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**"I've escaped not from life but
out into it":**

A contemporary literary approach to the human
presence into the natural landscape in Andrew
Greig's book *At the loch of the Green Corrie*
and his poetry collection *Getting Higher*.

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ABSTRACT

The present dissertation focuses on the works of the Scottish writer Andrew Greig, the novel *At the loch of the Green Corrie* (2011) and his poetry collection *Getting Higher* (2010), with the aim of better understanding his personal interpretation of the human presence into the natural landscape. To do so, an introduction on the author and on his works is given, together with the exploration of the intimate admiration for his friend and mentor – the Scottish poet Norman MacCaig. Through the pages of Greig's book *At the loch of the Green Corrie*, the expansion on their relationship gives light to their shared Scottish identity in the fast-changing environment of the Scottish Highlands, and to their personal bond with Scotland's natural landscape. Moreover, the present dissertation tries to give enough space to the central activity of fishing, in order to look at it from as many different angles as possible, while also meditating about the metaphorical standpoint that it assumes under the author's eyes. As a final act, the present analysis looks at Greig's works through the lens of Ecocriticism. Beginning from his memoir book and from its biographical considerations of the relationship between the human and the non-human, further considerations are made by looking at his mountain poems and at his philosophy of walking –a common act that finds its place in Greig's interpretation of human life on the Planet.

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INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation focuses on the relationship between the human presence and the non-human environment in Andrew Greig's works, specifically analysing his memoir book *At the loch of the Green Corrie* (2010) and his poetry collection *Getting Higher* (2011). The title quote itself – "*I've escaped not from life but out into it*" – aims to return the intention of the author to plunge himself into the outside world to be able to understand himself better and connect to the life around him in a new and deeper way.

The interest that gives life to this research comes from the ever-growing necessity of our contemporary society to locate and discuss the environmental issues and anxieties inside literary texts as well, giving birth to a new and fast-developing criticism, called Ecocriticism. From the second half of the twentieth century, and more specifically from the '70s onward, this new outlook on literature has produced a vast number of critical interpretations and literary products that place the problems of climate change and the issues concerning the presence of the human species on Earth at a central position.

The present research has wanted to focus on the Scottish author Andrew Greig and these works of his in order to advance the hypothesis that a good number of reflections can be found about this specific topic within his pages and their related critical writings. After a brief analysis of his

bibliography, these two books have been chosen for their relevant connection with the Scottish natural landscape and, more importantly, for their profound observations on nature and on the role of humans within the Earth's environment, at the purpose of deriving the most truthful interpretation of the author's position in this regard.

The research has been conducted first through a general introduction on the author and then by reading through the lines of his memoir book. In doing so, the mentor figure of Norman MacCaig is expanded, being the moving factor of the whole narrative and his poetry becoming an instrument for the analysis of the Highlands' landscape. Moreover, having received such an important role in the narrative of the book, the act of fishing has been thought to deserve its space in this dissertation as well, which has, therefore, tried to examine it under the circumstances of present time and afterwards, moving to its more metaphorical meaning also employed by the author.

With the support of Andrew Greig's mountain poems, as well as pertinent theory texts, critical essays and commentaries, interviews and a personal communication with the author, this dissertation tries to move toward a more ecocritical interpretation of his writings. Indeed, the last chapter tries to narrow down the connection between the human and the non-human; first, by a general overview of twentieth-century ecocritical theories, then by looking at the Scottish literary approach to the environmental discussion, and lastly, by analysing Greig's personal relationship with nature within his book and poetical production. At last, a final subchapter has been assigned to the connection with the general act of

walking, identifying it as an essential act for the author to connect to the real world and actively participate in it. Therefore, a hypothesis to the plausible influence of the American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau is advanced and some common traits are presented.

Eventually, the present research attempts to give space to the ecological thoughts that emerge from Greig's works, valorising their presence into his prose and poetry. At the same time, each of its chapters try to highlight nature's role related to human presence on Earth, not identifying it just as the background or scenery of an anthropocentric story, but as one of the protagonists of a much greater play.

CHAPTER 1

ON THE AUTHOR ANDREW GREIG

1.1 Biography

Born in Sterling in 1951, Andrew Greig spent his childhood in Bannockburn and his adolescence in the East Fife town of Anstruther, where he mainly focused on his love for music and played guitar. Apart from music, he focused on more literary subjects and was later educated at the faculty of Philosophy of the University of Edinburgh, city in which he lived for over twenty years. He is now a former Glasgow University Writing Fellow, Scottish Arts Council and Scottish/Canadian Exchange Fellow.

After a misunderstanding on the metaphorical writing of his poetry in *Men on Ice* (1977), he was invited by the mountaineer Malcolm Duff to join an expedition in the Himalayan peaks in the mid-eighties – an experience that allowed him to write more profoundly and personally about his presence in the mountains and, more in general, in the world's landscape as such.

An important event in Greig's life is his life-threatening illness that made him see life differently once cured and allowed him to give life to his later works.

Greig now shares his life between Edinburgh and the Orkney archipelago, where he started to spend his winters from around 1989 and where he also proposed to the woman who helped him and stayed by his side on those

difficult years – the novelist Lesley Glaister. They got married in Stromness in 2001.

Always divided between writing prose and poetry, he published many narrative books, memoirs, and poetry collections.

1.2 Bibliography

Andrew Greig's first success is to be found in *White boats* (1973) and on his poem sequence *Men on Ice* (1977). The experience in the Himalayan mountains gave him the chance to write about his expeditions and thoughts in *Surviving Passages* (1982), *Summit Fever* (1985), *A flame in your heart* (1986), *Kingdoms of Experience: Everest, the unclimbed ridge* (1986), and *The order of the day* (1990). Following the difficult illness, Greig started to turn his eye towards prose writing and published *Electric Brae: A Modern Romance* (1992), the poems of *Western Swing* (1994), the successful story of *The Return of John McNab* (1996), followed by *When they lay bare* (1999), and *That summer* (2000). A slight difference in tone is seen in the following poetry like *Into You* (2001), *Word Jig: New Fiction from Scotland* (2003), *In Another Light* (2004). From that moment on, he interchanged between prose and poetry, publishing his first poetry collection *This Life, This Life: Selected Poem 1970-2006* (2006), his book *Preferred Lies: A Journey to the Heart of Scottish Golf* (2006), the successful novel *Romanno Bridge* (2008) and the poetry

book *As though we were flying* (2011). At last, Greig published a memoir book entitled *At the Loch of the Green Corrie* (2010), followed by his poetry collection *Getting Higher: The complete Mountain Poems*, (2011), which will both be specific objects in the present investigation. Greig's bibliography ends at present with the latest publication of *Fair Helen*, in 2013.

As can be observed throughout the present list of publications, Greig's writings are various and they differ in style, form and contents. In the 21st chapter of *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Schoene, 2007), Simon Dentith clearly underlines the remarkable ability of the author to diverse his literary production, which remains, however, sustained by an overall thematic unity. Greig's intention and purpose can be synthesized in the chapter title itself, where "harnessing plurality" becomes the author's manner of collecting the variety of a culture and a generation in a process he names 'sampling':

"His sampling can be seen as a vital ingredient of his wider aesthetics, which seeks to include a variety of voices in a way that respects the history of his own particular origins and formative influences while also recognizing and celebrating the general cultural diversity of Scotland."

(Schoene, 2007, p. 185).

Given the large variety of Greig's texts and the self-given definition as a modernist writer, Simon Dentith gives us an additional interpretation on his poetic production:

“Greig appears as a modernist writer who positions himself within a given literary tradition while practicing a formally experimental and overtly intertextual mode of composition.”

(Schoene, 2007, p. 184),

particularly referring to his connection and references to the modernist poets T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, from whom he borrows multiple voices while blending them with the ones of contemporary popular culture.

Moreover, Greig’s way of writing and his use of the English language can be seen as various as his genre-facets. Even though his use of the Scot language is mild and never predominant in either his poetry or prose, “Greig takes advantage of the complexity of Scotland’s linguistic disposition to allow himself the different tastes of ‘whaup’ and ‘curlew’, referring to the same bird, but connoting wholly different social histories” (Schoene, 2007, p. 187).

Given some general details about Greig’s writings and aiming now at the contextualisation of the two books that are closely observed in the following chapters, a few lines are to be spent on their contents and form.

The first one to be taken into consideration is the book *At the Loch of the Green Corrie* (2010), which is seen by many as a sort of memoir and homage to Greig’s mentor, friend and father-figure Norman MacCaig. At the same time, it is a nonfictional account of Andrew Greig’s quest for the secluded and yet so meaningful Scottish lake of the “Green Corrie”. The journey is intertwined with Greig’s personal life experiences and his relationship with the people

surrounding him, especially the Scottish poet and his family and friends. The book leads to the expression of his thoughts on poetry, geology, land ownership and, above all, on love and friendship. Proceeding with its slow and soft pace, the book allows the reader to cast a glance into Greig's life as a man, a poet, a climber and a fisherman. His self-scrutiny leads him to set out on his quest for his own *loch*, while honouring MacCaig's request to fish, on his behalf, in his favourite place. Written a few years after his journey to MacCaig's lake, this book is an absorbing and touching act of tribute to MacCaig's life as well as his own, connected through the same burning passion and love for the Highlands' landscape.

Moreover, the analysis of the present dissertation is conducted through the lens of his latest poetry collection *Getting Higher: The Complete Mountain Poems* (2011). This collection assembles his lifetime's engagement with mountains, from the metaphorical experience of *Men on Ice* (1977), the personal experiences of *The Order of the Day* (1990), the poet's journey in *Western Swing* (1994), until his return back to Scotland of its last part – *Hills and High Waters, bringing it all back home* – where he also inserts the poem *The Loch of the Green Corrie*. As perfectly analysed by Roderick Watson in his second volume of *The literature of Scotland* (2006), "Greig's intention in this book was no less than to bring the Black Mountain poets to Glencoe in a conscious attempt to modernise the familiar signifiers of Scotland, placing them somewhere between Kathmandu and the Rest and Be Thankful, if not the kingdom of Fife and the kingdom of heaven" (Watson, 2006). In this way, Greig

brings the reader throughout his personal experiences in the Himalayan peaks, in the eastern deserted lands and back to the Scottish hills, managing to bestow his personal sense of being into nature upon the reader.

CHAPTER 2

ANDREW GREIG'S SCOTLAND THROUGH THE FIGURE OF NORMAN MAC CAIG

2.1 On Norman MacCaig

In order to contextualise the present chapter and justify the meaning that the life and example of this poet has given to Greig's development as a writer, it is first necessary to dedicate the poet Norman MacCaig a short introduction.

Norman Alexander MacCaig was born in Edinburgh in 1910. First educated at the Royal High School, he continued his career at the Edinburgh University, where he finished his honours degree in Classics in 1932. Married to Isabel Monro in 1940, the couple had two children. MacCaig worked as a schoolteacher from 1934 to 1967 and then he became schoolmaster until 1969. In 1967, he was also appointed to be Edinburgh University's first Writer in Residence and later he was nominated Reader in Poetry at the University of Stirling, receiving the Heinemann Award and becoming a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Norman MacCaig retired in 1978 and devoted his life almost entirely to writing poetry and to his family and friends until his death in 1996. Starting off with a New-Apocalyptic view and structured verses, his poems changed along the '60s, shifting to a lucid, freer verse, and to a poetry that became to him "a form of communication" that "teaches a man to do

more than observe merely factual errors and measurable truths. It trains him to have a shrewd nose for the fake, the inflated, the imprecise and the dishonest” (MacCaig, 1979, p. 89). In this way, MacCaig’s poetry is filled with a personal touch, whether he writes about people, animals, or places, both located in his native Edinburgh or in his beloved Assynt.

As a matter of fact, MacCaig is considered one of the major poets celebrating the landscape of the Western Highlands. While spending his summers in a small cottage in the area, MacCaig enjoyed his time fishing, relaxing, and walking long distances into the hills and mountains, leaving the task of writing his recollections and thoughts only when back in Edinburgh. He himself declared that “when I go up every summer to Lochinver, Assynt, for 10 weeks the stuff is there, hoist to venetian blinds and there it is. I never write a thing but I fatten my camel’s hump and feed on it all winter quite unconsciously. I never say there is a skinny rose we should make a nice skinny poem, but sitting here, years later maybe, that skinny rosebud will scratch my mind and demand an utterance, but not by conscious choice at all” (Alexander, 2010, 00:18:35). As Marjory McNeill wrote in her study on Norman MacCaig’s life and works, the poet’s ability was not just to see the Western Highlands “but to ‘see’ additional possibilities around them for fantasy, for the humanizing of nature” (McNeill, 1996, p.78), giving the place an interconnected relation to his life and personal experiences in it. More about his manner of writing is found in the conversation held with Marco Fazzini, in which MacCaig declares that “it starts with a blank piece of paper,

a blank mind, and then into my mind comes a memory of a place, of a person, of an event or of the three at once, but usually it's an unimportant detail and I struggle about that, and then the poem trickles down the page. And, then, once it's finished, it's finished. I never revise my poems. I often write a poem in the morning, and in the afternoon I can't remember anything, I can't remember what it was about. They are mostly one-page poems. I believe in brevity" (Fazzini, 2015, p. 5).

Norman MacCaig's first publication dates back to 1943 (*Far Cry*) and his bibliography includes a broad variety of poetry, some of which is worth noticing for the purpose of the present dissertation. In these poems, MacCaig includes many of the questions and thoughts that impregnates his works and that will be gathered together and reconstructed by his devotee Andrew Greig.

Some of the major issues that characterize MacCaig's poetical voice is, for example, the presence of Scotland's history and nationalism, as in the poem *Crossing the border*, together with the presence of Gaelic identity, as highlighted in his poem *Aunt Julia*¹, while continuing to write only in English. Another important question that surfaces in many of his lyrical compositions is the issue of land ownership, opposed to its dispossession. Specifically, MacCaig's famous long poem *A man in Assynt* brings the topic to light by asking:

"Who owns this landscape?
Has owning anything to do with love?
For it and I have a long-affair, so nearly

¹ See Appendix A.

human
we even have quarrels. –
When I intrude too confidently
it rebuffs me with a wind like a hand
or puts in my way
a quaking bog or a loch
where no loch should be. Or I turn stonily
away, refusing to notice
the roughed rocks, the mascara
under a dripping ledge, even
the tossed, the stony limbs waiting.”

(MacCaig, *A man in Assynt*, ll. 10-22).

This repeated question becomes the fundamental issue of his observations on nature and landscape, which is no longer praised but rather ironically criticised in its limitations and clashes with the human civilization.

The poet's answer is partly given a few lines later, where MacCaig affirms that these are

“False questions, for
this landscape is
masterless
and intractable in any terms
that are human”

(MacCaig, *A man in Assynt*, ll. 39-43),

in this way underlining his conviction of the impossibility for humans to actually possess any natural landscape.

The discrepancy between the poet's past and present is emphasised by objects that take him back to his childhood and that no longer represent the present life into the landscape. The historical wounds of a sad and

unrecognizable landscape, “clear and tiny in | the misty landscape of history” (MacCaig, *A man in Assynt*, ll. 204-205) that now show the nostalgia of a lost paradise.

MacCaig’s landscape is indeed populated with human references, both from its past and from its present life, and the relationships that the poet forms inside the landscape of the Western Highlands will permeate in his legacy. Raymond Ross talks about MacCaig’s landscape of human history describing it as one of his major themes of his work by reporting how,

“with his concern for people, the poet realises that the landscape is also its people and the Clearances haunt his meditation as does the continuing depopulation of Assynt.”

(Ross, 1990, p. 20)

Remembered by Andrew Greig in his book *At the loch of the Green Corrie*, MacCaig’s later years are the cause of many thoughts on old age, illness, and death, together with the celebration of life and natural elements. Greig’s quest through MacCaig’s persona becomes a road to self-discovery, as well as a search for the meaning of life within nature and within the Planet humans inhabit.

2.2 At the loch of the Green Corrie: a literary window onto the relationship between the two authors

Andrew Greig was just seventeen when he decided to

contact Norman MacCaig and send him some of his poetry to receive his personal opinion. From that moment on, they met a few times and they gave birth to a friendship that brought Greig into MacCaig's house and relations, as well as the poet himself into Greig's writings, particularly in the form of a memoir book – *At the loch of the Green Corrie* – written in 2010. MacCaig is presented in both his personal and public sphere, and the reader is given details of his understanding on poetry and life through the account of Greig's personal dialogues with him, or through the narration given by the same author of what he has discovered throughout the years. Greig's narration is sentimental and his admiration for the Scottish poet transpires in the report of their interactions, so much so that he dedicated the entire book to him and his '*pals*'. In the interview given to Nick Major for the SRB, he justifies his lure to the poet at the early age of seventeen with his admiration for the irresistible "combination of life-celebration and acute death-awareness" (Greig, 2014, par. 16) that he reads in the poet's poems.

In the same interview, Greig parallels MacCaig's relevance to the landscape of Assynt to the presence of George Mackay Brown in Orkney. Even if Brown's "absolute dedication to writing, and prioritizing of the work over worldly ambition remain inspiring", Greig cannot share his "near-wholesale rejection of the present in favour of pre-Reformation life, his preference for icons and types over individuals" (Greig, 2014, par. 10) and he cannot define himself as an Orcadian writer, or to write in an Orcadian tradition. The real reason why Greig decides to go to Orkney

and to still nowadays spend part of his life there is reported in one of his answers to Nick Major:

“I first came to Orkney in 1979, after a summer doing an archaeological dig in Shetland, so I still think of it as a green, kindly place to the south. I soon knew I needed to be involved in it for the rest of my life: the big sky, the open land, water all round and the inland lochs are very healing and clarifying for me. And some of my dearest friends are here. We play music, sail, fish, and talk. I need mornings alone to work, and after that a degree of company for stimulation, relaxation, normalcy”.

(Greig, 2014, par. 6)

Orkney comes to represent its own centre. While “being at a meeting of many sea-roads, it is historically very non-insular. Orcadians have moved all over the world, trading, whaling, sailing, settling, and the world seems to come to it. It is a true mongrel population, a *mixter-maxter* in George Mackay Brown’s phrase” (Greig, 2014, par. 8).

2.2.1 The human into the non-human

The book begins with Greig’s journey to MacCaig’s house, which will turn out to be their last encounter before the death of the poet a few months later. A promise and his love for Assynt and its people – these will be the two key points that will bring Greig back to driving those roads years later again, and the same motives for the author’s opening quest in the

subsequent book *At the loch of the Green Corrie*. Years later, while accepting to be immersed in that landscape once more, Greig also specifies the reason of his unwritten homage, which is not a result of nostalgia, or an unwanted summoning of past sorrows, but it is caused by the inevitable encounter with those “gone days, dead parents, lost friends, old lovers” that “rise round us as an escort, an entourage, to provoke, counsel and console”, because “there are places and times on this Earth when the ground as it were grows thin, and the dead arise of themselves” (Greig, 2010, p. 5). Greig’s quest of the Green Corrie, therefore, becomes a quest for MacCaig’s eternal company. By following his steps through the Highland’s hills, by looking at his beloved frogs, or by fishing in his favourite lake, Greig starts to feel closer to the man he once knew as his mentor and friend, gradually discovering what is left of him in those places and in the people around him.

As analysed in the review published by Sean O’Brian in April 2010, “the journey to Assynt with two friends, intended as a spontaneous approach to the real, is, even by Greig’s standards, burdened with an almost disabling load of duties: access to the past, enter the here and now, discover meaning, balance the contradiction between the intense pleasures of the landscape and the fact of death. And catch the fish” (O’Brien, 2010, pp. 3-8, par. 7). Moreover, Greig defines MacCaig as an *observer* and a *responder*, underlining the nature of his poetry as well as his way of being in the company of others. He enjoyed staying up late at night talking to his visitors and friends and in the summers spent in Assynt he managed to become an important part of

its social landscape. This aspect will become relevant to Greig's closing chapters of the book in the encounters and conversations with the many people who had known him during his life. As a result, Greig himself in the end admits that Norman MacCaig has become more the occasion than the true subject of the book, allowing the writer to dig deeper into the self and to catch his own fish and to finally affirm that "the small undertaking he once asked of me, has brought me to a place not so different from his, but my own" (Greig, 2010, p. 310).

As a consequence, while being guided by some of MacCaig's poems, this autobiographical book faces many of the poet's personal issues, intertwining his life to the experiences of the author and becoming a metaphorical bridge into Scotland's history and culture.

In the same way as MacCaig deals with the dilemmas deriving from the notions of 'noticing' and 'balancing' in his poem *Equilibrist*², Greig recognises the same issues concerning the intrusion of human affairs into the natural landscape. While referring to Assynt in his book *At the loch of the Green Corrie*, Greig admits that "on one level, namely ours, Assynt is profoundly human, it exists in and through human labour, memory, story, naming" (Greig, 2010, p. 209), clearly recognising that the presence of humanity through the history of the place cannot be ignored from its present identity, which is perfectly resurrected in MacCaig's poems and exemplary life. Therefore, by looking at

² For further reading see Roderick Watson's critical essay "'...the weight of joy...and the weight of sadness' Dilemmas of 'noticing' and 'balancing' in the Later poems of Norman MacCaig", in J. Hendry & R. Ross eds. "Norman MacCaig – Critical Essays", Edinburgh University Press, 1990.

MacCaig's poise between the human and the natural world, Greig talks about the figures that populate the landscape and the ruins of a broken past. The landscape of the Western Highlands is, indeed, something that brings the two authors close to one another and it represents the background that illuminates their poetics and their personal stories. A short example can be taken from the beginning of Greig's memoir book, which represents the beginning of his trip through the Western Highlands:

"I drive through Garve, then past the junction where one road goes off to Achnasheen, the red-ledged towers of Torridon and the hills of Kishorn. Pass those names across your tongue as though they were poems, as though they were whisky. These names and places have histories for me, dating from childhood holidays, my father's tobacco-rasped voice offering fragments of anecdotes as his gloved hands turned the big wheel of our Humber Hawk. He claimed to have driven every numbered road in Scotland; each had memories and associations for him.

Accelerating straight on up Strath Garve, my heart rises with the road. The landscape is empty now, any house or car an event, the hills all-surrounding, the river flashing brown and clear over stones. I wind the window down to check the air: moist sweetness with underlying acidic peat.

I have entered the West."

(Greig, 2010, pp. 14-15)

From the very beginning, Greig's identity is anchored in the landscape of the Highlands through the history of his family,

dating back to his oldest memories and making history re-emerge from his pages. Driving back to the Highlands represents for Greig also a return to his childhood, flooding the pages of his book with memories and flashbacks. Added to the author's personal stories and especially through the figure of his father, the history of Scotland peers out from the landscape. It was his father who first spoke to him about the Highland Clearances and now Greig looks at what those years have left in Assynt, that is, emptiness and ruins of a place which was once filled with people. Nevertheless, Greig also admits the misleading lessons that Scottish people perpetrated in the centuries following the battle of Culloden³. Though remaining a place of tragedy and loss for Scotland, Greig discusses how the real causes of the Clearances are to be searched much further back in time, nearly three hundred years earlier, when the Lordship of the Isles fell, leading directly to the Statutes of Iona in 1609 and, as a consequence, to the profound undermining of the clan structure. The statutes required that Highland Scottish clan chiefs would send their heirs to Lowland Scotland to be educated in English-speaking Protestant schools, resulting in the adoption of the new religion by many of the Clans involved. Even if the Clan system was not perfect, Greig places in the shift from that old system to the new commercialism of the following years the real tragedy portrayed in the empty fields of the battle of Culloden, which translates the idea of *leadership* into a new idea of

³ The battle of Culloden was fought near Inverness in April 1746 and it represents the final defeat of the Jacobites by the British army, representing a huge cultural and political change in the life of the Highland people.

ownership. The Scottish poet Sorley MacLean (1911-1996) expresses magnificently this period of great social and physical change of the Highlands in his much-celebrated poem *Hallaig*⁴, recaptured in Greig's personal meditations in his book *At the loch of the Green Corrie*:

“Through the nineteenth century, the exit trickle became a flood, as though someone had pulled the plug from the green bath of the glens. Those who stayed were forcibly relocated to the coastal fringes, to land unsuitable for sheep or deer. They moved to croft the tiny, beautiful, scattered ‘townships’ of Stoer, Clathtoll, Clashnessie, Achmelvich, Drumbeg, Achnacarnin and Balchladich, names impossible to sound without feeling the poetry and the loss.

Defeated militarily, abandoned or betrayed by their leaders, baffled by the loss of an unspoken tradition that constituted their world, all that was left for the people were sorrowful songs, poverty and unremitting work with no prospect of improvement, emigration, whisky with a side-dish of poaching, and the strange consolation of extreme Calvinism in the schematic sects of the Presbyterian Church.

And you wonder why, though the West moves me in ways no other part of the world can, I don't live there?”

(Greig, 2010, p. 184).

With this beautiful and sincere description, Greig loses himself in the landscape of an almost deserted Assynt, filling his eyes with the contrasts of a loved, yet somehow

⁴ See Appendix B.

estranged land.

Before proceeding, it is important to linger on the above nominated figure of Andrew Greig's father. Through this figure, Andrew Greig meditates on the notion of *transmission* in chapter "Retrieve: pass it on, pass it on" (Greig, 2010, pp. 115-117). By imagining the satisfaction of a father who managed to transmit his knowledge to his son at the end of his life, Greig recognises his direct descent from MacCaig lessons and, of course, from his poems. First started with an act of imitation, Greig is encouraged by the same poet to write some '*like his own*' and to search for his true expression of the self. Through the act of "transmitting and receiving", through the same fishing rhythm of casting and retrieving, the writer reflects on MacCaig's poem *Notations of ten summer minutes*⁵, underlining his understanding of the non-linearity of time and of the persistence of the past into the present. In his father's person, Greig sees Scotland's harsh and heated past in those men that were built for the need of a stronger endurance and of a dignity that would result from a period of wars and emotional distance. Now, during their quest, "the past had time to become present again; the present had time to be reflected on" because Greig realises that "to catch up with your own life (and your culture's past) is basic hygiene, not nostalgia or indulgence" (Greig, 2010, p. 196). Telling each other stories about their past experiences, friends, encounters, failures and joys, so becomes a way to simultaneously draw into themselves and be altered again.

⁵ Read poem in book *At the loch of the Green Corrie*, Greig, 2010, p. 169.

As Greig asserts in his SRB's interview, telling a story becomes a way to connect the lines in between people and places⁶.

Another important object of his solitary observations are the mountains and hills and their formation. Influenced by his father's interest in the controversies of Creationism versus geological time, Greig explains in his interview to Nick Major that he shares the strong belief in "the Enlightenment and in the nobility of the project of Science, the submission of authorities, traditions and theories to evidence" (Greig, 2014, par. 42). While enjoying the metaphors and language that geology offers, Greig parallels the geological processes of "dynamic change, endless process of deposit, upthrust, breakdown, and reformation" (Greig, 2014, par. 42) to his method of writing and to his outlook on transience.

Greig is captivated by the hills of Assynt, from Cul Mor to Cul Beag, Bheinn Mor Coigeach, Suilven, Stac Pollaidh, Canisp, Quinag and Glas Bheinn in their uniqueness, specifically lingering on their rock formation and observing the dense, hard, grey Lewisian gneiss of the valleys. He feels the responsibility of time while standing on it, and looking at the sedimentary reddish layers that sit on the ground. Following the narration of their process of formation and the drift of the continents, he follows those fragments along the centuries until the union of the British Isles and the formation of its mountains. Greig also observes the cap of quartzite that can be found on top of Quinag and other mountains in Assynt, which is clearly different from the rocks

⁶ See Greig, 2014, par. 27.

below and originated after a moment of great upthrust from low waters. The Holocene Interglacial period in which the author finds himself to be living in now appears in its context, blending in total accord with those mountains that have been all around the globe, “first under the ocean, been desert, freshwater lake, covered by miles-deep sandstone, then under water again” (Greig, 2010, p. 83) and proving the miniscule presence of humans on Earth; proving the greatness of the Universe every time things need to be put into perspective again. Greig uses the scientific geological term of *Deep Time*, parallel to the concept of *Deep Space*, to provide the basic concepts to study the landscape’s geological narrative, and to never forget that landscape, like nature and every living creature, is affected by time and is in an incessant process of changing. Following that train of thoughts, Greig presents the readers to the figure of James Hutton, the father of modern geology and the man who made the idea of Deep Time possible at first. In his *Theory of the Earth*, published in 1795, Hutton writes the words that, even if not immediately understood by the scientific community, would change the understanding of the world’s formation, id est: “In respect of human observation, this world has neither a beginning nor an end”, finally conceptualizing the core notions of the sedimentary origin of rocks and of the universal and constant process of erosion. Greig indeed writes:

“Geologists talk about Deep Time. Considering it seriously has a similar effect to looking at the thousand billion stars of our Milky Way at night and spotting among them the fuzz of the Andromeda galaxy. Deep

Space. When I was young, astronomers knew of five galaxies. By 1999, this had increased to 125 billion. The current estimate is of up to 500 billion other galaxies.

The mind stalls. It wasn't made for driving this kind of information.

Much of the time the stars are not visible. But the landscape's geological narrative is available anytime. That's way I've taken the time to learn its basics, so I can inform and blow my mind any time I need perspective.

Deep Space, Deep Time. Contemplating them makes your head birl. Terrifying or strangely relaxing, they make it impossible to tale anything very seriously again."

(Greig, 2010, p. 84)

As it often happens in the pages of his memoir book, Greig manages to look at the scene from afar and hangs on the figure of Hutton to give his readers a broader vision of the landscape he is looking at. As if asking the readers to meditate with him on the different objects on which he pauses, he attempts to preserve that nowadays rare encounter with the non-human landscape and, at the same time, encourage a primitive, sincere and close connection to the natural world.

Just like the historical events, the transformations and adaptations in the geological history of our planet had demonstrated, Greig also talks about the characters of trees. In his youth, the author had spent many summers in Assynt with his family, where he had met with the Scots Pine. This tree grows solitary in the area and its branches become twisted, its bark is resinous, its character free, and

it has its own encoded standards of growth. However, Greig's brother Sandy had told him that if planted close together, the Scots Pine can grow tall and erect, perfectly adapting to the restrained conditions and so demonstrating how its shape can be influenced by circumstances in response to proximity. Identifying himself like this contorted, inelegant, solitary pine, Greig assigns the character of the silver birch to Norman's last years, elegant and resilient in its wounds, perpetuating his attempt to find a place for the human into the non-human landscape.

Parallel to his thoughts expressed in *At the Loch of the Green Corrie*, Greig also dedicates a single poem to *A Scots Pine*⁷, found in the last section of *Western Swing – Hills and high waters*. Again, the figure of Greig's father peers out from the poem's lines just as a memory comes to its surface. Again, Greig, unlike his father, who "longed to be | where that wind was going" (l. 4-5) when he was at war, now wonders not on the destination, but rather on the origins of life, determined to know "the place that wind comes from" (l. 18). Slowing making its way inside Greig's thoughts, the notion of Deep Time appears clear in the transmission of culture, language, tradition and familiar landscapes, until his final realisation that "we arrive at who we are first by following, then by divergence" (Greig, 2010, p.18).

In the same way as Valerie Gillies observes when talking about MacCaig's "topographic state of mind" (Gillies, 1990, p. 153) in his poems, it is possible to recognise Greig's search to '*feel the right size*' inside the landscape,

⁷ In collection *Getting Higher*, p. 204.

identifying the hills he was walking in his book as perfectly sized to “rise above the human, without being entirely beyond us” (Greig, 2010, p. 209) and underlining that “they put us in our place, and that is healing. [...] Human into the non-human, with sweat our connection to the world, we felt ourselves the right size” (Greig, 2010, p. 210). The same connections are brought to surface by the documentary ‘*Fishing for poetry*’, produced by Douglas Eadie and directed by Mike Alexander in 2010, which inspects the figure of the poet Norman MacCaig through an adventure similar to the one carried by Andrew Greig before – to find and fish in the loch of the Green Corrie. The similarities between the meditations found in the documentary and in the book are easy to find and the conclusion is, almost ironically, the same: “Again, no fish but no regrets either” (Alexander, 2010, 00:56:59). In the documentary, the comedian Billy Connolly, the musician Aly Bain and Andrew Greig, together with the comments of Seamus Heaney, Jackie Kay, Liz Lochhead, are pushed by the common desire to talk about the poet and the person of MacCaig in order to celebrate him on the centenary year of his birth. For this reason, the three main protagonists of the trip embark on the quest to ‘*find Norman*’ at the loch of the Green Corrie, as if he was to be there forever, observing them and smiling at their unsuccessful attempt to catch a trout in that desolate and far-to-reach loch. After having visited the loch of the Green Corrie, they can now affirm that entering those places and walking those paths is, as described in Greig’s book, the same as entering MacCaig’s mind. By entering his poems, it is possible to feel part of the landscape itself. Vice

versa, the protagonists are able to feel the poet's eternal presence by just being and fishing into that same landscape and, simultaneously, make peace with his absence.

Similarly to MacCaig, Greig's complex yet boundless love for Scotland emerges from the very first pages of his memoir book. Although difficult to understand to the writer himself, this love is profound and absolute. He highlights the fact that, while meditating on his wife's *Englishness*, "she can see that for me being Scottish is fundamental to who I am" (Greig, 2010, p. 12). Being Scottish for Greig adds such a great meaning to its simple nationality trait that the writer fills up most of this book's pages in order to explain it in all its constituents. Greig's controversial love for his country, and especially for the Scottish Highlands, is also perfectly summarised in MacCaig's quoted poem *Patriot*:

*My only country
is six feet high
and whether I love it or not
I'll die
for its independence.*

Here the writer compares Scotland to a living body. A vision of *being Scottish* that Greig seems to share with his mentor – "earthly" and "corporeal" (Greig, 2010, p. 13) and comparing his love for Orkney to MacCaig's attachment to Assynt. The Scotland that we as readers discover between the lines is a wounded Scotland, full of complexities and saturated with its historical events. Yet still, this Scotland is the place MacCaig loved, the place where the narrator of Greig's poetry comes back after a long and difficult journey to the East, and the same place that Greig cannot leave

today. Similarly, in Greig's poetry collection *Getting Higher*, the same parallelism is to be found in the poem '*Meanwhile: A cure for loneliness*', where he writes:

“Already the body
seems large as Scotland
sprawled on the seas without sleep
the abdominal lowlands rising and falling
the mountainous chest expanding and
contracting
the north and western fingers
trailing the waters
inhaling and exhaling
from one ice age to another”.

(Greig, 2011, p. 117, ll. 40-48)

In this stanza, Greig identifies the natural features of Scotland in the organs of a sleeping body, shaped by its muscular landscape, breathing within the ages through its mountains' formation, with water pouring through its rivers like blood in the veins, expanding in each of its capillary tributaries.

Greig's interpretation of Scotland as a living body brings to surface his necessity to walk through the non-human landscape in order to enter its contrasting and yet complementary side; namely, the human landscape and the people who inhabit those places. As a consequence, this book is crowded with people belonging to Greig's present and past life, and with figures belonging to MacCaig's history, to the life of the Dorward brothers (Greig's companions in his first journey in search of the Green

Corrie) and to Scotland's historical past. Their stories bring the reader back in time, in order to reconstruct and rethink the past or to deal with the present issues concerning the writer's life and thoughts on loyalty, friendship, and love. Closely connected to the figure of MacCaig, Greig presents the poet's close friend Angus Kenneth MacLeod, or simply referred as AK. The bond between the two is represented as something special and there are many moments in Greig's book where the two are depicted together, especially in their fishing trips. MacCaig indeed used to go to the Loch of the Green Corrie with AK and spend many evenings chatting and drinking whisky together. As nicely described by AK's nephew, Angus John McEwan, they were like little boys together, lighting each other's worlds up. In the documentary dedicated to the poet – *Fishing for poetry* – the poet is indeed listened while talking about his friend AK: "I had the grace of meeting the man called Angus, who made me almost not ignorant. What I mean is that he taught me a hell of a lot about the usualness of the extraordinary, or if you like, the extraordinary of the usual" (Alexander, 2010, 00:20:31). After the man's death in 1976, MacCaig wrote many poems dedicated to him, especially a beautiful poem entitled 'A.K. MacLeod':

*I went to the landscape I loved best
and the man who was its meaning and
added to it
met me at Ullapool.
The beautiful landscape was under snow
and was beautiful in a new way.
Next morning, the man who had greeted me
with the pleasure of pleasure*

*vomited blood
and died.
Crofters and fisherman and womenfolk,
unable
to say any more, said,
'It's a grand day, it's a beautiful day'.
And I thought, 'Yes, it is.'
And I thought of him lying there,
the dead centre of it all.*

(Norman MacCaig)

This distinctive friendship between AK and MacCaig revives Greig's conflicting thoughts on the relationship between men, which allows the reader to catch a glimpse into Greig's life experiences in the stories of Graeme⁸ and Don Coppock, two figures that have left a mark in the writer's personal growth. As MacCaig was drawn to men like AK MacLeod, who seems to have the ability to connect directly with people and the world, Greig finds himself attracted to physical, emotional men; realising that "in our hearts we know what we are lacking, and are drawn to those who have what we do not, as though through proximity their particular sweetness of being may rub off on us" (Greig, 2010, p. 291). During a solitary stroll on his trip to the Loch of the Green Corrie, Greig revokes his memories of his lost friend, whom he deeply loved in his past days. Their untold and hasty declaration of love helped the writer to find in the following years a way out from his previous, unhappy marriage and this experience placed the writer in the position of believing to truly understand MacCaig's words – "*I loved the man!*"

⁸ Here, Greig uses the same name of a character present in his novel *Electric Brae*, who collected the man's main elements.

(Greig, 2010, p. 121) – when referring to his friend AK in a much more profound and sentimental manner. On the other hand, the theme of homosexuality is explicitly seen through the character of the American Don Coppock. In this case, Greig's writing seems to lean toward a more political understanding of the critical circumstances of the gay community in those years, even though remaining in a position more of a spectator rather than a participant. However, Don's love for nature and wilderness and his dreams of being one with the wild animals remains with the author long after the man's death, who fought the fight against AIDS without letting it consume his life.

Another important figure worth naming in Greig's recollection of his personal human landscape of the Western Highlands is the Scottish climber, Malcolm Duff. Being already deceased for fourteen years by the time that Greig writes the book, his character is recollected through Greig's memories of their time together in the Himalayan Mountain range and becomes a symbolic bridge to the author's meditations on death and life in such demanding and dangerous environments. From the very beginning of his book, Greig assigns to Malcolm Duff the fundamental connection to the later discussions on fishing between him and Norman MacCaig. It was him indeed who taught Greig the pleasures of fishing during the breaks in between his expeditions, and it was always him, who invited the writer on their first expedition to Mustagh Tower, which resulted to be the first of a series of trips to the Himalayan peaks they undertook together. One significant experience is brought back to Greig's pages when he finds himself inside a tent

again in their trip to the loch of the Green Corrie. Once more, Greig plunges into himself, meditating on how, inside their one-man tents, they belong to their own world, “sealed yet permeable”, as “human Gore-Tex” (Greig, 2010, p. 70). With this metaphor, Greig discloses his desire to dive deeper into the self, underlining the ability of the individual to *caste* and *retrieve* from external experiences and so to come to a reciprocal discovery of his external and his personal worlds. As a consequence, the sense of *other-ness* is replaced inside the self by a common sense of belonging and a desire of permeability of humankind into the natural landscape.

2.2.2 A question of identity

Hand in hand with the historical events, Greig’s meditations on the Gaelic language come to represent the symbolic manifestation of a past that is still present in the old population, as much as in the names of the places and in the traditions of the Highlands. Starting with “A rough pronunciation guide”, Greig forewarns the readers of *At the Loch of the Green Corrie* of the significant presence of Gaelic words, asking to “pass those names across your tongue as though they were poems, as though they were whisky” (Greig, 2010, p. 15). The so-called *Gaeldom* for Greig represents everything that MacCaig loved, and what he attempts to observe in his journeys to the West. It is the connection to the old songs and stories, to the language of old people who still inhabit those places, and the bridge to

the ancient and characteristic connection of the Gaels to the natural landscape. Indeed, MacCaig himself comes to incorporate that same connection and, while he himself recognizes that “I am, that’s to say, a threequarters Gael” (MacCaig, 1979, p. 81), it becomes clear that “when MacCaig talks in terms of ‘my people’ it is to his Gaelic ancestry that he typically refers and this Celtic consciousness counterpoints his Lowland birth and upbringing as well as his English language” (Ross, 1990, p. 14). MacCaig’s understanding of the Gaelic language and his recognition of the importance of place-names takes him closer to his origins and to the Gaelic poets. However, Greig’s controversial national and linguistic identity is questioned deeply by the people he encounters in his trips to the Highlands.

Across all of Greig’s narrative, this fundamental question is brought up by the Scottish poet Sorley MacLean’s question about Greig’s genealogy. His question “*And who are your people?*” repeatedly returns to Greig’s mind in the pages of his book, gradually and unintentionally becoming one of the core findings of his quest. Sorley MacLean, the Gaelic poet par excellence and last of the high Gaelic bards, brings Greig back in time in order to re-establish his present identity. His native Raasay and most of the Western Isles and Highlands were for MacLean completely interconnected with genealogical links, which in turn were directly connected to places, events, histories, dates, names, and thus creating “a web of meaning and identity” (Greig, 2010, p. 185). This was Sorley MacLean’s way of understanding the individual, a tradition almost lost within the following

generations. This obsession with genealogy and family story of MacLean guides Greig through the re-discovery of the Scottish Highlands he used to visit when he was a child, reconnecting him to his present and reconstructing his cultural, if not genealogical, lineage. Towards the end of the book, Greig finally affirms that “for most of us it is the same: we have family but we do not have people. Only now, nearing the end, do I see that along the way to the loch of the green corrie, I have been finding my people” (Greig, 2010, p. 311). Through his family, through Norman MacCaig and Sorely MacLean, through his wife Lesley, his friends Andy and Peter Dorward, Don Coppock, and all those ones he has never met such as AK MacLeod and Charlie Ross, the poets that inspired him, together with James Hutton and David Hume, and all those people, singers, writers, “who stand for something, whose words cling inside my mind like scraps of wallpaper, layer on layer” – Greig can eventually tell: “*These are my people*” (Greig, 2010, pp. 311-312).

2.2.3 MacCaig’s frogs

Greig’s adventures in the quest of the Loch of the Green Corrie bring him to the encounter with the zoology of Assynt as well. By admiring the way MacCaig dealt with animal life, Greig looks at the wildlife in the Scottish hills and revives the poet’s love for frogs in particular. Crowded with tiny frogs, the hills are a place of contemplation and admiration for the writer, a kind of admiration that, similarly to MacCaig’s, looks

“as a poet looks, not as an ornithologist” (Greig, 2010, p. 88). Indeed, Greig watches MacCaig’s words transform the object through image, simile and metaphor, and then try to return it to its otherness. In them, it is found “wonder, yes, but also strangeness and perplexity. And at the beginning, in that first glimpsing, before all the conjuring, reflection and cleverness, there arises that thin-skinned, quivering capaciousness: love” (Greig, 2010, p. 88). Looking at these frogs becomes, therefore, a way to look at life in general with a loving eye, which is capable of catching the preciousness of an interdependent and magnificent nature. MacCaig feels deeply attracted to frogs, defining them “so human” in the way that they elegantly jump and inelegantly land, and feeling so close to them to say that he must be froggish himself⁹. He loves everything about them and this love is able to emerge from the lines of his poems and influence the feelings of the company when they finally come across some frogs themselves (“We move on up with a renewed sense of connection, watching where our feet fall”; Greig, 2010, p. 88). Like the buzzard flying over their heads, or the trout they fish, the animals that they encounter in their quest seem to come from a different dimension. Distant, cautious and fierce they live in remote places and carry out an independent life. Hence, Greig questions himself on the place humans have in this world, finding themselves necessarily involved in the Earth’s mechanisms but at the same time with the conscious capacity of choice.

Directly connected to these observations, Greig expresses

⁹ From MacCaig’s poem “My last words on frogs”, in *At the Loch of the Green Corrie*, p. 92.

is what it is, not something else, and these figures of speech are only lures that capture our minds, and in this way, using Greig's own words, "this figurative language restores the world to us" (Greig, 2010, p. 45).

The discussion on the role of the poet and of poetry in general is deepened by the figure of The Poet himself, in '*The backwater of the cam*' (Greig, 2011, p. 132), in which to the question on whether she had become "merely a good guesser, or | a Master of Reality", Poet answers "No, but I am no longer | the Slave of Illusion". With this strong affirmation, Greig strengthens his view on poetry and Arts in general, which becomes a way to look at reality that is "as real as it gets. That is, real within our minds" (Greig, 2010, p. 89).

CHAPTER 3

FISHING: THE PHYSICAL AND METAPHORICAL ACT OF CASTING AND RETRIEVING

Andrew Greig's quest to the loch of the Green Corrie has brought to his readers' attention one of the most distinctive features that combine the lives of the author himself and of his mentor and friend Norman MacCaig: fishing. Even though it enters into the poets' lives in different ways, the act of fishing represents the joining force for the interlacing of their personal stories, becoming the guiding metaphor to Greig's book *At the loch of the Green Corrie* through its rhythm of 'casting' and 'retrieving'.

For this reason, a specific section is dedicated to the development of this topic, first by contextualising the physical act of fishing in the territories of present Scotland and, secondly, by analysing the metaphorical meaning of fishing in Greig's narrative line through Norman MacCaig's contribution of that narrative.



Figure 1 - Billy Connolly and Aly Bain fishing at the loch of the Green Corrie, in 'Fishing for Poetry'.

Across Greig's memoir book, fishing is the cause – as well as the medium – through which the author meditates on life and on his past experiences during his search to find the loch of the Green Corrie and, more specifically, during his attempt to catch a trout in it. Both the book and the documentary dedicated to the poet MacCaig are based on the act of fishing in the loch of the Green Corrie. Consequently, the present gaze on the topic hopes to give the reader a deeper knowledge of the act of fishing in Scotland today, while also advancing some hypothesis on the meaning that it acquires throughout the entire narrative of Greig's memoir book.

3.1 Current fishing legislation in Scotland

Together with the very famous question posed in MacCaig's poem '*A man in Assynt*', Greig also ponders over the same

issue of land possession in *At the Loch of the Green Corrie* (2010), questioning the different sides from which we look at history and its side-effects on the human society and in the natural landscape. Greig's quest for the loch of the Green Corrie forces him to think about the dual meaning of the act of obtaining the permits for fishing in it, which appears to be something extraneous to their culture, while being socially correct at the same time. Greig writes:

“It's not the money, more the principle. The history of the Scottish Highlands doesn't make for deep respect of land ownership. There is no Gaelic word for poaching. On the other hand, fishing fees are part of the income of these estates, which aren't overflowing with money or employment.”

(Greig, 2010, p. 36).

However, a small complexity in the process makes Greig and the Dorward brothers easily renounce to their permits, feeling the urge to carry on with their mission and, once again, underlining their strong sense of belonging to the place, as if they were granted of a greater permission given by their Scottish origins.

As anticipated, this particular episode has left the need to better understand how fishing was regulated in the Scottish context, as well as with the curiosity about its evolution until the present days.

Today, considering the whole of Scotland, the country has not a state licence system for fishing and people do not need a fishing licence anywhere apart from the Border Esk region that flows into England, including, therefore, its tributaries and the parts of the river that are in Scotland.



Figure 2 - Border Esk region

As the website of the UK government explains, “the Upper Esk is on the border of the two nations. However, the national and North West and Border Esk local byelaws apply to fishing on either bank of the Esk” (uk.gov, 2021) and the Scottish side is therefore subjected to the same rules.

Even though specific other laws proceeded it, the year of 1951 signs an important moment in the history of Scotland’s fishing legislation. In this act, the basics of salmon and trout fishing, freshwaters fishing, etc. are set, and many of these points are reconsidered in laws that followed it. In *‘The basics of Scottish angling law’*, in Alastair Gowans guide for fishing in Scotland (2010), some of the main issues are summarised to give the reader a general idea of the rules for fishing in the country.

Being Scotland largely populated with salmons in its rivers and seas, this fish has particular space in the discourse. Indeed, you can read:

“Thus, nobody may fish for salmon in rivers

or estuaries or in the sea within territorial limits without permission of the Crown or the party vested in the Crown rights. In many cases in rivers, estuaries and in the sea, the rights have been granted to private individuals, companies, local authorities and others. Salmon fishing rights are heritable titles and may be held separately from ownership of the land or may have been given along with ownership of the land. Where the right is held separately from the land, the proprietor of the right has an implied right of access for the purpose of exercising his right to fish for salmon. The fishing right must be exercised in such a way that it causes the least prejudice to the rights of the riparian owner.”

(Gowans, 2010).

For this same reason, the Salmon Act 1986 affirms that “If any person without legal right, or without written permission from a person having such right, fishes for or takes salmon in any waters including any part of the sea within one mile of mean low water springs, he shall be guilty of an offence”, and also: “access to rod fisheries for those without right is thus by private agreement with the owner. Access is widely available throughout Scotland but costs involved depend on a number of factors, including catch expectations, whether accommodation is attached, whether a ghillie is provided and so on.”

Alastair Gowans’s guide also illustrates fishing regulations and closing times, which, for angling with rods, is on Sundays. The exact annual closing times may vary between Salmon fishery districts; however, they generally are

between the end of August and mid-February. Gowans also writes:

“The prohibition of fishing for salmon during the weekly close time is contained in section 13 of the 1951 Act, as amended by the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976 (section 7 and Schedule 3) and the Salmon (Weekly Close Time) (Scotland) Regulations 1988 (SI 1988/390) made under the terms of section 3(3) of the 1986 Act.”

(Gowans, 2010).

Speaking of wild brown trout, particularly taken into consideration in Greig’s narrative, the fishing season in the Scottish waters opens on the 15th of March and closes on the 6th of October.

Moreover, the 1951 Act gives also a definition for rod and line: "single rod and line with such bait or lure as is lawful at the passing of this Act and, in the case of fishing for salmon in an area to which and at a time during which regulations made under section 8 of the Salmon Act 1986 apply, is not specified in such regulations in respect of that area and time", with the specific applications allowed to the single District salmon Fishery Boards. In the part dedicated to *Freshwater fishing*, Alastair Gowans carries on with another section of the 1951 Act:

“In general, the only permitted method of fishing for freshwater fish is by rod and line as defined in Section 24(1) of the 1951 Act, as amended by section 8(6) of the 1986 Act. However, under section 2(2) of the 1951 Act, in any pond or loch, where all proprietors

agree, a right of fishing for trout by net may be exercised, and in any inland water, a proprietor or occupier having a right of freshwater fishing may take any freshwater fish other than trout by means of a net or trap.”

(Gowans, 2010),

And tells the reader more about the access to freshwater fishing in the following words:

“In general, it is not a criminal offence to fish for or take trout in Scotland. However, this does not imply that there is, as some would assert, a free right to fish anywhere. The rights of riparian owners are protected by principles of civil law and permission should be sought before fishing.

There are some differences in relation to waters flowing into the Solway Firth. Section 9 of the Solway Act 1804 (this section is still in force) makes it an offence to fish for salmon or other fish without permission. However, this no longer applies to the River Annan and Border Esk. The 1951 Act is usually used in the case of salmon.

It is an offence to fish for or take freshwater fish in inland waters other than by rod and line. The use of double rod fishing is unlawful. (Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries, Protection Scotland Act, 1951).

It is an offence to fish for trout during the annual close time, which is between 7 October and 14 March. This offence and the offence of having trout in possession during the annual close time does not apply to the owner, occupier or lessee of any water where trout are kept in captivity or artificially reared

and fed, or any employee there for that purpose, or to any person to whom such fish have been consigned for e.g., stocking. (Freshwater Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1902, amended by Trout (Scotland) Act 1933)”

(Gowans, 2010).

While these laws regulate the fishing activity in Scotland, it is also important to answer another, although no less fundamental question: if no state licences are requested but people need permits to fish, who owns the rights of the land and its waters? In other words, who owns Scotland today? A BBC article so titled tries to give an answer to this complicated question. Its authors, Andrew Picken and Stuart Nicolson, start off by saying that “The government believes 57% of rural land is in private hands, with about 12.5% owned by public bodies, 3% under community ownership and about 2.5% is owned by charities and other third sector organisations. The remainder is thought to be owned by smaller estates and farms which are not recorded in those figures” (Picken & Nicolson, 2019), underlining the problem of a country that sees the majority of the land in very few powerful hands. As a matter of fact, the people who own a lot in Scotland today are: the Duke of Buccleuch, the Danish billionaire clothing tycoon Anders Holch Povlsen, the billionaire ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, and finally, the government agencies and other public bodies. As a consequence, another problem appears; that is, the absence of these very rich but also foreign landowners. The article, therefore, proceeds to show the consequent increase of land ownership communities with

their intent to buy back the land they inhabit. Figures show a rising number of acres owned by local communities, topping to 562,230 acres in 2019:

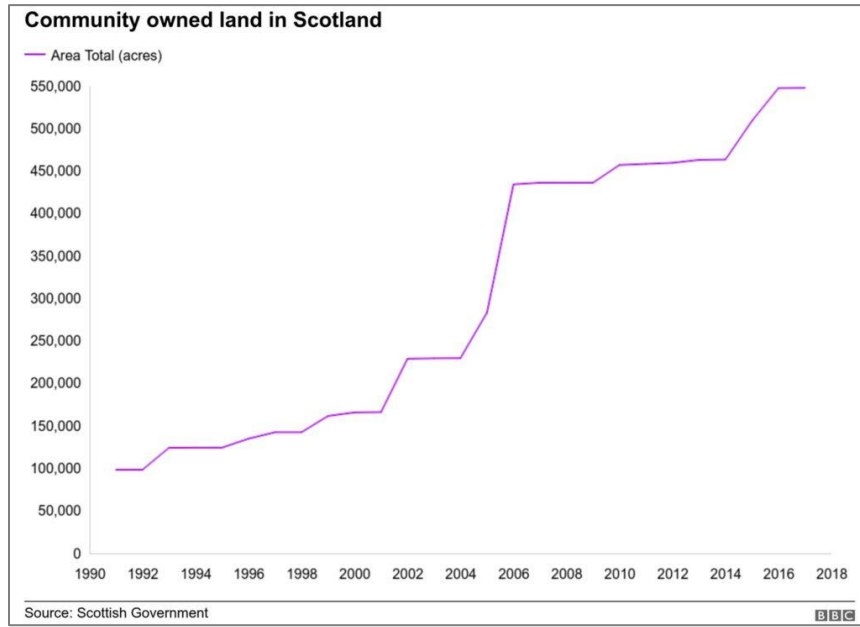


Figure 3 - Community Land ownership

In 2020, these numbers increased by 3%, 38% of which found in the Highlands' territories¹⁰, and it is thought to be gradually growing year after year.

Going back to the territories central to the present discourse, it is also interesting to see which laws about the fishing activities particularly interest the Assynt area of Scotland. As reported by the FAO Database, on the 4th June, 2004 the *Assynt – Coigach Area Protection Order 2004* (S.S.I. No. 260 of 2004) come into force, affirming that:

“This Order prohibits the fishing for or taking of freshwater fish in inland waters in the

¹⁰ From the Scottish government's website, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-ownership-scotland-2020/>.

prescribed area without legal right or written permission from a person having such a right (art. 3). The map annexed to and forming part of this note illustrates the area in which the Order applies. Section 1(8) of the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976 provides that any person who contravenes a prohibition in a protection order is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.”

(FAO website, 2022).

Again, this shows the reader the reason of MacAskill’s urgency in *At the loch of the Green Corrie* (2010) for the protagonists

to get permits when they declared their intention to find and fish in the loch of the Green Corrie¹¹.

A short but exhausting explanation about fishing regulations in Assynt is given in Adam Brown’s ‘*Angling in Assynt – Guide for visitors*’ (2022), which gives newly updated information on *Game, Sea and Salmon fishing in the area*. This guide represents a short summary of the information given in the website www.assyntanglinginfo.org.uk and presents an introduction on the places where to fish, on the needed permits and on fishing zones, boats, trout, salmon, and sea fishing. In Assynt, most of the wild brown trout permits are covered by two main organisations: the Assynt Crofters Trust (North side of Assynt) and the Assynt Angling Group (South, East and West side). The Assynt Angling

¹¹ See Greig, 2010, p. 36.

Group (AAG) is formed by mainly local landowners and more about its permits and their sellers, divisions and contacts follow in the guide. On the other hand, the Assynt Crofters Trust is known for having won the right to buy the land they worked on in 1993 and it is defined ‘a real trout angler’s paradise’ for the huge quantity of lochans located in it. Adam Brown’s summary reports also an interesting map, which shows the areas that require the same type of permit:



Figure 4 - Fishing Permits in Assynt

In Greig’s book *At the loch of the Green Corrie* (2010), on his last night spent in the company of the Scottish poet MacCaig, Greig converses with the poet about their passions and valuable things in life, making MacCaig talk

about the badge on his jacket, which reports the letters 'AAA'. They stand for 'Assynt Anglers Association' and the poet refers to it as "the honour of which I am most proud of" (Greig, 2010, p. 13). More than any other recognition or prize received for his poetry, MacCaig cherished his honorary membership to the Assynt Anglers Associations until his very last days. As his son Ewan MacCaig says in the documentary *Fishing for poetry* (2010), "of course he liked walking and enjoying the landscape, but it was fishing that got him up his chair" (Alexander, 2010, 00:12:09), a concept that Greig underlines in his book as well:

"I think sometimes MacCaig would have given all his poems for one more day's fishing, or another evening session with his friends. I am glad that bargain was not his to make"

(Greig, 2010, p. 2).

Towards the end of his book while writing about his second trip to the loch of the Green Corrie, Greig returns to talk about the Assynt Anglers Associations:

"I get out of the car, eyes snagged by sunlight and stiff breeze knotting the surface of Loch na Gainmhich. In my pocket is a £5 fishing permit from the Assynt Anglers Associations. The first Assynt Crofters Buy-Out sparked off a series of community buy-outs across Scotland and in Assynt: Glencanisp, Little Assynt, Inverpolly. Now I have no hesitation in paying to fish these lochs."

(Greig, 2010, p. 243).

It is interesting to see how Greig's opinion on fishing permits

grows throughout his own book and, in the end, he seems to be judging positively the process concerning Scotland lands and its local communities. The questions about the meaning of fishing permits that Greig had in his first trip to the loch find further justification in the fact that now it is Norman MacCaig's so-beloved association in charge of the permits in the area and for the loch of the Green Corrie, giving to that small amount of money a new and enriched meaning.

Continuing to look at the '*Angling in Assynt*' guide, some more information is given about Salmon and Sea Trout Fishing, shore and rock fishing, tuition and guiding. Last, but not least, some words on fish responsibility are spent:

"The fish stock in Assynt are wild and as such care must be taken to sustain the area's sustainability. Although there are many lochs teeming with trout, others are more sensitive and anglers must be responsible. A local code of conduct is:

- No fish taken is under 9 inches in length – this is a rule of the ACT and AAG.
- Whilst people often take 'one for the table' only do this where there are plentiful stocks, do not take more fish than you need and do not take larger fish. Our survey work suggests over 90% of trout caught are returned.
- Return all larger trout with care, ideally not removing them from the water. Practice catch and release at remoter, hill lochs and especially those where breeding will be harder."

(Brown, 2022).

These are just examples available of a wide literature about fishing in Scotland and in MacCaig's loved area of Assynt. Books and guides¹² have been written on the subject and they offer various angles of this ancient art that represents a fundamental column to Scotland's tradition until the present days.

3.2 The Art of Angling

From the very beginning, the reader of Greig's book *At the loch of the Green Corrie* (2010) is encouraged to undertake the task to follow the author in his journey to the West. Through his walks to the Highlands lochans and hills, the reader starts to build a map in the mind, including the names of little villages, mountains, lochans, and any kind of geographical reference. Witnessing together with the author the passing of time and the history of Scotland through the poems of Norman MacCaig, fishing becomes the representation of the constant in the inconstant world. While everything changes, the act of fishing seems to have pre-Biblical roots and to involve the very essence of man's happiness in this world. On this basis, Izaak Walton builds his discourse in his book *The complete Angler* (1889), referring to anglers by saying:

¹² Some exemplary titles can be: *Rivers and lochs of Scotland: The Angler's complete guide*, B. Sandison, Black & White Publishing (2011), *Secret lochs and Special Places, an angling memoir*, B. Sandison, Black & White Publishing (2015), *The Joy of Angling in Scotland*, various authors, Boucher Press (2017), *The Scottish Fishing book*, A. Forgan, Lomond Books (2005), *The loch Fisher's Bible*, S. Headley, Robert Hale (2006), etc.

“Nature had endowed these men with the simple skill to make happiness out of the cheap material that is within the means of the poorest of us. The good fairy gave them to weave cloth of gold of straw. They did not waste their time or strive to show their cleverness in discussing whether life were worth living, but found every precious moment of it so without seeking, or made it so without grimace, and with no thought that they were doing anything remark”.

(Walton, 1889, p. lx)

The life and experience of a *Piscator* is presented in this book as a life worth observing from a closer angle, and Walton brings the reader through a detailed story-telling of his activities and his knowledge of the act of fishing, which he defines as a true form of Art. He writes:

“PISC. Sir, I did say so, and I doubt not but if you and I did converse together but a few hours, to leave you possessed with the same high and happy thoughts that now possess me of it; not only of the Antiquity of Angling, but that it deserves commendations, and that it is an art, and an art worthy the knowledge and practice of a wise man”.

(Walton, 1889, p. 25)

And more, answering to the *Venator's* wish to learn more about his art:

“(…) the question is rather, whether you be capable of learning it? for Angling is something like Poetry, men are to be born so:

I mean with inclination to it, though both may be heightened by discourse and practice; but he that hopes to be a good Angler must not only bring an inquiring, searching, observing wit, but he must bring a large measure of hope and patience, and a love and propensity to the art itself; but having once got and practiced it, then doubt not but Angling will prove to be so pleasant, that it will prove to be like virtue, a reward to itself.”

(Walton, 1889, p. 26)

The writer compares the human inclination to the act of fishing to the inclination that involves a poet in writing his poems, as something belonging to the self and only needing practice to prosper. Bringing the ancient debate up to surface again, Walton wonders on the question whether men in this world are happier in the act of contemplation or rather in action, offering in the end his personal conclusions:

“Concerning which two opinions I shall forbear to add a third by declaring my own, and rest myself contented in telling you, my very worthy friend, that both these meet together, and do most properly belong to the most honest, ingenuous, quiet, and harmless art of Angling.

And first, I shall tell you that what some have observed, and I have found it to be a real truth, that the very sitting by the river’s side is not only the quietest and fittest place for contemplation, but will invite an Angler to it; and this seems to be maintained by the learned Peter Du Moulin, who, in his discourse of the Fulfilling of Prophecies, observes, that when God intended to reveal any future events or high notions to his

prophets, he then carried them either to the desert or the sea-shore (...), and there make them fit for revelation.”

(Walton, 1889, pp. 29-30)

In the same line of thoughts, Andrew Greig meditates on the presence of mankind on a bankside while fishing at the loch of the Green Corrie:

“As an hour and then another passed, a sense of the Green Corrie and its lochan began to register, like the image emerging on a Polaroid. Being locked in simple, repetitive activity allows the attention to split, the way you can sometimes do with your eyes. One eye is focused out on the water and light; the other drifts inward, to another hillside, another time.”

(Greig, 2010, p. 104)

Human entire existence starts therefore to assume a new meaning when inserted in such places and, as Greig’s friend Malcolm Duff once told him, now “it’s about the right kind of waiting [...] Attentive, open, neither impatient nor resigned. Just being there, alert, eyes focused yet looking behind the surface” (Greig, 2010, p. 112). Greig’s trip to Assynt and to the loch of the Green Corrie comes along with a great number of thoughts in the author’s mind, and the image of this outward-inward reflection is repetitively found in his works. Again, while looking at MacCaig’s favourite loch, Greig writes:

“Light on water, cloud reflection and sunlight broken on the water. I am beginning to sense the depth of this fluid body, feel the weight of this corrie. Where we are, where this is,

gradually becomes clear. This place is absorbing us. At its lures sink, we are perhaps as much fished as fishing.”

(Greig, 2010, p. 113)

Poorly appreciated at first by the new-comers, the loch of the Green Corrie shows its true nature, and minute after minute it captures Greig’s mind: it’s not about the missing fish, nor about the particularly beautiful landscape around it or its colour, but rather it becomes the stage in which they find themselves to learn how to find balance while standing on the rock of existence, “at the intersection of the world outside and the one within” (Greig, 2010, p. 223). Walton’s above-cited answer to the meditation/action debate comes back strongly into Greig’s pages, giving to the act of fishing the extraordinary opportunity to put men in the position to find their place in the natural landscape and into life itself. As the fisherman of *The Complete Angler* says, “you must endure worst luck some time, or you will never make a good Angler” (Walton, 1889, p. 84), Greig also reports his companion Andy’s sense of developing the right kind of mindset to properly enjoy and benefit of the act of angling. The author indeed writes:

“Still, *if you don’t enjoy fishing when you don’t catch a fish, you shouldn’t be a fisherman*”¹³.

Andy reels in his line. ‘it’ll get good again later,’ he confides as he opens his flask.

We sprawl on the little promontory, eat flapjacks and drink tea and look at the loch.

The sun reappears, the cool wind drops. For a while we just recline and look and no one

¹³ *Italics* in the original.

says anything much.
We are, I believe, entirely happy.”

(Greig, 2010, pp. 106-7)

Again, the concept of happiness emerges, and again, it comes associated with the quiet, meditating condition of a peaceful Angler. The impression on this place leaves a big mark in Greig’s mind and some time after his first trip to the loch of the Green Corrie, he explains his urge to go back again only by himself:

“Perhaps what brought me back was an outstanding issue of two fish – the one we caught and forgot to eat, and the one I did not catch.

Eight years had passed since that expedition with Andy and Peter. There had been time to take some things to heart; the rest was forgotten. What remained was less accurate but more truthful. Those few Assynt days had acquired the heightened clarity and resonance of familiar faces seen from the rail as the ferry moves off. [...] It sounded like a dinner gong to a hungry man. the Loch of the Green Corrie wasn’t finished with me.”

(Greig, 2010, p. 244)

After eight years from his first time at the loch, Greig writes about his second impressions of the place. Diving once again into its surface, Greig emerges with a renewed sense of presence in that landscape and a rediscovered meaning to his mission:

“In front of me is a lot of water in a hollow.
This morning in Lochinver Cathel MacLeod had protested that the corrie *is* green, but my overall impression is still of grey. Steep grey

scree slopes, loose rock, coarse turf. Only to the east does the corrie open, and even there is broken bedrock Lewisian gneiss, a long grey arm stretched out to the hills.

It is austere, indifferent, problematic, unyielding, making no concessions at all.

For months this place has been growing in me. Waking in the morning, or sitting in a shed in Edinburgh, I have felt its presence. I would lie awake at night picturing moon and stars reflected on its surface, with no one there to see.

It is not just the dead that accompany us through life; certain places come with us too. The Loch of the Green Corrie had become my Rorschach blob, my oracle, my revelator, its meaning expanding like rings after the fish has gone.

Now here it is in its unadorned reality, just a ragged stretch of water in a bare place.

I look over the lochan, wondering how to resolve this. If the world were indeed just water in a hollow, it would be a poor thing, and we an excrescence crawling upon it. I know some see it so, and the wonder is not more have killed themselves. Then again, if we saw only the inner, transformed thing, we would become detached from this world, float away like an untethered helium balloon high over vale and hill, singing praises in squeaky high voices.

Let's try this: the gap between water in a hollow and the thing we love cannot be closed. The gap between inner and outer world is the condition of being human. We are born in that tension and we live by it."

(Greig, 2010, pp. 257-8)

Appearing in many of Greig's works, the image of the reflected surface – or, the mirror – as the only place of truth appears in these pages in the form of the light reflected in the waters of the Green Corrie. As the author himself declares:

“In part this lochan works as a mirror, as a lover does. But as useful and as shocking is when it, or she or he, refuses to play along with our narcissism. Its otherness is its truest teaching, a remainder that though we give the world meaning by taking it into ourselves, that is not its meaning.”

(Greig, 2010, pp. 258-9)

The questions on the nature of this surface, on the meaning of what is to be found on the other side, and on the reality of the image reflected fill Greig's pages of his book *At the loch of the Green Corrie*. The repeated action of *casting* and *retrieving* is what gives rhythm to the book and it becomes the mean by which the author tells the reader about his relationship with the natural landscape and its people. Coming across some of MacCaig's poems and past experiences, Greig feels that “now being in Assynt is like fishing inside his head” (Greig, 2010, p. 46). This same conclusion is reported also in the documentary dedicated to Norman MacCaig – *Fishing for poetry* (2010) – in which the protagonists, struggling to fish under difficult and cold circumstances, find comfort in their simple presence in that one loch, as if they were able, in this way, to encounter the lost poet again. The hook, as a consequence, becomes a sort of connecting bridge to and from the reflected world

underneath, and the act of *casting* becomes a way of bringing the world's past history, people and experiences back to its surface. However, the whole time Andrew Greig seems to tell his reader of *At the Loch of the Green Corrie* that, no matter how or where or when, every person must fish for their own fish, because "in the end I am not them. I am just myself" (Greig, 2010, p. 316). In this way, the whole book incorporates the quest from which it had started from, leaving the reader with the feeling of having caught a much bigger fish than the one Greig was searching for.

As a kind of coda to this chapter on the book *At the loch of the Green Corrie*, it seems to be useful to offer Greig's conclusive poem dedicated to Norman MacCaig and to the place that initiated all this – '*The loch of the Green Corrie*' (Greig, 2010, p. 321):

The loch of the Green Corrie

(for Norman MacCaig)

We came to know it, a little.

*It kept its best fish hidden
under glassy water, behind silver backing
of the long day's clouds.*

*We cast and retrieve by that mirror
till the Green Corrie reflected only
three bodies of light,*

*filling and emptying themselves.
That place hooked us by the heart.
We were landed and released.*

*Now something of us reclines among those hills
and the chuckle of its water
runs among the world.*

Let the image and this poem's words accompany the reader to the next section, which tries to dig deeper into Greig's understanding of human presence inside our Planet and its natural environment, as well as his personal thoughts and interpretation on the meaning of life itself.

CHAPTER 4

ANDREW GREIG'S REPRESENTATION OF THE HUMAN PRESENCE INTO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Ecocritical interlacements

As the present discourse proceeds, it becomes of interest for the present discourse to dig deeper into Andrew Greig's literary interpretation of the human presence into the natural landscape itself. For this reason, it has been considered meaningful to investigate this question through the lens of Ecocriticism. As shown in Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra's article about Anglophone fiction 'Climate change in Literature and Literary Criticism' (2011), nowadays climate change penetrates the literary world as a cultural phenomenon. Especially since the 1970s onwards, a great number of fictional responses are produced with the "effort to depict the scale of complexity of climate change" (Trexler & Johns-Putra, 2011, p. 16). As a consequence, ecocriticism has started to enlarge and underline "the way we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production" (Garrard, 2004), finally reintroducing nature back on the agenda and sharing the "fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Fromm & Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix). A simple definition of ecocriticism can be found in the same book,

entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader*, in which the authors take an earth-centred approach to literary studies by analysing the relationship between literature and the physical environment, negotiating between the human and the non-human, and expanding the notion of “the world” to include the entire *ecosphere*.

The first to ever coin the word *Ecocriticism* was William Rueckert in 1978¹⁴ - a term that meant “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (Fromm & Glotfelty, 1996, p. 107) and that later gained the purpose of highlighting the human awareness of a period of environmental crisis. This new movement came with a strong statement of novelty and change in direction in the literary criticism of the second half of the XX century. Nevertheless, it cannot be completely separated from the way in which Romantics dealt with nature and also from its connection with the human society. Originating in the Latin and Greek pastoral writings, Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and other major writers, were descriptive and they represented nature as a sentimental escapism from society. Indeed, the view that emerges from their poems is deeply subjective, depriving nature of its real characteristics, as well as its set of problems.

Initially associated with mainly science fiction production, from the beginning of the 1970s and with the rise of the studies of ecocriticism, the problem of environmental crisis had been introduced in a wider scenario, resulting in a great production of near-future narratives, Gaia-like prospects,

¹⁴ Read the whole essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in *The Ecocriticism reader*, Fromm & Glotfelty (ed.), 1996, pp. 105-123.

and other future-life adaptation novels, in order to deal through different genres with the apocalyptic threat of global warming. However, as depicted in Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra's article, many writers of "literary" fiction have started to set their novels "in worlds that are obviously climate-changed by human irresponsibility" even though "not explicitly linked to the current anthropogenic crisis" (Trexler & Johns-Putra, 2011, p. 8), dealing not only with environmental disasters set in the future, but also with the "emphasis on climate change as an ethical dilemma for the present" (Trexler & Johns-Putra, p. 9).

Generally including a broader and more capacious quantity of literary research, ecocriticism slowly flourished by overcoming the complexities of how to connect climate and literature and how to manage the deviant understanding of nature of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, until managing to reconsider climate change "in its very heart – nature and place" (Trexler & Johns-Putra, p. 20). In the same article, ecocriticism is described in its three main stands: as an attention drawer to the general environmental issues, as an interdisciplinary studies tool, "exploring the ties between literature and ecology, human and physical geography, biology, and evolutionary sciences" (Trexler & Johns-Putra, p. 19), and lastly, as a tracer of the presence of nature inside literary works. Special consideration is given, therefore, to the role of literature and language, representing the main source in which scientific ideas and environmental issues are argued and exposed. As stated by John Burnside's article's title itself – "A science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology" – poetry becomes now a new

means to view the world in its scientific elements as well:

“It would be too simple to say that the work of science is to investigate how things are in the world, and the work of poetry is to remind us of this separate mystery—the fact of a world, the sense of wonder that anything exists at all—but it would not be entirely mistaken. At the same time, it would be absurd to suggest that the scientist is always a scientist, the poet always a poet: we all have to deal with the *how* and the *that*. Knowing the *how*, and celebrating the *that*, it seems to me, is the basis of meaningful dwelling: what interests me about ecology and poetry is that, together, they make up a science of belonging, a discipline by which we may both describe and celebrate the ‘everything that is the case’ of the world, and so become worthy participants in a natural history.”

(Burnside, 2006, p. 92)

Within these words, John Burnside suggests a new approach to poetry writing in the contemporary natural environment, considering “the discipline of poetry as a slow, lyrical, and fairly tentative attempt to understand and describe a meaningful way of dwelling in this extraordinary world” (Burnside, 2006, p. 92), making it become, therefore, “a form of *scientia*, a technique for reclaiming the authentic, a method for reinstating the real, a politics of the actual” (Burnside, 2006, p. 95). As a final remark, the reader is reminded that poetry teaches us “a necessary awe”, stating that, “while science at its best seeks to reduce our ignorance, it cannot – and should not seek to – eliminate

mystery. The more we know, the more the mystery deepens. If poetry has a role in relation to science, it is to remind science of that universal truth” (Burnside, 2006, p. 95). Whereas Andrew Greig seems to verge towards the unknown and the *otherness of things*, John Burnside writes in a similar way:

“We know ourselves by knowing the world: ‘looking outward,’ he says, ‘we experience the one who does the seeing’¹⁵. In our moments of intimacy we see that reality is continuous, seamless, and inclusive, and that the world is both given and imagined.”

(Burnside, 2006, p. 96).

As a consequence to these observations, it seems necessary to consider the present ecocritical thoughts when dealing with the concept of natural environment in literary texts that include such an important encounter between nature and humans, as Andrew Greig’s works do.

4.1.1 Nature and contemporary Scottish literature

According to researcher Louisa Gairn, since the second half of the nineteenth century, the question of “dwelling” and “belonging” has most fundamentally suggested the value of the science and philosophy of ecology specifically into the work of Scottish writers and poets. In her book *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* (2007), the author introduces

¹⁵ John Burnside here is referring to the poet Mark Doty’s words in his work *Still life with oysters and lemon*, 2001.

how “writing about the natural world is a vital component of a diverse Scottish literature” (Gairn, 2007, p. 1) and tries to demonstrate how mid-nineteenth Scottish writers and thinkers¹⁶ have contributed to the development of international ecological theories while creating their own ecological discourse. By implication, the affiliation that contemporary Scottish writers share is a re-centred vision of nature and rural environments, redefining the notion of *nature writing* into something new that is able to mix science with art. At the same time, Gairn underlines the difficulty of Scottish writers to belong to an increasingly urban and globalised world, where the desire for escape and exile into wilderness still persists and the notion of *home* maintains a tension between the act of staying and the search for a different place, linked to the idea of a solitary *non-place* in a condition of a modern cultural identity loss¹⁷.

Furthermore, in his essay “Ownership and Access in the work of John Muir, John Buchan and Andrew Greig” (2005), Terry Gifford tries to explore the Scottish Highlands that populate the authors’ works, arguing that “nature cannot be conceived except through the frames of culture” (Gifford, 2005, p. 1), highlighting the “confused and complex issues of private ownership and restricted access in Scotland’s wild lands” (Gifford, 2005, p. 24). The discussion is meant to underline the importance of access to the wild land over its ownership, bringing to light again what Andrew Greig and

¹⁶ Such as Edwin Muir, John Buchan, biologist Patrick Geddes, George Mackay Brown, Naomi Mitchison, Norman MacCaig, Hugh MacDiarmid, Edwin Morgan, Nan Shephard, the poet Ian Hamilton Finlay, and the younger Alan Warner, together with many other names that gave shape to the literary production of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

¹⁷ See Gairn, 2007.

his friends discussed in his journeys to the Scottish Highlands about fishing permits, and the above reported community-owned-lands controversy. While going through Muir's, Buchan's and Greig's works, Terry Gifford affirms that "what a reconception of 'the Highlands' might offer is a 're-creational' healing experience in which culture is attuned to nature and nature is perceived as including culture" (Gifford, 2005, p. 33).

Moreover, in the introduction of Jos Smith's book *The new nature writing: Rethinking the Literature of Place* (2017), the author calls on Richard Mabey, "an author whose work has consistently pioneered new ways of thinking about landscape, nature, place, culture and the range of interconnections that all of these share" (Smith, 2017, p. 1) in order to support his words that "culture isn't the opposite or contrary of nature. It's the interface between us and the non-human world, our species' semi-permeable membrane" (Smith, 2017, p. 1). Here, the human body is, once again, compared to a *membrane*, which has the specific role to absorb and mediate between the inner life to the outer reality of things, culture, language, and natural elements. In 2008, Jason Cowley first created the name of "New Nature Writing" with the purpose of opposing this new way of writing about nature to the old pastoral and romantic traditions and with the aim of building a new understanding of the concept of 'Nature' itself:

This sense of 'kindredness' and ethical concern for wildlife has been amplified since the popularization of environmental thought by groups like Friends of the Earth from the 1970s onwards and the often local *and* global

register of such feelings is one of the driving factors that has made the affiliation between nature and nation, even landscape and nation, highly problematic. However, critical thought from across a range of disciplines has more recently brought about deeper changes that affect the way we understand the 'nature' of nature writing, suggesting ways in which the 'New' of 'New Nature Writing' ought to qualify a new understanding of 'Nature' itself as well as a new form of writing.

(Smith, 2017, p. 9).

In its complex title, this book attempts to redefine a new contemporary approach to nature writing, in which Andrew Greig tries to give his own contribution in the development of his prose and poetry, while trying to constantly escape the sentimental commonplaces and pastoral clichés as well.

Returning to Louisa Gairn's book *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* (2007), it is possible to capture how the author addresses the interlacements between Scottish literature and ecology even further:

"Modern Scottish views of 'ecology' are not simply the appropriation of Romantic discourses but are attempts to find new ways of thinking about, representing and relating to the natural world."

(Gairn, 2007, p. 5).

For Louisa Gairn, this has created "the possibility of a new form of poetry which can 'realise' the natural world [...] something which has proved central to post war Scottish poetics" (Gairn, 2007, p. 5). Again, she writes:

“Scottish writers have been engaging with the science and philosophy of ecology since its inception. Modern Scottish literature constitutes a distinctive heritage of ecological thought which is both vitally relevant to international environmentalism and central to Scottish culture.”

(Gairn, 2007, p. 10).

A new idea of nature and the self seems to appear again from these words, once again highlighting the profound effects of human existence in the Scottish landscape, developing the thought that the human body is now permeable and an integral part of the natural environment:

“The new perspectives afforded by ecological thought suggest a new ‘conception of the human being not as a composite entity made up of separable but complementary parts, such as body, mind and culture, but rather as a singular locus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships’”

(Gairn, 2007, p. 6).

This new way of contemplating the presence of the human species on the Planet Earth, together with the ideas of thinkers such as James Lovelock and historians of the Scottish setting, has helped to deeply merge literature and ecology in the Scottish landscape in Louisa Gairn’s discourse, transforming the last fifty years in the perfect frame for the expansion of diverse ecocritical responses.

4.1.2 Nature and Andrew Greig

Reading through Andrew Greig's pages and personal life experiences, his attachment to familiar places and things is juxtaposed to his attraction for the unknown and the discovery of new physical and cultural environments. Orkney – like Assynt to Norman MacCaig – comes to represent the author's safe place of retirement from the city life and, at the same time, it becomes the place where he rediscovers himself as a man and a writer. The unknown, on the other side, is searched through the concept of a *quest*, which takes him to different places on the Earth and to new encounters, as well as to never-ending self-meditations and self-revelations. In his SRB Interview, the author declares his attachment to the process rather than the realization of his quests:

“I am drawn to quests, in writing and in life. They satisfy some basic need for meaning and purpose, and gift us brings heightened experience and new perspectives, unpredicted encounters and consequences. The goal – Ithaca, the Grail, romantic love, to sail to Cava and back, find a loch and land a fish, or climb the Mustagh Tower – is essential, yet the meaning and value reside in the going rather than the getting there.”

(Greig, 2014, par. 24)

This is carried out through an almost resigned acceptance of the limitedness of human presence on Earth, together with a general awareness of the fact that the Planet is not moulded for mankind alone and forever. The overall sense of multiplicity which transpires from Greig's pages returns

the idea of the author's identification outside the national borders, including the countries and cultures that have built the foundations of his life. Nonetheless, Greig also seems to admit the complexity and the dangers involved in that same sense of global belonging, especially highlighting its environmental consequences, although avoiding a particularly apocalyptic approach. His attitude to these dangerous and threatening places seems to represent the intention of the author to be immersed in them without any feeling of control or security given by the anthropocentric idea of human presence over the natural environment. With a repetitive word pun, Greig unfolds in his poem '*On falling*' (Greig, 2011, p. 44) also the fear in the speaking voice of not being able to fall *in*; that is, to get past the surface of things. Only when people allow the eye to see on the other side of the ice, then "the eye recoils from nothing | All things shine from within | You never know fear again" (Greig, 2011, p. 44, ll. 27-29). The voice continues stating that, even though these men can seem insane, and their reasons inexplicable and dangerous, "their eyes are calm | surviving smoothly in a monstrous environment" (Greig, 2011, p. 44, ll. 30-32). More is also given in another poem of his poetry collection *Getting Higher*, entitled '*Interlude on Mustagh Tower*':

"In these high places we are melting out
of all that made us rigid; our ice-screws
hang loose on the fixed ropes to the Cul.
[...]
Men on ice, going nowhere and laughing
at everything we cannot see but know
is there – among the cloud, on the Col,

a hand of some sort is tightening our screws.”

(Greig, 2011, p. 79).

In these lines, the physical as well as the spiritual submersion of the characters in the landscape is easily recognisable, accompanied by the implied advice of the speaking voice to let the place and the bad weather conditions take over the characters, who can only admit their own mortal and peripheral existence in that menacing environment.

Greig’s writings bring the reader to a more personal closeness to nature and landscape through the filters of language, cultural and personal influences, in order to re-establish his scientific outlook and personal interpretation of life on Earth. The author himself answers in an interview:

“I am not very hopeful for the environmental future. [...] I take comfort in Deep Time – this planet, lovely as it is, was not made for our comfort and convenience. It is not inherently stable; we just happen to have had a fortunate period this last twenty thousand years. We have been able to mess it up, and I’m not sure human nature and political forces will allow us to sort or moderate the speed of change. Nevertheless, it, our planet and our being alive on it at this moment, is a great joy and Good.”

(Greig, personal communication, July 23,
2022)¹⁸

The author seems to draw near the position of Deep ecology

¹⁸ See the interview in its entirety in Appendix C.

theories, especially responding to their demand of recognition of the intrinsic value in nature, while asserting “the shift from a human-centred to a nature-centred system of values” (Garrard, 2004, pp. 21, ch. 2). On the other hand, Greig’s emerging hope for that “balanced presence of the human” (Greig, 2022) on Earth deflects his discourse from Ecofeminist’s belief in the fact that “the notion of balance in ecosystems is scientifically highly problematic, and ecologists no longer assert that biological diversity is necessarily linked to stability” (Garrard, 2004, pp. 27, ch. 2). Moreover, the concept of wilderness, closely developed in the eighteenth century non-fictional authors, is represented in an oppositional standpoint, in which Greig discusses the concept of being in nature not as an escape in an uncontaminated, non-human land, but as a quest for truly belonging *in* it. Using Andrew Greig’s own words, “I’ve escaped not from life, but out into it” (Greig, 2010, p. 269). In Greig’s poem ‘*Back Again*’, the presence of the climbers is mingled even more with the natural landscape of the Himalayan mountains:

“All day snow sank in the billy,
was boiled, drunk, peed, replenished
as we passed the mountain through us.”

(Greig, 2011, p. 78, ll. 13-15)

It is possible to recognise Andrew Greig’s longing for the outer world in all of his works; however, the author dedicates an entire poem entitled ‘*Quest*’ in his poetry collection *Getting Higher* (2011), in which he ponders on what people can carry to those high places:

“We must wonder how
we can bear ourselves with any honour
into high places, following our betters.
(It was a gesture to no one living,
a homage to homage itself.)
Bearing gifts in hands that shook,
carried up in one that did not,
for those says we were
a net that lands nothing,
rods bending over
the breaking light.”

(Greig, 2011, p. 205, ll. 6-16).

At the same time, these people are pushed by the desire of the unknown, together with the fear that accompanies these experiences, as finally expressed in the poem ‘*To get higher*’:

“What form of life is it
that uphaults itself
out of its element
to heights where the sun burns
and lungs heave,
to thoughts unnatural and places
inhospitable
to countless lives lost by accident or design?
Climbing into life
or out of it?”

(Greig, 2011, p. 63, ll. 11-19)

This ending question finds one of its answers in the following lines of the same poem, in which Greig delivers again his intuition about the fact that the Western Romantic idea of escapism into nature must be turned into a new way of living, opposed to those who “yearn for our destruction | so that they can put their shame to sleep | and yawning climb

the stairs to bed | too little alive to ever be dead.” (Greig, 2011, p. 63, ll. 30-33). Andrew Greig ends the poem beautifully, highlighting his passion for the act of walking or simply being in those places; not for the pleasure of stand on the peak nor for the successful return, not even for the outer world anymore, but for the mountain reflected underneath the ice:

“I turn my wayward gaze
to the ground beneath by boot;
thinking not of peaks, I loot
them at every turning of the way.
In here and now no step is up or down,
or in pain and hope and joy I go
until I love but do not linger on
each footstep in the snow.”

(Greig, 2011, p. 65, ll. 2-9).

Returning to his poem ‘*Back Again*’, the same image is found to interpret an even higher metaphorical meaning:

“and we believe
the true scale of things
is the entire mountain
hung mirrored in our shades.”

(Greig, 2011, p. 78, ll. 9-12).

As the critic Roderick Watson comments in the introduction of *The Polygon* edition of the poetry collection *Getting Higher* (2011) while talking about the final ‘*Western Swing*’ section:

“The return to Scotland in Part V is a return to the everyday; the quest in exotic foreign lands – the up and down disco, indeed – is over, and the company has dispersed. Yet

this is still a reconnection with the spirit, even (or perhaps especially) to be found in the mundane corners of the East Neuk of Fife. The journey out (which is also an inward journey) has been followed by a return, perhaps (in Elliot's words) to know the place for the first time. These are the 'debatable lands' of the Border, but also the debatable place of Scotland itself and what Scotland will come to mean to those of us who live here."

(Greig, 2011, p. 12)

In the same way that Greig's journey out allows him to go back and see his homeland with a renewed eye, the experience in the Himalayan mountains helps him blend the external eye with the mind within, or the external presence with the image reflected in the ice underneath, as described in Greig's poem *'Reflections on the Mirror'*:

"This is the haunting edge of glass;
The shadow of yourself
Peering from the other side.
[...]
World within mind
Mind within world
A shift of the light

and the self is uncurled

Out in the mountains
the Mind problem is em-Bodied
in volcanic form:
if every peak is ideally projected
as on some inner silent screen,
what melancholy being is this travelling eye
that ants a way across the icescape?"

(Greig, 2010, p.50, ll. 1-19)

Once again, the author underlines his desire to see what is behind the visible, almost pitying the superficial eye that is not able to glimpse underneath the surface of things.

4.2 The act of Walking

While this dissertation verges towards its end, it comes natural to the observer to find a common thread in the analysed works of the author, as well as in the thoughts brought up by the above-named critics, who have looked at the connections between Scotland, poetry and ecology; that is, the very act of walking through the landscape. As it has been underlined in his poetry collection *Getting Higher* (2011), the simple act of walking makes itself protagonist of the characters' adventures, bringing them to far places and back home to the Scottish hills. At the same time, in his memoir book *At the loch of the Green Corrie* (2010), walking lays at the very basis of Andrew Greig's quest of MacCaig's loch, giving the protagonists the space and the time to walk through a landscape engraved of old personal memories, historical events and cultural references. In his essay "A science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology" (2006), John Burnside tries to give his readers a suggestion about the very same act of walking:

"What I would also suggest is that, on foot, we become ecologists because, walking, we have the potential to see the world as it is, not in virtual glimpses through a VCR or a car windscreen, but as the here and now, the

immediate, the intimate ground of our being.”

(Burnside, 2006, p. 97)

As he continues, the discourse seems to offer even more the same ecological viewpoint encountered in Greig’s works:

“I would maintain that the very fact of walking—or rather, of being a human body exposed, moving or standing in the open—is an essentially *ecological* act, [...] walking takes us away from the machine and back to the world, and so to the real.”

(Burnside, 2006, p. 98)

This attachment to the real surfaces again as a human urgent necessity to be able to return to the ancient and more profound understanding of nature, for many considered lost in the contemporary age. In a passage in Greig’s book *At the loch of the Green Corrie* (2010), the following words suggest that same almost shocking awareness of being a human body exposed to a wild environment:

“The sky was star-studded and deep. The stars do not twinkle at altitude; there are so many one cannot recognise familiar constellations. They are just there, fixed, unfaltering.

So many many stars. I never felt so boundaryless as under that Karakoram night sky. I looked back at the stars and then it began to happen, that shift I was to remember fourteen years later in a tent in Assynt, and retrieve now in my writing shed in suburban Edinburgh.

Abruptly, the stars were *down there*. I was looking down on them from a vast height. I felt giddy, looking down into that vertiginous drop. At any moment I would fall off the Earth, into space. I spread my hands on the ground, but there was nothing to grip there. Nothing to hold on to anywhere. Nothing to do but to wait to be sucked down and out, nothing for it but to fall.

I lay, awe-struck and helpless, until I had to surrender, and I fell into the night.”

(Greig, 2010, pp. 74-75).

In these pages, while the protagonists are held back into the Karakoram mountains and forced to spend the night out, Greig plunges his readers into his mind, returning a sense of void of a lost body into space and highlighting again the feeling of instability of the presence of humans on Earth. Nevertheless, it would be incomplete to discuss the present topic without making any reference to the renowned American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)¹⁹. Beginning from the fact that he also analyses the act of walking in the homonymous essay “Walking” (1862), Thoreau represents one of the major figures of American nature writing and was a convinced advocate of transcendentalism together with his friend and mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). Building his life on the values of simplistic living, spirituality, self-reliance and on the importance of nature, Thoreau’s lifestyle gives way to a

¹⁹ For the complete biography, read *The Winged life, The poetic voice of Henry David Thoreau*, edited and with the commentaries of Robert Bly, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1986, pp. 141-145.

new understanding of the presence of men into the natural environment, particularly thanks to his most celebrated book *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (1854), in which he tries to find the human's role in the world and to expose his personal understanding of the meaning of life.

In his SRB Interview, the writer Andrew Greig affirms that the language he uses in his writings is the result of a mix of "Standard Scottish English, with additional Doric, Lallans, an awareness of Gaelic, and a dose of American from poetry, songs and films" (Greig, 2014, par. 28), underlining his plausible encounter with Thoreau's poems and their messages. Thoreau's writings, therefore believed to be among Andrew Greig's influential readings, reveal his transcendental ideas, as well as turning him into one of the agents of birth of contemporary environmental movements in the USA and in all over the world.

As Lawrence Buell writes in his book *The Environmental Imagination – Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the formation of American Culture* (1995) when referring to Nature's Personhood, "one of the dramatic developments in postromantic thinking about nature has been the recline and revival of kinship between nonhuman and human" (Buell, 1995, p. 180), and tries to make sense to that otherwise lack of hope deriving from renouncing anthropocentrism. In the same way, Greig's character of the Heretical Buddha justifies this conclusion in his poem '*Lights up dim*' by saying that "Anthropocentrism makes you blind, | a kind | of beating your own trumpet." (Greig, 2010, p. 97, ll. 14-16).

Returning to Thoreau's essay "Walking" (1862) in specific, it is possible to recognise in it the author's familiar passage from human civilisation to natural wild environments, together with his clear necessity of being absorbed in them. As Greig's awareness of being a body exposed to nature grows thicker when he finds himself in the Himalayan mountains, Thoreau writes: "Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him" (Thoreau, 2016, p. 43), until he can finally state that "in short, all good things are wild and free" (Thoreau, 2016, p. 43), affirming that to feel truly alive one should be able to find comfort in the wild. At the same time, nature seems to obtain its own persona, growing relentlessly in a world indifferent to human presence. Here Thoreau praises 'the Walkers', for whom "no wealth can buy the requisite leisure, freedom, and independence which are the capital in this profession" (Thoreau, 2016, p. 9). These people are, for the author, the ones who can still find the connection to the real in being out into the Wild, so to declare his famous motto that "in Wildness is the preservation of the World" (Thoreau, 2016, p. 31). This same reconnection to the real is found also in Greig's book *At the loch of the Green Corrie* when the author talks about the relationship with the loch and its imaginary reflection in his mind:

"it is time to reconnect to the real thing. Which, whatever they say, does exist. Even if it evades you whenever you open your mouth."

(Greig, 2011, p. 251)

Again, the necessity of finding the truth and the real is expressed by the author in the relationship between the human and the nonhuman, and he only seems to doubt his ability to find the right words to describe it. The same sentence is evoked by Roderick Watson when he, in his introduction to the *Polygon* edition of the book *Getting Higher* (2010), writes that “here, too, the key is to explore the relationship between being and landscape. Or rather, the puzzle of being in landscape and yet somehow *not* in it, which is where we all find ourselves, as thinking beings cast into the world” (Greig, 2010, p. 12). This relation is also similarly and beautifully described by the contemporary Norwegian writer Erling Kagge in his book *Walking* (2018):

“The more I walk, the less I feel the distinction between body, mind and the environment around me. The internal and external worlds overlap. At that point, I am no longer an *observer* looking at nature, my whole body is involved. Nature and the body are made of the same substances.”²⁰

(Kagge, 2018, p. 103)

The act of walking appears essential for linking the human body to the actual world, mixing the two and creating new relations between the inner self and the external natural environment. Robert Bly also comments on this in his book *The Winged Life, The poetic voice of Henry David Thoreau* (1986), arguing Thoreau’s acceptance of the word of nature not as a “fallen word, but on the contrary a veil for the divine world” (Bly, 1986, p. 109) that trains the observer to see

²⁰ Personal translation from Italian ed.

through the eye, and not just *with* it. For Thoreau, too, the observer needs to move beyond the external single vision in order to “glimpse the divine energy in each thing we see [...] and become aware of a light in and around the squirrel, the ant, the woodchuck, the hawk, that belongs to *them* and not to the eye observing or the brain producing words. The human mind, when it is in its own deeps, shares that light” (Bly, 1986, pp. 109-110).

At last, Thoreau strongly declares that “I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least – and it is commonly more than that – sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements.” (Thoreau, 2016, p. 9). Despite his complete dedication to nature, critics have argued the incompleteness of Thoreau’s appreciation of it, which was based only in the human experience in nature and not in nature itself, as written in Philip Cafaro’s book *Thoreau’s Living Ethics* (2004):

“‘Walking’ gives detailed advice for how to deepen our experience of nature. Yet it would be foolish to focus solely on improving the walker, while failing to preserve the landscape she walks through, just as it would be a mistake to locate all value in human experience and none in wild nature itself”.

(Cafaro, 2004, p. 164)

Andrew Todd Marcus also writes in his introduction “On Thoreau, Walking, & Nature” (2003) about Thoreau’s ethics of the act of walking, which gives the walker not the direction where to walk, but the knowledge on how to walk, therefore

claiming nature's role in the development of the human consciousness rather than its natural independence.

Even if Thoreau can be interpreted and criticised under different lights, his intention to preserve the wildness of nature remains one of the major characteristics that can be found at the basis of today's ecological thoughts. As clearly stated in their words, the above-named authors' share the necessity of *being out into the open*, which seems to be the primary condition to experience the world and participate to the *real*, trying in this way to find that balanced presence of men on Earth, in which the author Andrew Greig finds comfort and hope for the future of humans on this Planet.

CONCLUSIONS

The present chapter will briefly summarise the main findings of the research on the relationship between the human presence and the natural environment in Andrew Greig's book *At the loch of the Green Corrie* (2010) and his poetry collection *Getting Higher* (2011), in order to support the thesis that it is possible to find a strong link between these two seemingly oppositional entities within his pages, which gives shape to a profound interconnection with modern ecocritical theories. Moreover, it will try to analyse the weaknesses and limitations of the research, so to illustrate possible future directions for further investigation on the topic.

This study's purpose was to view the role of human presence in Andrew Greig's non-human landscapes. After looking at his memoir book and at his mountain poems, it is possible to state that nature has a central role in his understanding of the Scottish identity and culture in particular, transforming the natural landscape in which he walks through into the basic component of the diverse and unstable human development. In his book *At the loch of the Green Corrie* (2010), the reader discovers the Highlands culture and history by looking at the ruins of the past civilizations and watching the sedimentary rocks of Assynt. The animals and local plants that populate its pages allow the reader to discover stories and past anecdotes of people who lived and people who still inhabit those lands. Through

the homonymous loch itself, the figure of the poet Norman MacCaig comes to surface, bringing his people, language, and his passion for fishing with him. In this book, nature becomes a sort of filter that allows the uninformed eye to see the landscape with a renewed awareness of its many relations to the human presence in it. In the same manner, Andrew Greig's mountain poems collected in his book *Getting Higher* (2011), show a profound connection between the human and the non-human, trying to move beyond the metaphorical and into a more physical contact with a wild natural environment. The framework of the Karakoram mountains, first only imagined in the section "Men on Ice" and then through the actual adventures of the author of the following sections, becomes a sort of "Walden-like experience" of submersion into nature, which makes the author evaluate, once again, his position as a man on the Planet. As Greig himself meditates while casting his line out, this "is where we live, balancing precariously on this rock, at the intersection of the world outside and the world within" (Greig, 2010, p.223). The image of the mirror becomes, therefore, the common thread that accompanies the reader through his memoir book and his mountain poems, first found in the image reflected on the water of the loch and then in the shapes reflected on the ice. In both cases, the writer employs the image of the mirror to question the consistency of the real and the place of humans on Earth, which appears to be found right on that thin shore line between the image and its reflection, between the mind within and the world outside, so to restore to the human species the faculty and responsibility to find that "balanced

presence of men on Earth” (Greig, 2022).

All things considered, some weak traits of the research are identified in the scarcity of critical material on the author, due to the proximity to the present of his writings and the still developing field of ecocritical literary production. However, the willingness of the author Andrew Greig to personally give answers for the present dissertation allows to hope for further connections and dialogues, as well as for the possibility for critics of the field to analyse his many other works and so expand the understanding of his literary production.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Crossing the border, by Norman MacCaig:

I sit with my back to the engine, watching
the landscape pouring away out of my eyes.
I think I know where I'm going and have
some choice in the matter.

I think, too, that this was a country
of bog-trotters, moss-troopers,
fired ricks and rooftrees in the black night – glinting
on tossed horns and red blades.
I think of lives
bubbling into the harsh grass.

What difference now?
I sit with my back to the future, watching
time pouring away into the past. I sit, being
helplessly
lugged backwards
through the Debatable Lands of history, listening
to the execrations, the scattered cries, the
falling of rooftrees
in the lamentable dark.

Aunt Julia, by Norman MacCaig:

Aunt Julia spoke Gaelic
very loud and very fast.
I could not answer her –

I could not understand her.

She wore men's boots
when she wore any.
– I can see her strong foot,
stained with peat,
padding with the treadle of the spinningwheel
while her right hand drew yarn
marvellously out of the air.

Hers was the only house
where I've lain at night
in the absolute darkness
of a box bed, listening to
crickets being friendly.

She was buckets
and water flouncing into them.
She was winds pouring wetly
round house-ends.
She was brown eggs, black skirts
and a keeper of threepennybits
in a teapot.

Aunt Julia spoke Gaelic
very loud and very fast.
By the time I had learned
a little, she lay
silenced in the absolute black
of a sandy grave
at Luskentyre. But I hear her still, welcoming me
with a seagull's voice
across a hundred yards
of peatscapes and lazybeds
and getting angry, getting angry
with so many questions
unanswered.

APPENDIX B

Hallaig, by Sorely MacLean (translated by Seamus Heaney):

Time, the deer, is in Hallaig Wood

There's a board nailed across the window
I looked through to see the west
And my love is a birch forever
By Hallaig Stream, at her tryst

Between Inver and Milk Hollow,
somewhere around Baile-chuirn,
A flickering birch, a hazel,
A trim, straight sapling rowan.

In Screapadal, where my people
Hail from, the seed and breed
Of Hector Mor and Norman
By the banks of the stream are a wood.

To-night the pine-cocks crowing
On Cnoc an Ra, there above,
And the trees standing tall in moonlight -
They are not the wood I love.

I will wait for the birches to move,
The wood to come up past the cairn
Until it has veiled the mountain
Down from Beinn na Lice in shade.

If it doesn't, I'll go to Hallaig,
To the sabbath of the dead,
Down to where each departed
Generation has gathered.

Hallaig is where they survive,
All the MacLeans and MacLeads

Who were there in the time of Mac Gille Chaluim:
The dead have been seen alive,

The men at their length on the grass
At the gable of every house,
The girls a wood of birch trees
Standing tall, with their heads bowed.

Between The Leac and Fearnas
The road is plush with moss
And the girls in a noiseless procession
Going to Clachan as always

And coming boack from Clachan
And Suisnish, their land of the living,
Still lightsome and unheartbroken,
Their stories only beginning.

From Fearnas Burn to the raised beach
Showing clear in the shrouded hills
There are only girls congregating,
Endlessly walking along

Back through the gloaming to Hallaig
Through the vivid speechless air,
Pouring down the steep slopes,
Their laughter misting my ear

And their beauty a glaze on my heart.
Then as the kyles go dim
And the sun sets behind Dun Cana
Love's loaded gun will take aim.

It will bring down the lightheaded deer
As he sniffs the grass round the wallsteads
And his eye will freeze: while I live,
His blood won't be traced in the woods.

APPENDIX C

Personal communication with the author Andrew Greig (via e-mail), July 22, 2022:

Interviewer message: “Good day Mr. Greig, thank you in advance if you get to answer this message. My name is Gloria Rubin. I am an Italian university student and for my final dissertation I am currently involved in writing an ecocritical analysis of your works. In particular, I am concentrating on your book "At the loch of the Green Corrie". In order to write more accurately about the topic, it would be really interesting for me to understand even further your relationship with the natural landscape and have some of your personal thoughts about the way you enter nature and man and their interactions into your narrative. Even through your realistic and sometimes fatalistic eye (correct me if I'm wrong), reading your book has given me hope for a balanced presence of the human into the natural landscape and to be able to feel "the right size". Would you consider yourself to be hopeful for what the future holds, environmentally speaking?

You also give great importance to old languages and traditions, history, poets and writers of the past, and Scottish culture in general. Would you say that this adds to the image you want to make emerge of natural landscape? By merging all these elements, which idea of Nature do you think you wanted to transfer to us readers when you wrote "At the Loch of the Green Corrie"?

Thank you very much for your time, it would mean the world to me to be able to include and enrich my work with your own words.

My kindest regards,
Gloria.”

Andrew Greig: “Dear Gloria - your email has reached me in Orkney where I'm resting through the summer (pleasantly cool!). I had covid again recently and it has left me mentally and physically fatigued.

So I won't respond at length to your queries. I think your response to the Green Corrie is about what I intended and hoped. That 'balanced presence of the human' is good.

I am not very hopeful for the environmental future. I hope your generation may respond to it better than we have. I take some comfort in Deep Time - this planet, lovely as it is, was not made for our comfort and convenience. It is not inherently stable; we just happen to have had a fortunate period this last twenty thousand years. We have been able to mess it up, and I'm not sure human nature and political forces will allow us to sort or moderate the speed of change. Nevertheless, it, our planet and our being alive on it at this moment, is a great joy and Good.

I guess that's my position. I hope it goes well for you and yours and of course your dissertation! I'm so encouraged you and many others have responded so to this book. The Green Corrie gave me so much, and still does.

All best wishes,
Andrew Greig”

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