
Towards an Ecology of Encounter in Kathleen Jamie's Selected Poems

Asst. Prof. Anan Alkass Yousif, PhD
University of Baghdad/College of Arts/Dept.
of English
anan_alkassyousif@yahoo.com

Abstract

One of the global and crucial concerns of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the ecological preservation of the life-supporting system of the earth. It is considered one of the most important current studies that challenge the rapid degradation of the environment and wildlife.

The purpose of this paper is to explore Kathleen Jamie's (1962) vital ecological vision that she conveys through her ecopoetry and some of her nonfiction writings, arguing that developing ecological consciousness is crucial not merely to rediscover the value of natural world but also to realize that it is another form the human self. The paper also argues that ecological degradation as revealed by Jamie's ecopoetry paradoxically stands as the very reason that would foster the ecology of mind to observe the natural world as a valuable entity in itself. Jamie's literary output extends to generate citizens of the natural world, a world that is based on comprehending the interconnectedness and interdependence between people and their physical landscape. Otherwise, the contemporary individual would be inclined to live in self-isolation.

To examine Jamie's portrayal of the relationship between man and his environment, ecocriticism is employed as an interdisciplinary approach that emerged in the 1980s to interrogate man's patterns of relationships with nature, questioning the common notions of belonging and dwelling. In so doing, ecopoetry is demonstrated as essential in cultivating a new canon of nature poetry that promotes a maneuver beyond the politics of place and the limitation of nationhood.

Jamie is a prominent contemporary Scottish poet who endeavors not only to promote ecological consciousness but also to advocate a breakdown of all the barriers between the human and non-human world, man's individual 'I' and the assumed 'Otherness' of nature. It is the construction of a new poetic and ecological mode towards an ecology of encounter, a path towards empathy between man and nature that would render the former more human and the latter more natural.

**Towards an Ecology of Encounter in Kathleen Jamie’s Poetry
“God loved the birds and invented trees. Man loved the birds
and invented cages”. Jacques Deval (1895-1972)**

One of the global and crucial concerns of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is ecological¹ preservation of a life-supporting system of the earth. It is considered one of the most important current studies that challenge the rapid degradation of the environment and wildlife. Due to global warming, the effects of wars, the growth of technological pollution as well as the continuous deforestation, ecological crisis augmented into an ignorable human, social and cultural wrongdoing. No wonder that the impact of these factors on ecology plays an important role in affecting the human world, a matter which came to be of great interest in contemporary literature. Through literary works, this interdisciplinary approach, namely ecocriticism that emerged in the 1980s is dedicated to exploring the future of our earth and its relationship with man. It has formed an important method to raise ecological consciousness and explore man’s connection to the physical environment. It is that encounter between human and non-human worlds: flora, fauna, the land, and man. The objective of ecoliterature in general and ecopoetry, in particular, is not merely to revive the romantic spirit toward nature, but basically to motivate environmental awareness and deep understanding meaning of ecology. Knowing that ecology is derived from the Greek word *Öikologie*², meaning ‘house’, ‘dwelling’ or ‘environment’) is an essential start to apprehend how ecoliterature has evolved to explore ecological affiliation with human world/dwelling.

Analyzing literary works of ecowriters through employing ecocriticism stands now as a vital interdisciplinary approach to bring environmental or green studies forward. One of the crucial goals of this approach is also to regain the “undervalued genre of nature writing” (Glotfelty et al xxxi), accentuating the role of the poet in becoming a contributing factor to new environmental perspectives and

¹ As a discipline ecology is defined as "the totality or the patterns of relations between organisms and their environment" (Johnsen and Jorgenson 13). The living and non-living creatures are in a strong relationship with each other and the human world, which plays an important role both in their preservation and their destruction. For further information consult Johnsen, I. and S.E. Jorgensen. *Principles of Environmental Science and Technology*. New York: Elsevier, 1990.

² The term ecology was coined by the German zoologist, Ernst Haeckel in 1866. For more information consult Ayres, Peter G. *Shaping Ecology: The Life of Arthur Tansley*. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

a powerful voice for a better understanding of physical ecology and our human world.

Through employing ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary approach in examining Jamie's selected poems, the paper interrogates the common notions of belonging and dwelling, emphasizing the importance of cultivating citizenship of the natural world that goes beyond the politics of place and the limitation of nationhood. Jamie is a prominent contemporary Scottish poet who endeavors not only to promote ecological consciousness but also to advocate a breakdown of all the barriers between the human and non-human world, man's individual 'I' and the assumed 'Otherness' of nature. The functionality of ecopoetry is revealed as an important factor to construct a new ecological culture of encounter; an encounter that would lead to a committed responsibility towards environmental justice and renewal of the ecology of mind. That is to say, it is the construction of a new mode to see the natural world that man has distorted a path towards empathy between man and nature that would render the former more human and the latter more natural.

The emergence of ecoliterature during the 1980s led to the emergence of a wave of eco-poets such as the Australians Kath Walker (1920 – 1993) and Judith Wright (1915-2000), the Scottish John Burnside (1955-), Robin Robertson (1955-), Don Paterson (1963-), Kathleen Jamie (1962-), etc. Their eco-poetry responds to the contemporary environmental crisis and "enacts through language the manifold relationship between the human and the other-than-human world" (Fisher et al xxx). Their starting point is the environment itself as a value in itself rather than just an entity to objectify a beneficial source to man. In their works, man is seen as an inseparable part of nature whose 'Otherness' forms an integral portion of human corporal and ontological life.

Having this consciousness about the importance of the natural world and accepting its Otherness, man is capable of understanding that this 'Other' is another form of the human self without which he would live in self-isolation. In an interview, Jamie asserts: "I don't recognize the idea of 'the outdoors' or of 'nature'. WE are 'nature', in our anatomy and mortality. Regarding nature as other, different, an 'outdoors', an environment', speaks volumes about our alienation from ourselves" (Jamie *Findings* 2005). Being alienating from the natural world signifies being away from one's self, dwelling place or one's home. Judith Wright also states: "We must regenerate ourselves if we are to regenerate the earth. Our feelings and emotions must be engaged and engaged on a large scale" (qtd. in Rigby 173). Embracing the environment as an entity inseparable from ourselves begins with expanding our mode of envisioning the earth and requires a rethinking

of the stereotypical ideas of nature writings. In this regards, Burnside states:

I think poetry imagines, at the same time as it observes a world. The world I imagine and observe begins with ‘the natural’, proceeds by exploring the lines we draw between ourselves and that world – why? where are they? why are they there and not somewhere else? – and each in asking questions about dwelling, that is, about ecology (qtd. in O'Rourke 6.)

In so doing, ecoliterature emphasizes the ethical dimension of the relationship between human and non-human world as it is revealed in the early traces of Jamie's environmental or nature poetic publications such as *Black Spiders* 1982 *The Way We Live* (1987), *The Autonomous Region* (Bloodaxe) (1993) and *The Queen of Sheba* (1994). Inspired by Seamus Heaney, Elizabeth Bishop, John Clare, and Annie Dillard, Jamie reflects a traveling spirit over geographical spaces between the Himalayas, Pakistan, and Scotland. Her musical poems show a strong intersected spirit with landscape with an intense interest in the ecological crisis of the physical environment, which unfolds itself mainly in *The Tree House* (2004) for which she won the Forward Poetry Prize and Scottish Book of the Year Award. It demonstrates her poetic skill in lyrical poetry and ballad quatrains. Other works of Jamie's non-fiction publications such as *Findings* (2005) and *Sightlines* (2012) are an exemplum of her powerful voice that reveals the urgency to listen to the natural world, promoting a better understanding of ‘what's natural’ or ‘wild’ that came to be considered so due to the intervention or negligence of man, as she says in *Findings*:

Sometimes you hear this land described as ‘natural’ or ‘wild’ – ‘wilderness’, even ‘wilderness’ seems an affront to those many generations who took their living on that land. Whether their departure was forced or whether that way of life just fell into abeyance, they left such subtle marks. And what's natural? (Jamie 2005 126).

Jamie's nature poetry or ecopoetry endeavors to advocate a poetic voice that stems from the heart of the non-human voice that requires observing the fabric of the land across time and listening to what it needs to say. Alexandra Campbell points out that Jamie's poetic output functions as “a relational force which embraces the entire spectrum of human and nonhuman life across the Atlantic archipelago” (13). This embracement of both worlds is an attempt to construct a culture of an encounter between human and non-human worlds; this encounter is based on a dynamic to and fro movement and interaction between two entities of equal value. Man is that unique amongst other created species, yet according to biological aspects of evidence of fossils, he is believed to have progressed from other

organisms. In other words, man is part of this big picture of creation and related to all organisms as all of them are connected to all the environments.

Then, why would nature become the ‘Other’ or the external part that lies outside human life? Why it is difficult for the individual to identify himself with it? The mother earth’s incorporation of this environmental abundance is seen in Jamie’s poetry as an invitation to the human world to renew its relationship with the non-human, which forms an integral part of this whole totality of the universe.

In “The Wishing Tree”, the first poem that opens her collection of *The Tree House*, Jamie underlines “the need to engage with nature as equal not as master” (Karhio, et al 12). Interestingly enough the poem is written from a non-human perspective; the voice of the tree itself is enforced to emphasize the unheard voice of the landscape. Jamie employs the Scottish tradition of the wishing tree that is found in several Scottish cities, known as means to grant people’s wishes by hammering coins into its bark. Unlike Ralf Waldo Emerson’s fresh “Rhodora”, which spreads ‘its leafless blooms in a damp nook’ and whose ‘beauty is its own excuse for Being’, Jamie’s wishing tree is poisoned and ill-used. Within the use of blank verse, internal rhyme, and no punctuation, the talking tree communicates to the reader: ‘I stand neither in the wilderness/nor fairyland/ but in the fold/ of a green hill/...To look at me/ Through a smirr of rain/ Is to taste the iron/ In your blood’ (Jamie 2004 3). The tree identifies itself based on its no-location. It is located neither in the wilderness nor in fairyland. There is indeed an obvious nationalist implication of Scotland through the employment of the wishing tree tradition and the use of the word ‘smirr’, drizzle, yet the tree stands alone and secluded in the fold of ‘a green hill’, which lacks specific features.

Based on biographical information, the ‘Wishing Tree’ seems to be Jamie herself, especially when her family settled in Currei, a district on the west side of Edinburgh. More specifically, it was allocated “a couple of miles from the city center in one direction and the hills on the other” of which she says “perfectly poised between the two. I think I’ve carried that sensibility with me all my days; a foot in both camps” (*The Guardian* 2012). Thus, in one way or another, the wishing tree stands as an articulation of Jamie’s in-between self, that part which longs to be one rather than be in the middle of two places.

The use of pathetic fallacy that gives the tree a voice implies the real meaning of the title. It is the longing and wishing of the tree that needs to be heard. Jamie establishes the relationship between the tree and the human world; humans come to visit it only to hammer money ‘into my wood.../My limbs lift, scabbed, with greenish coins’ (Jamie 2004 3-4). People come “thoughtlessly thrusting into its bark in the

hope of achieving their desires” (Lister). ‘Blood’ refers to humans whose desires are in contrast with that of the ‘wood’ or the tree. With supremacy, humans poison the tree with their coins unaware of the value of the place to which they belong and incapable of interacting differently with the landscape. Through these couplets, the tree continues to express a sense of both hope and despair: ‘though I’m poisoned with/ choking on to small change/ of human hope/ daily beaten into me/ look: I am still/alive-/in fact, in bud.’ As Lister states it is “a small but necessary triumph for hope” (Lister). However, this little hope lies in the bud rather than in humans. The very act of wishing that the title carries implies the landscape’s silent or silenced wish to wonder about its importance.

This is what is meant by the poetics of ecological consciousness that invites the reader to wonder what would the landscape say about itself and how would man become part of it? Can poetry bridge the gap between the two and construct ecology of mind? As stated by J. Van Boeckel Gregory Basteson (1904 -1980), an English anthropologist and social scientist, that “When we find meaning in art, our thinking is most in sync with nature” (qtd. Zandvleit 289). The same is true to the purpose behind Burnside’s ecopoetry, who aims at writing

about what is usually recognized as ‘nature’ (i.e.greenery etc.) but I class all this work as part of an ecopoetic world-view. That is because I think, at this juncture, an ecopoetic view is what the age demands. I am talking about repairing our relationship with the world that we, humans, inhabit. All too often, this world is fractured, poisoned, polluted (de Meo-Ehlert 369).

Speaking of ecology as an equal entity to man rather than an inferior one, Jamie underlines man’s incapability to subdue nature in “The Dipper”, another poem from *The Tree House*. As once she ‘walked through a forest of firs’ during ‘winter, near freezing’, she ‘saw issue out of the waterfall/a solitary bird/ it lit on a damp rock’, singing an ‘undammable song’ (Jamie 2004 49). For a moment the speaker is filled with ecstasy as she heard the song ‘wrung from its own throat’, yet the tone of the poem changes as the speaker realizes that the song ‘It isn’t mine to give’(Ibid). That contrast, which forms part of Jamie’s poetic techniques, is meant to emphasize the lack of connection between the dipper and the speaker in a way similar to the one emphasized in John Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale”. In Keats’s poem, the speaker feels disoriented from the nightingale’s song despite the fascination he feels as the nightingale sings. In both poems, the importance of listening to nature is underlined to bridge a connection between the two.

In “The Dipper”, both the speaker and the bird are separated and hard to blend due to the speaker’s failure to persuade the bird to come close: ‘I can’t coax this bird to my hand/ that knows the depth of the river/ yet sings of it on land’ (49). Even if the speaker is seen as a wonderer poet in quest of affiliation with nature, the bird’s song is not his give. In this respect, Laura Severin states that “Jamie acknowledges that the human cannot, and should not, attempt to subsume the natural, despite their ongoing connective relationship” (100). The influence of the rhetoric of the poem indicates that the natural world is not for man to claim ownership; it is much more than that.

Within the same lyrical tone and rhetorical effect, Jamie juxtaposes between human and non-human that seem to be in a rivalry with each other; man and birds are competing to get the cherries as we see in her “Before the Wind”: ‘If I’m to happen upon the hill/where cherries grow wild/it better be soon, or the yellow-/eyed birds will come squabbling//Claiming the fruit for their own.’ Can both coexist and share the cherry before it grows wild? The wildness of the cherries is compared to ‘stones barely clothed in flesh’. But which one of them is wild, man or the non-human world? Could these stones refer to humans barely clothed in flesh? Jamie’s poems might not answer but this very idea echoes what she writes in her collection of essays, *Sightlines*. Speaking of people in terms of animals, she utters: “our animal bodies say; best get moving. Keep warm, keep hunting” (Jamie 2012 28). Similarly, the speaker at the end “Before the Wind” says: ‘the flowering branch/I must find before the wind // scatters all trace of its blossom, /and the fruit comes, and yellow-eyed birds’ (Jamie 2004 13).

Though the wildness of nature is an indisputable reality represented in the fierce-eyed birds or the forceful abortive wind, which scatters all blossoms, man’s wildness is also implied as a hidden and unknown force inside man. In her collection of essays, *Findings*, Jamie writes on nature by saying: “We consider the natural world as ‘out there,’ an ‘environment,’ but these objects in their jars show us the forms concealed inside, the intimate unknown, and perhaps that is their new unction” (Jamie 2005 141). The ‘Other’, the physical nature, does also refer to the wild reality concealed within man who encloses the natural world within molded assumptions, ‘jars’.

Jamie’s vision of the degradation of the natural world is more enhanced in “Frogs” in which she “contrasts the pastoral lyricism of Wordsworth with contemporary nihilism” (Flajšarová 25), portraying two frogs incorporated together into one entity during copulation as a car comes to press them both. It is the car that ‘would smear them/into

one-belly/to belly, //approached and passed on/ Oh how we pass on-/ the car and passengers, the slow/ creatures of this earth (Jamie 2004 5). Unlike the previous poem discussed, the speaker shows an ecological consciousness that observes well nature is not only consumed but also destroyed by man. The unity that the frogs display as they become one in death is contrasted with indifference and the lack of attention humankind show to nature.

It is worthwhile saying that although Jamie's poetry is known for its sensual and visual celebration of the wind and air, oceans and rivers, birds and other animals, blue skies and islands, light and darkness, etc., it does not aim at romanticizing nature or escaping reality. As Jason Cowley points out that the main reason for the flourishing of ecopoets is that their work is deeply rooted in ecological consciousness, stating

They share a sense that we are devouring our world, that there is simply no longer any natural landscape or ecosystem that is unchanged by humans. But they don't simply want to walk into the wild, to rhapsodize and commune: they aspire to see with a scientific eye and write with literary effect (Cowley 9).

The same is true to what Jamie states in her essay "Pathologies" in which she reflects on her mother's death in Ninewells Hospital in Dundee where she saw an autopsy in the pathology labs. She writes about her vision of nature, saying: "It's not all primroses and otters. There are other species, not dolphins arching clear from the water, but the bacteria that can pull the rug from under us...It's all nature...We can't make distinctions about what to admit, about 'good' and 'bad' nature" (Jamie 2012 24).

Based on this premise, Jamie's ecological sensibility encompasses all environmental organisms, living and non-living creatures, domestic and bestial, mild and dangerous, beautiful and depressing, etc. It is an attempt to acknowledge the fragility nature of both the human and non-human worlds. This notion extends William Blake's conception of the sublime presented in his "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience". Jamie's ecological thought goes deeper to incorporate all species even the bacteria that could be so destructive to man. All organisms function and exist as part of the ecosystem and the living world as they should be with no difference. Each is in relation to the other and all are in relation to their environment. This is the other nature that humans have within and can be seen under the microscope as Jamie describes them: 'the unseen landscapes within' (Jamie 2012 34). This very idea challenges the notion that nature is merely outside of us.

To exemplify the notion of interaction and integration between humans and the non-human world, Jamie's poem "Meadowsweet" from *The House Tree* reflects her ecopoetics of a shared interaction between human and non-human that speaks of the very act of human biological incorporation with the earth. The poet begins her poem with an epigraph: 'Tradition suggests that certain of the Gaelic women poets were buried face down'.³ It is a practice that Jamie employs to re-envision her relation with nature (Severin 99). The poem, written in free verse, begins with a description of the funeral by the use of a third-person voice:

So they buried her, and turned home,
a drab psalm
hanging about them like haar,

not knowing the liquid
trickling from her lips
would seek its way down,
and that caught in her slowly
unraveling plait of grey hair
were summer seeds:

meadowsweet, bastard balm,
tokens of honesty, already
beginning their crawl

toward light, so showing her,
when the time came,
how to dig herself out —

to surface and greet them,
mouth young, and full again
of dirt, and spit, and poetry (Jamie 2012 49).

Apart from the obvious feminist connotation of the poem reflected in the entrapment and sense of imprisonment imposed on the female poet, the landscape seems so powerful and in a strong interconnectedness with the dead body of the poet. Jamie examines here a dark image of the natural world; the dreary recited psalm that overwhelms the place like a 'haar', a cold sea fog of the North Sea of

³ The reference to Gaelic women poets refers to the use of a language that intends to defy "a specifically Scottish skepticism regarding the legitimacy of the female poetic voice". The preface of the poem also indicates the "way of interring witches; the idea being to silence them and prevent them from speaking further maledictions from the grave" (McGuire 144).

Scotland, “is contrasted with the female poet who merges and becomes one with the landscape” (McGuire 145). The flowing liquid of her lips and the disentangled weave of her hair are fused with the ‘summer seeds’, bringing forth ‘meadowsweet’. Every part of her body sprouts and rises again to nourish the earth. Her decaying body forces an entry up to the surface of the soil, producing summer flowers, meadowsweet.

Matt McGuire interestingly remarks that “what the community does not realize, what the haer of the drab psalm blinds it to, is the natural cycle of rebirth in which it has unknowingly placed the poet” (145). The integration between the woman poet and the earth echoes the meaning of ecology, which refers to “all living organisms inside the closed ecological system fed off each other, passing food up and back down the food web”. (Haven 170). As all organisms are related to each other as one unit, the mother earth’s assimilation with this environmental abundance is revealed in Jamie’s poem to create a concrete exchange and identification between physical ecology and human life that acknowledges also their vulnerability.

Though it seems contradictory to other poems in which humans act indifferently if not aggressively against the non-human world, “Meadowsweet” does emphasize human-nature interconnectedness. It is an unavoidable polarization that establishes the balance in poetry Jamies seeks between the very fact ‘Otherness’ embodied in nature as seen by humans as well as the sense of continuity and coexistence that both share. In a time of ‘anthropocene’⁴, a geologic period in which man’s potentiality and various activities came to have a powerful impact on changing the landscape, Jamie makes the voice of nature be heard, asserting that the survival of both is interdependent and interactive. In this respect, Severin points out that Jamie endeavors to exhibit:

a new understanding of the human–natural connection: On the one hand, she learns to respect nature’s intrinsic value and worth or its inherent separateness from humanity, and on the other, she discovers that humanity is the natural and therefore is necessarily interconnected with what we have thought of as the (outside) environment (101).

Similarly in “White-sided Dolphins”, this ‘Otherness’ or the non-human world is united with the human even if for a short time to form one entity rather than a distinct existence from human existence:

⁴ For more information on Anthropocene, consult Lewis, Simon L. & Maslin, Mark A. *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*. Mark A. Maslin Penguin UK, Jun 7, 2018.

When there was no doubt,
no mistaking for water-glint
their dorsal fins'
urgent cut and dive

we grabbed cameras, threw ourselves
flat on the fore-deck. Then,
just for a short time
we travelled as one (Jamie 2004 22)

The short unity between the dolphins, 'mothers-with- young/old scarred outsiders' with humans is celebrated in the poem within a rhetorical effect as both travel side by side. However, it comes to be juxtaposed when dolphins 'veered off from us, north by northwest' (22), establishing again the idea of different worlds. The accentuation on this contrast is Jamie's very way to reconcile human and non-human into one unity by which the contemporary individual will not live in self-isolation and feel disoriented from his land.

The whole collection of *The Tree House* strongly discusses the notion of place represented in the natural world in which humans can dwell and belong to. In this regard, Jamie says of the title poem that the treehouse it indicates "a place where nature and culture meet, a sort of negotiated settlement, part reverie, part domestic, part wild" (qtd.in Borthwick 142). The speaker of the poem embraces the branches of the tree as she sits in the treehouse away from human society: 'Here I was unseeable./ A bletted fruit hung through tangled branches/ just out of reach'(Jamie 2004 41). She enjoys the togetherness she experiences with the tangled branches of the tree:

I lay to sleep,
with by my side neither man
nor child; but a lichened branch
that wound through the wooden chamber,
pulling it close (41).

The union felt by the speaker with the treehouse indicates not only her own union with the natural world but also the union established between the tree and the house itself. The 'linched branch' and 'the wooden chamber' become part of each other and part of the earth, '-sweetened earth' without which human life would have been quite different and deprived of interconnectedness:

we might have lived
the long ebb of our mid-decades
alone in sheds and attic rooms,
awake in the moonlit souterrains
of our own minds (42).

Jamie highlights the need to belong to the mother earth and cultivate an ecology of mind by which an individual can be a citizen of the natural world. After all, this natural world belongs to nobody and everybody at the same time.

Despite her love for her Scottishness as it is revealed in the landscape of her poetry and her use of Scots, she transcends the sense of national belonging to embrace a broader notion of place. In her poem the “Battle of Bannockburn”⁵, Jamie celebrates Scotland's history, yet she asserts that: ‘Here lies our land: every airt/Beneath swift clouds, glad glints of sun,/Belonging to none but itself’ (Jamie 2013). The emphasis is on reminding the reader again that one’s land is not a mere property to be claimed possession by being Scottish by birth; the land owns itself. Thus, ‘We are mere transients’; belonging citizens would be nothing but transient dwellers if they lack an ecological consciousness by which they experience a true interaction with their land. It is for this reason that Jamie challenges stereotypical notions of nationality and belonging as she gives voice to Scotland itself: ‘Come all ye’, the country says/ You win me, who take me most to heart’ (Ibid.).

It is worth mentioning that the very idea of being transient is in correlation with the ontological nature of the environment as transient or changeable externality, reminding us of our own transience nature and “the transience and temporality of its [nature] forms; demystifying that transience and temporality as indicative of its construction of interconnected processes and reactions” to human world (Lilley 21-22).

Though this song celebrates the Scottish landscape, the exact location of the battlefield of Bannockburn is still indefinite. In this respect, David Wheatley denotes that Jamie’s poem “offers opportunities of its own...and informs the conditions of Jamie’s response to the lie of the land in contemporary Scotland” (Falconer 53). That is why “Battle of Bannockburn” is loaded with an ecological sensibility that goes beyond the confines of the politics of place. Despite the prominence, she gained as a Scottish poet of the new generation, Jamie herself rejects to be merely identified under gender

⁵ Battle of Bannockburn (June 23–24, 1314) is a “battle in Scottish history whereby the Scots under Robert I (the Bruce) defeated the English under Edward II, expanding Robert’s territory and influence.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Bannockburn> (Accessed 10/10/2019). Jamie’s poem was chosen in 2012 as part of the Battle of Bannockburn project to accentuate the importance of the landscape of the Bannockburn battlefield, which became an outstanding mark of the iconic Rotunda monument for this purpose.

and national categories, believing that her poetry transcends these grounds. In an interview with *The Guardian*, she asserts: “I have a horror of [my writing] being filed under Scottish”, endeavoring to explore new questions about selfhood and its connection with the natural world as well as national identity and belonging (*The Guardian*). Even Jamie’s association with the Scottish Arts Council that supported writers like her to create a literature of national character did not hinder her skepticism about national belonging, which is shared with her fellow writers such as Burnside and Peterson. They, indeed, pioneered the meaning of ecological dwelling and citizenship of the natural world that rise above the borders of one’s nation.

In an early poem of the 1990s, “The Republic of Fife”, which projected her ecological awareness, Jamie aspires to see her home residence not only a place of human population but a place where ‘All birds will be citizens’, a union between humans and non-humans. She uses the word Fife, which is a reference to the historic city of Scotland that is portrayed as a republic rather than a kingdom, which is built on human and non-human interconnectedness that extends to the international realm:

...we can balance,
carefully stand and see
clear to the far off mountains,
cities, rigs and gardens,

Europe, Africa, the Forth and Tay bridges
even dare let go, lift our hands
and wave to the waving citizens

of all those other countries (Jamie 1994 50)

Jamie underlines that man’s interaction with his fellow men represented in ‘the wave to the waving citizens’ is closely associated with the landscape. In so doing, a different encounter would be established and would extend even national boundaries to become an interconnection across the globe, an ecological encounter that transcends one’s nationality and culture. It is a perspective that unites both respect for and responsibility towards one’s landscape and bridges various realms of the intersection with the so-called ‘Otherness’:

By the light we have made, we can see that there are, metaphorically speaking, cracks. ...We look about the world, by the light we have made, and realize it’s all vulnerable, and all worth saving and no one can do it but us (Jamie *Findings* 2005 24).

In a time when everything infiltrated with the politics of place, Jamie's ecopoetry comes with new ecological lenses that question national borders and notions of belonging and home. Accordingly, ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary approach does provide new dynamics to interweave interplay between man and his environment, on the one hand, and the new intersection between him and his fellowmen, on the other. Through this eco-poetic voice, Jamie intends to speak for the earth to which originally and ontologically man belongs, endeavoring to cultivate an ecological encounter. Eco-poetry might not provide immediate solutions to the ecological crisis, but it does stand as a powerful literary matrix in the process of changing the stereotypical perspectives about nature and the politics of place. Shall the contemporary individual continue to observe nature as a mere beneficial element or as a valuable entity in itself? Is the notion of home will always be connected to one's nation or it might extend to generate citizens of the natural world? Eco-poetry, responds to these questions taking art beyond mere aesthetic aspect, conveying a new landscape writing that channels a relationship of continuity and interaction between the self and natural world. It is worth mentioning that poets can still be considered 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world' as Percy Shelley states in his "Defense of Poetry". However, the output of the contemporary eco-poets does represent a novelty in protesting against the indifference of man towards the degradation of the landscape that stems from the individual's incapability to perceive the creation as a gift given to be loved and valued rather than possessed. In the face of the global ecological crisis, both the eco-poet and landscape reveal their own voice highlighted through eco-poetry to deliver a global message for the rediscovery of the value of the environment and its connection to man. It extends to draw a new mapping of the sense of home and identity, paradoxically underlining that the danger of climate change could be the very opportunity to ask the fundamental questions about the mystery of the self and the planet.

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