement beyond Father God. This re-cognition of a sharable space beyond human skin has something of the matrixial borderspace described by psychoanalytic theorist, Bracha Ettinger. Ettinger argues co-affectivity is made possible through artworks which blur the ‘borderlines’ between the self and other humans, through the shared response. Humans are wired to respond together from their prenatal beginnings in a ‘sharable borderspace’ where the self is also part of the other (2006: 59–61, 165). Mother and child feel as one while also feeling as separate beings. In this ‘matrixial’ space, subjectivities are partial. Ettinger suggests that in moments of affect, caused through active reception of artworks, people can go ‘riding on the same mental strings’ created in the most formative stage of human life. This shared affect, brought about by partially shared subjectivities, bears some relation to the mutual intersubjectivity described by Rose, particularly if these borderlines are conceptually extended to the other-than-human. Eco-psychology would go one step further and link this to humans’ innate ‘capacity for participatory consciousness’ present in the sensibility of childhood, but lost to adulthood’s reason (Bai 2006: 146). If this is the case, humans working to retain or recover what they can of this consciousness through greater attentiveness may begin to understand it is not the rest of country that is dumb, but rather, it is humans who have been playing deaf. As eco-philosopher Bruce Foltz says, country ‘speaks to us, if we are able to listen, and if we are willing to set aside our preconceived notions of language’ (1995: 89). It is not possible to write ethically of these communications. They might be discernible but they are not heard as human language is heard. However, as Brontë and Carson demonstrate, writing of the affect of these communications is an effective way to signify what has

been communicated, if indirectly. The human-centred signifier is put in its decentralised place and this re-placement of affect orients readers towards the ever-evolving eco-divine.

This movement is found in the way the Canadian moors affect Carson's speaker. Like Cathy, she listens attentively, porously, for other-than-human utterances, allowing affected devoted readers to enter the constantly negotiated matrixial borderspace in a way that includes the other-than-human. Following Ettinger's argument, it is Brontë's artworking that liberates the speaker to go beyond the limits of Father God thinking, and this rupture occurs with and because of the intervention of country. Letting go of the self through the moor of Brontë's text, walking as country, offers Carson's speaker a profound and liberating cleansing. She walks on from fleshy material attachment in a fully embodied way and she is empowered to do this *only* at the point where she was 'not watching for it' (Carson 1996: 42). Once she relinquishes mastery, her self-exposure flays her containment open, just as Cathy moves closer to an eco-divine through her bodily desire for exposure to the elements. It is ironic, even counter-intuitive, to think reading texts such as *Wuthering Heights* can provide an escape from human-centred signification but it makes 'sense' when this matrixial response occurs with country that is actively emplacing the attentive reader. By describing country with and beyond Brontë's text in her devotional way, Carson doubles the readerly space for encountering the eco-divine. Her reading of Brontë's text shows the affect of the novel *and* of country on her speaker. The flesh-stripping wind allows Carson's protagonist to love in the context of extremity, echoing the love between Cathy and the moor. Carson's bare-boned speaker, in a body re-formed by the moor, walks from en'light'enment to seek an eco-divine in the darkness of possibilities beyond Father God (1996: 42).

Carson's re-cognition of shared space beyond the closure of a singleton's skin⁷ answers Brontë's challenge to listen attentively, porously, responsively, for the other-than-human utterance. Together these two texts invite devoted readers to be active in the constantly negotiated borderspace described by Ettinger. It is ruptures such as these that have the potential to create new relationships to country because they fundamentally question the logic active in anthropocentric thought. They work with the word to go beyond the word so they might be open to a mutual self beyond human conceptions.

The question of mutuality addressed to the urban moor of 'Obsession'

Carson's work with *Wuthering Heights* demonstrates how the eco-divine is generated through the reader, the more-than human, and the productive text, in a shared affect crucially distant from (if 'near' to) signification. This leads to a difficult question. How much does the 'nature' of country 'matter'? Joan Hendriks, a theologian and reconciliation-oriented elder has suggested a meditative mind open to the sound of wind in trees and the resistance in rocks is likely to experience a moment of encounter, of emergence, of intent, in moments of emplacement with the 'bush' (2010). Mark Tredinnick agrees. As he writes, in his beautiful landscape memoir,

Attachment grows if you abandon yourself, if you let a place in, and if you're lucky. It may happen fast if you are porous to places; it may never happen if you are impregnable to the world, and many of us are. But it is performed best, this practice, when it's an accident of one's being and staying somewhere, making some kind of a life and some kind of a living from the country (2009: 169).

The question I ask myself, long distanced from enjoying 'some kind of a living from the country' is whether emplacement is equally possible in the city, where the human-made dominates human senses.

Jane Bennett's work is useful here. Bennett shows how country is affected by 'entelechy', which she describes as a 'driving force' that gives all matter a 'self moving and self-altering power' (2010: 12, 71). Not only does this put human agency into perspective, it also suggests that if all matter is country that flows with and beyond human skin, then the potential for human emplacement should not differ if the country is rural or urban. It is not *what* country that matters, as much as the interactions *between* various interconnected components of country. Bennett's focus on materiality, and her ethic of not privileging complex organisms over less complex organisms, invites me to position Acker's urban country in the vicinity of the moors depicted by Carson and Brontë. There seems to be no reason why the communications of the moor experienced by Carson's speaker and Brontë's Cathy should not also be heard in a city that has much in it of New York.

Kathy Acker's 'Obsession' is as attentive to Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* as 'The Glass Essay' and while it is set in a very different kind of country than the unpopulated moors of Canada or Yorkshire, 'Obsession' shares important similarities with Carson's poem. Both use the narrative poem form to explore sado-masochistic themes, both are discomfited by the containment of the masculine, both share a willingness to tell the bitterness of conflicted truth, and both poems reach beyond signification to other-than-human communications.

There are also some crucial differences, particularly in the context of the more-than human. In the very beginning of 'Obsession', the mutual self is taken as a given. Acker's speaker is variously 'Heathcliff', 'Cathy', 'I' and 'Kathy' and these 'selves' are further fragmented by remnants in each voice that have something of 'Heathcliff' and/or 'Cathy' and/or 'Kathy' and/or 'I'. Acker creates a shared subjectivity but Carson's 'I' becomes 'we' only in the poem's moving denouement. Similarly, where it takes the full length of Carson's poem for her speaker to make her hard-earned departure from the harsh light that holds her captive through her flesh, Acker's speaker(s) begins with a celebration of darkness, gloating, 'I loved the night' (1992: line 6). Finally, in the beginning of Acker's poem a distanced Cathy explains her need to move 'out into tracks beyond', then flags the shift in temporality is required for 'the human world' to be 'only nature'. The physicality of the body binds the speaker(s) but there is a sense that his/her body is not the limit of the 'self' because human time is no longer privileged. 'Time began here, outside, where there were no humans' (1992: lines 15, 49). In creating this space outside human time, Acker, more boldly than Carson and Brontë, is offering readers the opportunity to become aware of the possibility of utterances outside the limits of human signification. The speaker(s)

searches for other-than-human languages, looking past the ‘human world that seemed nonhuman’ (1992: line 7). This porosity between the human and other-than-human can be seen in the urban moor’s ‘shrieking rain’ (1992: line 30) which seems to be both emitted from the speaker *and* from parts of country outside human control.

However, ‘Obsession’ departs from the generative eco-divine suggested in the works of Brontë and Carson in its absence of references to cyclic natality. There is no golden crocus or melting ice-mud in this poem. Rather, ‘The chill night howled through the dying branches and the dying cars started beeping’ (Acker 1992: line 154). In the urbanity of modern human constructions, death is final. Here Acker reinforces Plumwood’s point that when death has no ‘life affirming significance’, life also loses meaning. Humans are alienated, set apart from a ‘larger persisting order’ (Plumwood 1993: 102). In this vulnerable state Acker’s speaker(s) is struck by one-way traffic, ‘something that’s a combination of truck and tractor’, a threat connected to the urban as it zooms ‘away from the pier’ even while the dawn is ‘parallel’. The speaker(s) is immediately torn from this potential by five more ‘Monsters’ that ‘swerve’, ‘whizzing around and around’ at ‘breath-taking speeds, hurtling past each other.’ There is no escape, s/he is caught, unable to move. There is a shift only as s/he notes these human-made beings ‘are just like horses.’ The pause in the speaker(s)’s unrelenting commentary invites readers to connect the domination of non-human animals to the harm of harnessed fossil fuels. The speaker(s) makes sense of this in a taut, devastating and matter-of-fact tone. ‘*This is the realm of males*’ (1992: line 170). The speaker(s)’s response to this technological sublime⁸ has a vengeful watchful dissonance that reaches into Irigaray’s cry for a feminist response to a wrongly geared world. It is an encounter with country that involves nothing of care, and there is nothing of the other-than-human that allows the speaker(s) the potential to move.

Excluded, denied emplacement, and nightmarishly angry, Acker’s dreaming ‘I’ becomes a singular female; the human has entered the centre of the poem’s perspective. She dreamshifts to a pink-hued brothel and enters the province of female internalisation. ‘The cathouse in which I landed obviously catered to upper-crust clients. For there were deep pink velvet curtains and no other visible walls’ (1992: line 323).

The emancipation in this feline ‘escape’ is limited. There is no mutuality in being the caterer, any more than there is in being catered for. In this context, birth channel ‘deep pink’ is perverted, there is none of the mutuality Ettinger describes, the borderspace is denied matrixiality. The speaker’s wolf-like movement is slowed. She can no longer ‘lope down’ this ‘long and narrow hall’ because of ‘very high heeled shoes’ that accost her body like thorns. Her attempt at ‘escaping’ ends with human containment. ‘Already, hookers and thieves, we decided we could be murderers’ (1992: line 323). There is a ‘we’ here, made up of herded cats, but still, there is a regression to individuation. The speaker calls Heathcliff her brother and she does so in the knowledge that ‘to be other than Heathcliff is to be human’ (1992: line 45). In this newly contained state the speaker looks upon Heathcliff with the intent of Cain. The boundaries of the Father shape her desire.

Acker's poem is of the eco-divine insofar as it speaks with poetic force at the outer margins of the signifier, unbinding language, as Julia Kristeva would say (Kristeva 1980: 58–9). Her unbounded text gestures towards the other-than-human, and a 'body of us all' seems to be forming, but her speaker finishes in a less eco-divine space than the protagonists in Carson and Brontë's works. Acker's speaker ends focused on the human, despite various efforts to escape her human skin. She is caught in the loneliness of human desire. Where Cathy self-starves herself back into the moor, and Carson's speaker moves from the constraints of Law's love by leaving behind her fleshy self, Acker's speaker ends as a singleton, caught in the 'realm' of men (Carson's 'MEN'). In a bittersweet allusion to the dream where Brontë's Cathy rejected heaven, Acker's lonely 'I' dreams she 'was in Heaven. But I had no business being there so I ran back to Wuthering Heights (this place) (loneliness) (this state of human) (this impossibility named hell). I know that here is happiness' (Acker 1992: line 186). The speaker's scarifying 'happiness' reflects the hurt of Cathy's hellish heaven. There is no joyful sobbing return to the heath, nor is there an intimation of a shift toward the positive mutual intersubjectivity such as that approached by Carson's skinless speaker. Acker's speaker might share the desire for the connective flow felt by Cathy and Carson's protagonist, but the country that she lives with remains silent. If there is an 'all' it is one of bleakness and hurt. Acker's speaker(s) has begun to learn the languages of the non-human but progress is stymied when she becomes other than Heathcliff, only human.

All three of these artworks have an alert openness to the reaching out of country. Where Brontë's Cathy 'becomes' part of the 'moor' by orienting herself to death and Carson's speaker walks towards an 'all' that includes her differentiated self, the last sight we have of Acker's speaker is an 'I' trapped in a human-centred lonely self. She exists in a deathly non-communicative silence, outside the traffic of the country she inhabits. The medicinal Canadian moors evoked by Carson's speaker and the moody moor of Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* are not necessarily more benign than the dreaming cityscapes experienced by Acker's speaker(s) but they do seem to allow greater movement to the protagonists within them.

The attempt of Acker's speaker(s) to access the communications of the urban moor is not without productivity, however, despite the bleak alienation of the 'I' in the poem's close. There are times when s/he, with Carson's speaker and Brontë's Cathy, is *part of*, not *separate to* country, and these moments of attentiveness allow for the potential of future movement. I take heart from Foltz's thoughtful reminder. 'To save something is to let it be and remain what it is, to deliver it over to its own possibilities' (1995: 15). Shifting the focus away from human deliverance allows the country experienced by all of these protagonists to be revealed in other-than-human terms. Yet Acker's speaker stays bound through human time, a limit that forces her to 'run back' like the 'tractor-trucks' to the 'state of human'. The quiet attentiveness of letting be might only be accessed once she leaves that self behind for a different kind of saving time.

Writing towards growth in the gutters

My writing is, like the works discussed here, a product of the specificities of my life. It comes from all that I have read and lived. In a creative revision of Brontë's novel, my novel *The Dead Country* freely plays with the storyline and characters of *Wuthering Heights*. I join Carson and Acker and the rest of a large company of thieves in this process of adventurous robbery and redesign.⁹ The first narrator, the astute Bai Hua Chi, is based, inversely, on *Wuthering Heights*' obtuse Lockwood. Bai Hua is wholeheartedly urban, and initially out of place in the sentient silence she experiences when temporarily inhabiting rural Victoria.

She finds new ways to live outside her urban self, through alcohol-spiked conversations with Alan, a gentle rural worker and close neighbour. Alan tells his stories with a lack of manly judgment, unlike the perceptive but sharp-tongued Ellen/Nelly, the equivalent narrator in Brontë's novel. Bai Hua responds to Alan with alert attention and takes time to reflect on what she is told. When she returns to her home in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, Bai Hua relates to urban country differently. She is open to new forms of communication.

The traffic lights make the traffic go slow and boring but when the wind gets strong and mean, the long grass goes this way that way, no way can you know what happens next.

Her unplanned exchanges with rural country have altered her relationship to her more familiar urban surroundings. Exposure to different matter creates a different affect and at the same time echoes in urban communications that follow.

The way Bai Hua is affected by the urban moor through Alan's stories and the rural moor, is different to the experiences of Acker's speaker(s) who has no access to a storyteller with the humble grace of the deeply emplaced Alan or to country like Taylorston. This may be why Acker's speaker(s) is reduced to being 'only human' when confronted by the monstrosity of horsepower harnessed in the realm of the male, where Bai Hua welcomes communications from her city habitat. She has learned to hear communications from the rural moor¹⁰ and may well continue to seek the eco-divine in suburban Melbourne, using new patterns of attentiveness formed listening to both Alan's stories and communications from the country she has inhabited. She has been nurtured through the communications of the dirt and the trees in the backblocks of fictitious Taylorston as well as by the invocations of her friend.

At the same time, there are similarities between the urban Bai Hua and Acker's speaker. Time feels different to Bai Hua when she returns to suburban Melbourne.

Things go quick here, like cars going past my slow driving when I'm in the van coming back. Everything's quick, doing city time.

This different comprehension of time is perhaps the most critical change required if human responses to the other-than-human are to change. Acker's speaker has begun to learn the other-than-human languages and so it is quite possible she will regain her porosity should text and/or country intervene in ways that bring her back to her shared senses.

Another of my artworks, 'Pulse Sating', looks towards what a character like Bai Hua or Acker's speaker might find in this kind of attentive state. The lyrical component of this text was written after a moment of emergence following many walks along the same route to my work. The accompanying video was taken during another unexpected moment on the same path. These two particular mornings were of the sort described by Foltz, through the Heideggerian idea of an emergence or revealing, which only occurs through and because of a surrounding process of concealing (Foltz 1995: 106). The title and the beat that begin this video move to a hint of green so subtle it will only be visible to the most attentive. The words of the poem intervene, speaking of emplacement and porosity, as the hand-formed lines of concrete pass at hand height, inviting the brush of a finger, the eye of a camera, the lick of a word. The view cedes to brick, again shaped by hand, again placed by hand. Human works and words are always almost reverse-eclipsed by the immensity of the rising sun. In the final frame, a tender unfurling of green towards this eclipse of light co-exists with a faux-lantern and modern skyscraper in an odd meeting of the natural and technological sublime.

'Pulse Sating' treats the built environment with a reverence I generally reserve for country where human intervention is less in evidence. My upbringing and education has long privileged natural wilderness. Yet by designating rural areas as sacred, the risk is to render all other areas profane, encouraging harmful or inattentive treatment of the urban moor. There is no ethical justification for such divisions, as Bennett has made clear. Mathews writes to the same point, with her suggestion that once an urban space is loved and 'let be', it will 'change and grow ... from within the shell of that which already exists' (2005: 52). Mathews' vision is encouraging. Consecrating rather than cultivating gardens and repairing or replanting devastated land can transform anonymous, uncared-for space into sites with different possibilities. These exchanges will shape what follows. As Mathews says, 'meaning takes time to grow' (2005: 52). Such mutual productivity can only occur, however, by listening to the requirements communicated to us. Eco-divine texts are unlikely to cause such shifts on their own, but they may well help develop expressions of this extreme faith.

This reflection about my own work, which increasingly embraces both urban and rural country, does not, in any way, grant my writing the 'shocking' productivity found in the texts of Brontë, Carson and Acker. However, with the openness of Bai Hua and the determination of a gutter weed, my work is offered as another sentence in an increasingly present dialogue of artworking where protagonists let country be in ways that allow for communicative exchanges beyond the exclusive Word. The intertextual growth between the works of Brontë and those of Carson and Acker open one of many ways for writers and readers to re-approach country in ways oriented towards the eco-divine. The more readers and writers move the Word and the world towards a greater porous self, the more the world might, person by person, word by word, encounter by encounter, country by country, nurture localised healings and grow a more generative future.

Endnotes

1. Irigaray has shown her deep commitment to a hierological thinking that could almost be called theology, rather than theology in two particular works (1991, 1995).
2. There are, and always have been, many alternative readings of Judeo-Christian theology and the most congruent to my current thinking is the eco-theology of Norman Wirzba. I particularly like his reclamation of 'stewardship' from notions of dominion. This is a timely reminder of theological thought that goes back at least as far as St Francis of Assisi, where (all) humans are servants not masters of the other-than-human and the other-than-human is as much of God as the human (Wirzba 2003: 124).
3. I am indebted to Cary Wolfe's useful definition of posthuman as a way of thinking where the human is decentred in an effort to escape the boundaries created by humanism which thinks, first, through the human (2010: xv-xvii). Related and equally contested terms seeking to speak beyond human centrality include ecohuman, inhuman, more-than-human, non-human and other-than-human. I am not content with any of these terms and use whichever has the connotations that fit with the language I am using. While my intention is human decentralisation, all of these terms can be read as suggesting the superhuman. I look forward to the emergence of a more suitable neologism.
4. Feminist literary philosopher Hélène Cixous activates this term through Jacques Derrida's idea of productive writing that cuts or stabs (1990: 26). Elsewhere, again echoing her colleague Derrida, Cixous cites Franz Kafka's famous view that writing must smash into readers like an axe on ice (1993: 36).
5. This is a positive change. As David Abram points out, 'Our strictly human heavens and hells have only recently been abstracted from the sensuous world that surrounds us, from this other-than-human realm that abounds in its own winged intelligences and cloven hoofed powers' (1996: 15).
6. It is well worth remembering, with Linda Williams, that blanket descriptions such as 'Western Science' or 'Cartesian logic' suggest an unchanging and unchangeable monolith, when in fact, 'The boundaries between instrumentalist reason and empathetic feeling have historical flaws and fissures that are as much a foundation to our current relations with the non-human world as the narrative of the Enlightenment as the death of nature' (2008: 9).
7. I owe Marina Warner for this delightful term (2007: 378).
8. Peter Otto's perceptive context is most pertinent for this evolving term, first coined by Perry Miller and popularised by David Nye.
9. As Northrop Frye points out, such theft is a better as a productive act than as an imitation (1965: 98). My aim is to steal in good grace and refashion, rather than to reproduce.
10. Peter Khan's work describes how human experiences with rural country (or, more specifically, 'wilderness') creates more positive relations between humans and their urban environment (2009: 37-42). Similarly Robert Greenaway suggests taking people out to the wilderness for psychic healing can 'maintain, or integrate, wilderness learned modes of knowing' within urban cultures, although yoga and meditation are needed to defend that new way of knowing against the 'hardened, separate, well-defended' self (1995: 133).

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