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The Ontology of Immanence: Arriving at Being
in Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*

Rachel R. Gilman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Ontology of Immanence: Arriving at Being in Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*

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In response to the economic and political upheaval of World War I, Scottish Modernism explored the cultural and linguistic changes of a nation trying to identify itself amidst a world-wide conflict. Scholars and critics have considered Nan Shepherd's fiction in this context—focusing on issues of gender, female identity, language, and land—but have yet to look seriously at her work *The Living Mountain* and its contributions to the Modernist movement. More recently, critics like Louisa Gairn and Robert MacFarlane have called attention to Shepherd's small but powerful text in an ecocritical and philosophical light, reframing her contribution to issues of Scottish identity from the Modernist era.

Ecocriticism is concerned with the importance of place in relation to human conceptions of identity and explores how landscapes, even a mountain, can elucidate understanding of human being. Ontological questions of being have been explored in relation to place and landscape for several centuries and require, or invite, new narratives of the experience of these encounters, which makes present ecocritical studies an ideal place to do so.

This thesis examines Nan Shepherd's work in the intersection of ecocriticism and ontology. To understand a mountain as living, a new language and a new ontology of place is required. The work of Gilles Deleuze on immanence becomes crucial to an understanding of why local place and a connection to it creates a deeper understanding of being and of a language that offers a desubjectivized perspective of a shared awareness between matter. In Shepherd's encounters with the organic and the inorganic her language of experience explores an interaction between her own senses and their perception of the mountain's body of elementals, or the means of apprehending the vitality of the mountain as a living thing. An intriguing twenty-first-century conception of place emerges from Shepherd's modernist perspective and reframes how a landscape and inorganic matter can elucidate human being.

Keywords: Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, ontology, immanence, being, perception, ecocriticism, place, Scottish Modernism

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The Ontology of Immanence: Arriving at Being in Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*

Rachel R. Gilman

"... I go to the mountain—the eye sees what it didn't see before, or sees in a new way what it had already seen. So the ear, the other senses. It is an experience that grows; undistinguished days add their part, and now and then, unpredictable and unforgettable, come the hours when heaven and earth fall away and one sees a new creation. The many details—a stroke here, a stroke there—come for a moment into perfect focus, and one can read at last the word that has been from the beginning."

— Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*

Introduction: Movements of Being

While climbing recently to the cloud-covered, fiercely windy, and extremely cold summit of Mt. Timpanogos along Utah's Wasatch front, I heard a man descending from the summit say loudly into the wind at fellow climbers ascending, "it's your body telling you that you're alive." His tone and the look of the ascending climbers spoke to the pain they must have been feeling after several miles and over 7,000 feet of elevation gain to reach the 11,752 ft. top of Mt. Timp. The nature of his comment stayed in my head as I reached the summit, where I precariously took shelter from the wind amongst the rocky outcroppings overlooking a drop-off of more than a thousand feet to a valley below. This was my first climb up the mountain, and I had set out seeking what Nan Shepherd had discovered when she began hiking in the Cairngorm mountains in western Scotland, that "the mountain has an inside" (12). At the top, adjusting to the pain and discomfort from the climb, I looked down to the valley below on what appeared to be the "inside" of the mountain. My view was fogged by another realization Shepherd's first trip, like mine, had encountered: I was inside a cloud. She called it "knowledge of" the inside of a cloud and a mountain, suggesting that it was apprehended by being present, both body and mind, in the experience of the hike much like the descending hiker had proclaimed. From the mountain's height I could see in all directions, clouds obscuring and revealing mountain peaks along the

range, and I began to comprehend what Shepherd had called this interaction of weather and inorganic matter, saying “it is like the morning of creation” (13). Creation seemed even more so the conscious awareness of body and mind and place in that moment, of being inside the mountain and the cloud.

Nan Shepherd’s work *The Living Mountain* labors at this very intersection between organic and inorganic matter to apprehend how a mountain is a living entity. One of her contributions from this labor with the mountain is upending the Cartesian cogito of “I think therefore I am,” with her own participatory mode of perception and a cogito suited to the experience of the living mountain: “I walk therefore I am,” as suggested of Shepherd’s work by British nature writer Robert Macfarlane. *The Living Mountain* is in part her resolution to a subjective problem, one rooted in a neo-romantic mode of thought that provides no relation to person or place. Problems faced today in environmental thought remain steeped in this subject-object mode of experience, one in which the subject strives toward a connection to place through a conscious engagement with the natural world.¹

Shepherd offers a twenty-first-century ecological sense of place²—despite her being a modernist era writer—by engaging with a mountain and representing its context of deep geologic time as a way to understand the inorganic as the living qualities of a mountain. She perceives that this requires a new language and a local ontology—an immanent connection to place, which she discloses in recounting her experience in the mountain. I rely here mainly on Gilles Deleuze’s definition of immanence, defined as *a* life—a desubjectivized “living” as such—that opens a relational understanding of consciousness to subject-object creation within a transcendental field. Shepherd attempts to articulate this kind of experience in a letter she wrote to Neil Gunn, a contemporary, in 1940:

To apprehend things—walking on a hill, seeing the light change, the mist, the dark, being aware, using the whole of one’s body to instruct the spirit—yes, that is the secret life one has and knows that others have. But to be able to share it, in and through words—that is what frightens me.... It dissolves one’s being. I am no longer myself but a part of a life beyond myself when I read pages that are so much an expression of myself. You can take processes of being—no that’s too formal a word—*states* is too static, this is something that moves—*movements* I suppose is best—you can take movements of being and translate them out of themselves into words; that seems to me a gift of a very high and rare order.

(Shepherd viii)

Neither static nor formulaic, experience for Shepherd is this movement between the senses and her perception of the elementals she is apprehending in the mountain. In the intersection between the organic and inorganic elements of the mountain and her own being, a new language and a new ontology of understanding and perceiving being is required, and *The Living Mountain* records her attempts to translate the rhythms of immanence—the living movement of these dynamic moments.

Nan Shepherd was uniquely suited to writing about the Cairngorm mountain range she refers to in *The Living Mountain*, because she walked those hills and peaks her entire life. Shepherd was born in 1893 just outside Aberdeen, Scotland. She attended and graduated from the University of Aberdeen in 1915, and became a lecturer at the Aberdeen College of Education, where she remained for the rest of her life teaching and training other teachers. She made a small but notable contribution to the Scottish modernist movement, publishing three short novellas on the home and community life of head-strong women in rural areas of Scotland

during the interwar period. Towards the end of the Second World War, she wrote *The Living Mountain*, best described as a prose meditation on her love of the Cairngorm mountains (Macfarlane). She had sent a draft of her text to Neil Gunn at the time of writing it but was told that she would not find a publisher at the time. She did indeed receive one rejection letter, which was enough for her to tuck the manuscript away in a drawer. It wasn't until the mid-seventies that she pulled it out again and, believing it just as relevant then as when she had written it, published it successfully.

As a modernist era writer, Shepherd is often conspicuously absent from anthologies of Scottish literature,³ conspicuous perhaps to audiences today, but at the time, her impact was minimal and unnoticed. What has brought Shepherd's texts to light is an interest in relating to landscape from the perspective of a woman. Thirty years ago, these interests were not key to understanding Scottish literature and identity.⁴ In present studies of ecocriticism, it is more fitting to situate Shepherd amongst her contemporaries like Gunn, Hugh MacDiarmid, and Lewis Grassie Gibbon who were also engaging with deep time and landscape to explore the importance of place in subject-object experience, or experience beyond culture and language.⁵ Roderick Watson grouped these four authors in his chapter titled "The Modern Scottish Literary Renaissance," arguing that in these authors' attempts to write about the nature of identity, "the versions of identity offered in these works go so far 'outwards' as to leave 'Scottishness' behind, and to problematise the conception of identity itself" (Brown and Riach 75). Watson claims that Gunn "shares Nan Shepherd's sense of the sheer strangeness of being and unknowableness of the relationship between mind and a physical world" (86), but I take issue with this claim since Watson was only considering, for the purpose of his article, Shepherd's fiction. *The Living*

Mountain also engages in that search for identity beyond “Scottishness” but does not “disappear into the boggy hole of [Gunn’s] own subjectivity” as Watson claims (86).

Hence, from the ecocritical perspective, Shepherd’s contribution carries more weight. Louisa Gairn writes in her introduction “Re-Mapping Modern Scottish Literature,” that her research “suggests that the science and philosophy of ecology, which asks questions about being in the world, about ‘dwelling’ and ‘belonging,’ and most fundamentally, about the relationship between humans and the natural environment, has been a valuable and significant concept in the work of Scottish writers since the mid-nineteenth century” (1). That Shepherd is the first to be mentioned in this “re-mapping” of modern Scottish literature when ecological theory and philosophy are the key points of discussion is reason enough for me to argue that Scotland and wider academia is rediscovering writers who were possibly overlooked because of gender bias or their marginalizing “Scottishness,” but who have a great deal to contribute to ecological thought and ecocritical writing since the mid-nineteenth century (Gairn 1). Shepherd’s recent adornment of the £5 pound note by the Royal Bank of Scotland is evidence of this important reappraisal, and shows the renewed importance of writers who expounded on the relationship between identity and locality to Scotland’s history.⁶

The Cairngorms: A Local Sense of Place

Shepherd’s new ontology of being relies heavily on a relation to place, a local place known intimately to her—the Cairngorm mountains. The Scottish term *fey*, or *feyness*, describes a physiological state of “bodily lightness” that is fitting of those who love the mountains and are far-sighted, in terms of relishing to look and gaze upon the expanses that the massif affords (6). Fey is a term describing the “joyous release” of the body that Shepherd also terms a malady because of its “subverting the will and superseding the judgment,” which often resulted in a

physiological boldness of body on the mountain (5–6). In the glossary to Shepherd’s Grampian Quartet, which holds her four works, *fey* is defined as “peculiar, other-wordly” (86). Shepherd’s use of the term is in context of the mountain and to climbers like herself. She describes it in the same language as one would a characteristic like daring or boldness. In its 800 years in the English language, *fey* has oft been associated with fairies, supernatural phenomenon, and as a portent of impending death (OED). Yet Shepherd’s use and context of the term, which depends heavily on being rooted to a place, is less supernatural than hypernatural. Activated in her encounter with the living mountain, *feyness* does not lead to universal, cosmic consciousness, the transcendence so familiar to Romanticism, but a transcendent consciousness uniquely open only to an ecological sense of place.

Fey becomes a means of a radical fusion of person and place. This fusion is brought on by more than a physiological predisposition of enjoying and handling well the heights of a mountain. She exclaims that there must be more to that intermingling of body and mind with place, writing, “What more there is lies within the mountain. Something moves between me and it. Place and a mind may interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered” (6). Her experience is a journey into knowledge, but knowledge of discovering what “moves” between her and the mountain; how that place and her mind interpenetrate; how both are altered and to what end. Shepherd posits that place, and a locally known place, is just as important as her subject, crucial even to the experience of knowing being.

In this local sense of place Shepherd departs from the Romantic tradition whose sense of place is less concerned with the specifics of the landscape and more with experience that leads to a cosmic consciousness.⁷ Emerson’s “Nature” is a fine example of this and contrasts with Shepherd’s experience in place because of the way he depicts consciousness. “Standing on the

bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing;” he writes (12). Approaching the Absolute, the body becomes inessential to Emerson’s ideal of experience in nature, but it, we will see, is paramount to Shepherd’s. Emerson’s experience in nature is a conduit to cosmic understanding of everything, nothing that is unique to the landscape on which he stands: “I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God” (12). Transcendental idealist accounts of selfhood and nature, as is the case of Emerson’s eponymous essay, evince more concern with nature as a spiritual portal by means of which one loses consciousness of the particulars of one’s surroundings—even the ecological interconnectedness of each living part of the landscape.

Ecological thought in the twenty-first century is concerned with the particulars of one’s surroundings and, on a local level, understanding and even becoming part of the interconnectedness of each living aspect of a landscape that one would call home.⁸ Instead of dissolving subject-object distinctions into a formless transcendental whole, Shepherd’s text goes through the particulars of a landscape she has come to know by walking it all her life making that place and her presence there paramount to understanding how it is a living entity of inorganic matter and how she is a part of it. These elemental features of the mountain and her engagement with them is what allows her to create a local sense of place that leads her to an understanding of being that isn’t bound by her own subjectivity.

Shepherd’s 84-page work is laid out like a creation narrative. There are twelve parts, starting with the foundation of the Cairngorms: the plateau; the recesses; and the group. The following three chapters cover the elementals themselves: water; frost and snow; and air and light. These are followed by life in, on, and around the mountain: the plants; birds, animals,

insects; and man. Finally, the last three chapters are the means of perception: sleep; the senses; and being. As one reads through each of these parts however, it becomes clear that life is interconnected and her goal in knowing the total living mountain, is to simply be there. I use “creation narrative” in the sense that, as I defined “experience” for Shepherd, she walks her way into the mountain and into immanence, which brings a creation of self along with it. “Perception” as Shepherd uses it, is very similar to Deleuze’s concept of immanence; she describes perception as “[dwelling] in pure intimacy with the tangible world” (70). This “tangible world” is a landscape marked by deep rhythms of movement and is thus what propels her narrative searching; Shepherd attempts to translate those movements of creation—ever in process—that seem beyond human capacity and understanding. It is a process of creation unique to geologic time but the exercise of reaching to translate it is what enables Shepherd to reach perception, discern immanence, and have her being suddenly dissolved and then find it again, reformed and reimagined in these cross-sections of organic and inorganic material.

Shepherd’s immanence in the landscape of the Cairngorms is more than the physicality of her presence. She complicates this on the first page of her explanation of “The Plateau,” when she describes the height and girth of the massif, saying, “but this is a pallid simulacrum of their reality, which, like every reality that matters ultimately to human beings, is a reality of the mind” (1). Immanence is a presence that brings both body and mind to bear on the experience. While the body is essential to Shepherd’s experience with the mountain, it is the perception of the mind beyond a simple physical sense that matters.

Jane Bennett’s work with what she terms as “vibrant matter” offers similar parallels to defining what Shepherd seeks in her exploration of the movements between organic and inorganic material. “The philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends is

too often bound up with fantasies of a human uniqueness in the eyes of God, of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature;” Bennett says, “and even where it is not, it remains an aporetic or quixotic endeavor” (ix). I argue that Shepherd’s experience and description of the vibrant matter of the inorganic features of the mountain, to borrow Bennett’s term, while infused with wonder, is grounded in matter that reveals itself to be fundamentally interconnected. As the organization of her chapters reflects, matter and mind produce reality, and all features of the *living* mountain create a shared awareness. What I do wish to employ from Bennett is her argument for the “vitality of matter” that is considered non-living, and how she equates “affect with materiality” (xiii). Bennett is less concerned with natural landscapes as the objects of materiality, but that is what I will focus on—Shepherd’s use of the inorganic qualities of the mountain as place in her creation of being.

Immanence and the Living Mountain

Shepherd’s sense of place is dependent on the mountain considered as a living thing, making the body paramount to a sensory experience of perceiving the movement between her and the mountain. She claims, “I cannot tell what this movement is except by recounting it” (6), bringing a whole new mental capacity of narrative to relate to her physical encounter with the place. Immanence is not solely gained by experience, but through memory of experience and then the expression of recounting it on her journey into knowledge. Because of this, I find in Deleuze’s work on immanence the resonances of Shepherd’s experience between place and a mind. Manuel DeLanda argues for a consideration of Deleuze (and Guattari) in relation to ecology because of their “realist ontology” that “does not depend on essences, but on processes instead” (Holland par. 3). A realist ontology fits Shepherd’s journey into being by acknowledging the physicality of her arrival at immanence, a process dependent on sensory

engagement with elementals unique to the landscape of the Cairngorm mountains. This is what I hope to reveal in considering Deleuze's construction of immanence, that Shepherd's work is a move that situates her self in a realist ontology, one unique to a local sense of place because of the specific landscape features of the Cairngorm mountains.

Deleuze wrote that the "plane of immanence" is defined by "*a life,*" or "life as such" (28). Deleuze cites Charles Dickens as having written the best example of a life, as opposed to "one's life;" a misanthrope on his deathbed is being cared for by others who once despised him and in the moments leading to his death he has a change of heart. As a result of this change, Deleuze explains, "The life of the individual gives way to an *impersonal and yet singular life* that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens" (28, italics mine). He calls this a haecceity, better understood as a quality, or the property of being a unique and individual thing. This movement, or moment, when a life confronts death is what Shepherd is also describing when her organic material being meets the "living" mountain's inorganic material being. It is more than just life and death, however, the movement between the two materials is understood as sensory perception coming in contact with base elementals—the essential nature of the mountain.

There is evidence of this in her recounting an experience that later leaves her amazed at how she could come so close to the edge of being and not realize the danger she was in. Of such an experience, she recounts wading into a loch, walking along a shelf that suddenly comes to an edge and plunges down into a pit. At that edge she says, "Then I looked down; and at my feet there opened a gulf of brightness so profound that the mind stopped" (10). Her mind was stopped by depth, a physical feature of the mountain made clear by standing in the water. She then further describes that moment: "My spirit was as naked as my body. It was one of the most

defenceless moments of my life” (10). It seems this interaction strips away from her being what is non-essential to sensing and perceiving through the body. This is key to understanding the immanence that Shepherd seeks and gains in her experience with the mountain. She comes to added clarity of what occurs at this junction:

That first glance down had shocked me to a heightened power of myself, in which even fear became a rare exhilaration: not that it ceased to be fear, but fear itself, so impersonal, so keenly apprehended, enlarged rather than constricted the spirit.
(10–11)

That fear “enlarges rather than constricts the spirit” is crucial to understanding Shepherd’s mode of perception: fear is the emotion of reaction produced between an interaction of being and non-being, or the non-existence of death. Here where organic matter and inorganic matter encounter one another is a movement that brings heightened awareness to her own self *of* her own self. It is knowledge gained from the body becoming as defenseless as the spirit in seeing near annihilation.

Returning to Deleuze, the heightened awareness that Shepherd describes in the experience wading in the loch resonates with what Deleuze calls a “pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life” (28). Because of what Deleuze calls a “transcendental field,” the awareness that Shepherd describes is actually a shared awareness between the *living* mountain and herself (25). “[The transcendental field] can be distinguished from experience in that it doesn’t refer to an object or belong to a subject (empirical representation)” (25). So the movements that Shepherd recounts are reminiscent of meetings between the inorganic material of the mountain, that Shepherd calls *living* for reasons dealing with the senses and the elementals (that will be dealt with in the next section), and the organic material she is made up of. The

transcendental field though, becomes “a pure stream of a-subjective consciousness, a pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without a self” (25). Shepherd is furthering experience in relation to the mountain by seeking immanence in a transcendental field that is “a-subjective consciousness,” or “impersonal consciousness” that is beyond the woman Nan Shepherd, but closer to *Being*, what she is really pursuing. But Deleuze lays out that “were it not for consciousness, the transcendental field would be defined as a pure plane of immanence, because it eludes all transcendence of the subject and of the object,” thus “absolute immanence is in itself: ... pure immanence ... is A LIFE” (26–27). For Shepherd, I argue that her description of the experiences with the *living* mountain is an inquiry and a trail “to know Being” (84), which is beyond subject and object and an empiricism that make up the world. “[It] is an absolute immediate consciousness whose very activity no longer refers to a being but is ceaseless posed in *a life*” (27, italics mine).

The “absolute immediate consciousness” is a result of the movements that Shepherd so curiously seeks to describe in her writing. She finds herself then loses herself there in those movements. The experience in the loch was a meeting and a movement of organic matter and inorganic matter, but one that only brought her to the edge of the subject and the object divide because empirically, it was the depth of the loch over the shelf she stood on that caused her to feel “defenseless” and for her spirit to be as naked as her body (Shepherd 10). Her language, we will see, changes when the organic and the inorganic intertwine in an elemental way and something even more extraordinary happens so that absolute immediate consciousness is realized. It moves beyond empiricism.

Deleuze’s discussion on consciousness elucidates the movements that Shepherd describes on the mountain interacting with the elementals. The clearest moment of “consciousness” as

Deleuze describes it—“when a subject is produced at the same time as its object” (26)—is when she submerges herself in the mountain stream. Interestingly, this experience is in her chapter titled “The Senses,” giving more weight to the senses as a means of perception, but perception that interacts with the mountain’s inorganic materials—its elementals. Her experience wading in the loch is in the chapter titled “The Recesses,” marking the physicality of that feature of the mountain and her own body in connection with it. “The Senses” is where she pushes further into a mode of perception that achieves absolute immediate consciousness. Consider this passage:

In fording a swollen stream, one’s strongest sensation is of the pouring strength of the water against one’s limbs; the effort to poise the body against it gives significance to this simple act of walking through running water. Early in the season the water may be so cold that one has no sensation except of cold; the whole being retracts itself, uses all its resources to endure this icy delight. But in heat the freshness of the water slides over the skin like shadow. The whole skin has this delightful sensitivity; it feels the sun, it feels the wind running inside one’s garment, it feels water closing on it as one slips under—the catch in one’s breath, like a wave held back, the glow that releases one’s entire cosmos, running to the ends of the body as the spent wave runs out upon the sand. This plunge into the cold water of a mountain pool seems for a brief moment to disintegrate the very self; it is not to be borne: one is lost: stricken: annihilated. Then life pours back. (81)

The simple touch of the water is mere feeling, as is the sun on her back and skin. But a full submersion into the water is a pure interpenetration of “place and mind” that alters both. Time again is a factor in this interaction. The cue in her language like “One’s entire cosmos” is enough

to explode any sense of limit to human being, which is what is so exciting about this passage. The language recalls Emily Dickinson's poem "I saw no way—The heavens were stitched" which, in so few words, de-familiarizes being by occupying an imaginative space of deep time that loosens any fixedness of being to the known world. Shepherd achieves this same feat but by describing a movement of immersion between her and the living mountain; between the organic material of her being, the subject, and the inorganic material, the object, of absolute being that is the mountain's element of water. Shepherd's "[disintegration of] the very self" is the moment of absolute immanence, because in the movement of being "one is lost: stricken: annihilated. Then life pours back" (81). But it is *a* life, not one's life or Shepherd's life. Consciousness is a fact now that the subject and the object have been produced at essentially the same time. Although, here I would argue that Shepherd differs slightly from Deleuze in that the *living* mountain is an absolute being, existing only for itself. But through the elementals, and in contrast, through the senses, the interactions between subject and object create and recreate immanence. As she described it, cold water has strength and cold and energy and sound that reflect the whole of the mountain, "it does nothing, absolutely nothing, but be itself" speaking of the water that flows from the mountain, "one of the four elemental mysteries" (17). For a moment, Shepherd's self is disintegrated into that absoluteness and immediate consciousness comes because pure immanence is there.

For Shepherd, immanence exists then in the cross-section of organic and inorganic material. Deleuze provides fitting structures that situate Shepherd's experience in a more realist ontology that depends on the processes, as DeLanda points out, of her body's senses perceiving the inorganic life of the mountain. *A* life is in the movement she speaks of, because there, emotion and reaction is produced to being stripped by the elementals of the mountain to a body

that then only perceives through the senses, but at a creative moment of consciousness. This is the true “reality of the mind” she spoke of to apprehend the total and living mountain. She reaches immanence by walking to and then through these movements of the basest elements of the mountain meeting her purest and heightened modes of perception; when her body and mind are closest to the starkness of being; between her life and *a* life.

A “Realist Ontology”: Perception Through the Senses

Louisa Gairn, author of *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature*, observed that Shepherd’s book *The Living Mountain* offers “what might be called a phenomenology of wildness, focusing on the experience and sensations evoked by direct physical contact with the natural world” (124). Of Shepherd, this is a “viewpoint which relies on close, reverent attention to the physical aspects of the world around [her]” (124). In essence, Gairn calls what Shepherd uses scientific inquiry, coupled with “an acute sense of the sacred” that she claims is informed by Romanticism and Eastern Mysticism (124). She goes on to explain, “the phenomenological encounter with nature resolves the dualism suggested by the Cartesian approach, breaking away from the Western mode of thinking” (125). Rather than “I think therefore I am” as the cogito celebrated by the Western mode of thinking, Robert Macfarlane wrote, “I walk therefore I am” as a more fitting cogito for Shepherd’s form of participatory perception. But scholarship on Shepherd has yet to make the connection between how her mode of participatory perception through bodily scientific inquiry leads to immanence, and thus a realist ontology, beyond a simple empiricism that hypothesizes the subject-object mode of perception. This realist ontology resolves the dualism between body and mind through Deleuze’s terms of immanence. Shepherd’s experience with the senses and the elementals of the mountain moves her to a realist ontology that ““does not depend on essences’ but on processes” as DeLanda explained of

Deleuze's "individuation process" (24). This process relies on "terms of an immanent abstract structure" (27), or mutable reality gained from this shared awareness between Shepherd and the mountain.

As Gairn's idea of Shepherd's mode of scientific inquiry through the senses implies the importance of the body to Shepherd's understanding of being, looking at a deeper understanding of the phenomenology of perception through Merleau-Ponty's ideas of body spatiality elucidates Shepherd's experience to a certain point. What resonates in Merleau-Ponty's writing is that "it is knowledge in the hands" (166)—just as Shepherd writes "the body may be said to think" (83)—in experiences where "knowledge ... is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made" (Merleau-Ponty 166). Bodily effort for Shepherd is akin to breathing; walking is her way into the mountain, and the effort comes naturally as she simply goes out to be with the mountain. She walks her way through each part of the mountain, as described in the titles of each chapter until that experience is distilled into "Being" her final chapter and arrival at knowledge. But what moves Shepherd's engagement with the natural world in her body from a "phenomenology of wildness," as Gairn put it, to a realist ontology is her arrival at immanence. Merleau-Ponty wrote that "the body [is] mediator of a world" and "the body is our anchorage in a world," so "to understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance" (167). Of Shepherd's experience in the mountain, seeking to know its Being, Merleau-Ponty would say that she as the subject incorporates the mountain into her bodily space (167).

If the body is said to think, as Shepherd declares, then it is her means of knowing the mountain first as object, but the body is also a threshold of immanence that brings her to a realist

ontology that relies on processes of knowing other than reflection. Consider this passage from her final chapter “Being,” on seeing the body as “anchorage in a world”:

The body is not made negligible, but paramount. Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled. One is not bodiless, but essential body . . . It is therefore when the body is keyed to its highest potential and controlled to a profound harmony deepening into something that resembles trance, that I discover most nearly what it is *to be*. I have walked out of the body and into the mountain. I am a manifestation of its total life, as is the starry saxifrage or the white-winged ptarmigan. (83)

In declaring “I am” Shepherd declares herself into being, but as part of the mountain, a final interspersing of organic and inorganic matter.⁹ This accurately describes her arrival to immanence as discussed in Deleuze’s terms, and moves her to the final result, a realist ontology. Her final lines reveal: “I am not out of myself, but in myself. I am. To know Being, this is the final grace accorded from the mountain” (84). With “Being” capitalized, it is as if the declaration for absolute being is complete and achieved—to arrive at knowing Being is arriving at absolute immediate consciousness between subject and object, between body and place.

I see this arrival as further evidence of Shepherd’s text functioning like a creation narrative for her own being. She writes that the journey to “knowing another is endless;” it absorbs her and her experience into the deep time of the mountain and perpetuates it. Thus “the thing to be known grows with the knowing,” setting being on an endless cycle of self-creation (84). With every walk into the mountain’s life, Shepherd gets closer to absolute Being: that is the act of self-creation. Her awareness of self in this walking is a shared awareness that creates her being in relation to place, to the mountain. Consider how she writes about experience, that it “grows” by nature of time and specifically of deep geologic time: “undistinguished days add

their part, and now and then, unpredictable and unforgettable, come the hours when heaven and earth fall away and one sees a new creation” (83). Her terms evoke the senses again, but her terms also evoke a transcendent consciousness, or the shared awareness that is a result of immanence. She concludes: “The many details—a stroke here, a stroke there—come for a moment into perfect focus, and one can read at last the word that has been from the beginning” (83). “The Word” seems to be part of Shepherd’s arrival at Being, as it is in her final chapter and amidst her discussion of walking into knowledge of the mountain’s life. Immanence in the mountain is enabled by perception of consciousness.

Consciousness is key to understanding Shepherd’s mode of perception and arrival at immanence. Shepherd uses sleep as a way to describe the effect of time and slipping between modes of consciousness to apprehend the tangible world. Before her chapter titled “The Senses,” she first writes of “Sleep” and the task of learning quiescence on the mountain. She says, “As one slips over into sleep, the mind grows limpid; the body melts; perception alone remains. One neither thinks, nor desires, nor remembers, but dwells in pure intimacy with the tangible world” (70). “Pure intimacy with the tangible world” seems beyond the senses to a level of perception that is unique to a different kind of consciousness. As she describes watching the light fade around objects in a midsummer night, she describes “watching it, the mind grows incandescent and its glow burns down into deep and tranquil sleep” (70). Shepherd’s language suggests that her observations of the light reflect back onto her observations of her mind, and the two become similar in their qualities as she describes them in the same language from her memory of the experience. What Shepherd finds unique about sleep on the mountain is the “corollary of awaking” (71) and a state of perception she could not otherwise try to achieve. “Because outdoor sleep is deeper than normal, I awake with an empty mind” she says, which leads to a quick return

to consciousness of where she is, but this brief moment is enough, it “serves this end of uncoupling the mind” (71). Like the experience of total submersion in the cold mountain stream, Shepherd also reaches immanence with the mountain through an experience that releases consciousness—sleep. She speaks of the mountain as “absorbing [her] consciousness, so as to reveal itself to a naked apprehension difficult otherwise to obtain” (71).¹⁰ This is precisely what Deleuze describes as *a* life, a moment when “absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, *to* something; it does not depend on object or belong to a subject” (26). Shepherd furthers this by recounting of the mountain: “at no other moment am I sunk quite so deep into its life. I have let go my self. The experience is peculiarly precious because it is impossible to coerce” (71). Subject is no longer subject, but also, this state does not depend on the object of the mountain because it is achieved by sleeping and awaking. However, because she is *in* the mountain, reaching immanence is this absorption of consciousness for a brief moment. This experience of sleep on the mountain reduces her consciousness and the body to a “pure intimacy” that is “perception alone;” her senses are left as the only means, albeit pure means, to perceive the mountain of which she is a part.

A realist ontology relies on movements between her self and the mountain to reduce consciousness to pure sensation. Later, she describes falling asleep in the daytime, laying at the edge of a summit. The sun and sound make her drowsy, she falls asleep, and then awakes abruptly still looking over the edge, and “that first horrified stare, dissociated from all thought and all memory, sensation purely” (72) causes her to gasp with relief. This state of sleeping and awaking is her means of knowing “sensation purely,” fitting to preparing her senses to perceive Being. “I am continually coming to the surface of awareness and sinking back again, just seeing, not bedevilled with thought, but living in the clear simplicity of the senses” (72). With her

senses, being is perceived and created. A transcendent consciousness is beyond normal physical human perception, and it is evident in her language describing these interactions. “The body is said to think,” as she says, which is a higher consciousness and awareness beyond thought to pure intimacy with the tangible world—the senses without the mind and body (83). Thus, her senses are key to perception and consciousness beyond the body, because of *what* they are perceiving from the mountain—the elementals, or the senses of the living mountain. Place and a mind interpenetrating.

Self-Creation: A “Continuous Creative Act”

Shepherd’s body enables experience by walking into the living mountain. This is where the encounter with the elements commences: “One walks among elementals, and elementals are not governable. There are awakened also in oneself by the contact elementals that are as unpredictable as wind or snow” (3). The “contact elementals” are the climate features of the mountain, or the base elementals, and what the senses perceive—the intersection of organic and inorganic matter: her senses and the elementals. In this movement is also where resonances of deep time justify a new language of ontology.

Shepherd spends the most time on the sense of sight, because as she says, “the eye brings infinity into my vision” (76). This “infinity” seems to reverberate in dimensions beyond normal time and space of human perception.¹¹ In her observations through her eyes scanning the landscape, she calls it “savouring the extent of a water surface,” in one instance. “This changing of focus in the eye, moving the eye itself when looking at things that do not move, deepens one’s sense of outer reality” (8). An “outer reality” is a fascinating space where perception seems to witness more of the movements between her and the mountain, where immanence is reached. It is also telling of how elementals are not bound by time. She continues, “Then static things may

be caught in the very act of becoming” (8), but becoming what? I argue that in the sense of sight, Shepherd is able to more easily disassociate herself with her mind, and therefore thought, to absorb more of a pure sensory experience of the mountain and reach immanence.

Evidence of Shepherd’s disassociation from her mind and thoughts are revealed in descriptions of simply altering one’s viewpoint, moving one’s head so that “a different kind of world be made to appear” (8). Better yet, she explains, stick your head between your legs for the best viewpoint of the mountain: “Details are no longer part of a grouping in a picture of which I am the focal point, the focal point is everywhere. Nothing has reference to me, the looker. This is how the earth must see itself” (8). As Deleuze explains, pure immanence is achieved by disassociation from one’s life and subject-object relation, to “a pure stream of a-subjective consciousness, a pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without a self” (25). For Shepherd, it is in moments like using her eyes and her body to change her viewpoint that disassociates her own self from a known sight, or a reality connected to empirical observation and markers. Instead, she gains how the mountain would see itself, or “infinity into [her] vision” and “a reality of the mind” that is akin to the shared awareness between her being and the living being of the mountain (76, 1).

The shared awareness is a further disassociation from the reality of time even, which is a disassociation from self-awareness. Shepherd’s descriptions of rivers and hills and physical features may be in part empirical, but the language is unique to moving beyond a known reality of the mind. In speaking further about water, “one of the four elemental mysteries” (17), she states, “Avon indeed has become a by-word for clarity: gazing into its depths, one loses all sense of time” (2). Her language of description of the water disassociates the observation from empiricism:

Its waters are white, of a clearness so absolute that there is no image for them. Naked birches in April, lighted after heavy rain by the sun, might suggest their brilliance. Yet this is too sensational. The whiteness of these waters is simple. They are elemental transparency. Like roundness, or silence, their quality is natural, but is found so seldom in its absolute state that when we do so find it we are astonished. (2)

In this description of water she reasons why the astonishment occurs at witnessing the absolute state of clarity, or elemental transparency, evidence that it is beyond normal empirical observation. This is what Deleuze would call “absolute immediate consciousness” (29). She uses her eyes as an extension of self to look at water, and it moves her to a shared awareness, and a shared consciousness with the living mountain. “Water so clear cannot be imagined, but must be seen. One must go back, and back again, to look at it, for in the interval memory refuses to recreate its brightness ...” she explains, “the mind cannot carry away all that it has to give, nor does it always believe possible what it has carried away” (3). This is a fascinating observation of a movement between her and the mountain that can only be explained then in the observation itself, meaning as she writes, one cannot recount the brightness and the clarity because in its absoluteness, it doesn’t seem to fit normal parameters of the mind’s judgment. One simply has to be there standing and looking at the water. To say that “water so clear... must be seen” suggests this physicality and presence in a place.

How is this connection achieved between the eye and the mind and a field of vision? Shepherd comes to this in her concluding chapter “The Senses,” before reaching the finality of “Being.” Whereas she claimed “Avon” to be a by-word for clarity, clarity seems for her to be a by-word for Being. In witnessing clarity and absoluteness of the elementals in the living

mountain, her own being is re-created. The condition and location of her body are key to this awareness: “such illusions, depending on how the eye is placed and used, drive home the truth that our habitual vision of things is not necessarily right:” she describes, “it is only one of an infinite number, and to glimpse an unfamiliar one, even for a moment, unmakes us, but steadies us again” (79). Vision then seems to be tangible for Shepherd in entering this shared awareness that disassociates her self with the experience of being with the mountain. Without this disassociation, she would not find knowledge or know the mountain as she has come to through the absoluteness of its clarity and its elementals. Or in her words, in its Being. “The interpenetration of mind and place alter the nature of both,” as she stated in her opening chapter. The alteration is keyed to sensory observation beyond empiricism, but reaching absolute Being in its movement between inorganic material made alive by elemental transparency and organic material made absolute by immanence.

The sensory observation in this movement between material is best captured as she describes the value of her individual senses in apprehending matter. She writes of sight that it is essential to the act of knowing being and to understanding man’s existence:

It is, as with all creation, matter impregnated with mind: but the resultant issue is a living spirit, a glow in the consciousness, that perishes when the glow is dead. It is something snatched from non-being, that shadow which creeps in on us continuously and can be held off by continuous creative act. So, simply to look on anything, such as a mountain, with the love that penetrates to its essence, is to widen the domain of being in the vastness of non-being. Man has no other reason for his existence. (79–80)

The act of creation, or “to widen the domain of being” as Shepherd puts it, is based on a sensory engagement with the mountain. This sensory engagement is the “continuous creative act” that Shepherd claims holds off non-being, which is in opposition with being and a discovery of an absolute immediate consciousness. That consciousness however, is shared awareness with the living mountain, making man’s existence and in Shepherd’s experience on the mountain, actual Being an interpenetration with inorganic material—base elemental material. Being is itself “A life” as Deleuze calls it, and “a living spirit” as Shepherd names it, “a glow in the consciousness” lighted by the elements that make the mountain living.

The Living Mountain’s Body of Elementals

Roderick Watson stated that “Shepherd comes to the conclusion that the living mountain *lives* because of our own conscious engagement with it” (Shepherd x), but this cannot be all, because Shepherd’s own *conscious* engagement with the mountain would remain simply empirical. She shows us that it is more than her consciousness, but rather the shared consciousness that does not “belong to a subject” like Shepherd or “refer to an object” like the mountain that creates a living mountain out of inorganic material (Deleuze 25). Pure immanence as Shepherd achieves is a creation of Being that is brought on by sensory perception. We know there is immanence because of the language Shepherd uses to describe the sensory perception that is a disassociation of self from her experience. It is “not the element of sensation (simple empiricism), for sensation is only a break within the flow of absolute consciousness” as Deleuze states, “rather, however close two sensations may be, the passage from one to the other as becoming, as increase or decrease in power” (25). Shepherd’s descriptions of experience at the cross-section of organic and inorganic matter have elevated sensation to reaching absolute

consciousness, or shared awareness between a self stripped of thought to being essential body in the mountain.

How does the mountain respond?¹² What evidence from the inorganic matter of the mountain points to a shared awareness? Shepherd speaks of the elementals in her narrative first before she reaches the living things so that she can tell of their part in the life of the mountain. She calls the elementals “the forces that create” the living things of the mountain, and that “through them” a greater knowledge of the mountain is gained: “for the mountain is one and indivisible, and rock, soil, water and air are no more integral to it than what grows from the soil and breathes air” (36). In her opening chapter “The Plateau,” she begins her walk to find the sources of the elementals like water, so the source of the rivers that flow directly from the rock itself. “One cannot know the rivers till one has seen them at their sources” (3). She writes again of “seeing” and witnessing these elements at their source, which is a way of knowing much like scientific inquiry. It’s a participatory form of perception that is achieved through immanence as has been established throughout this article. Walking begins her “journey into Being” which “is to know [the mountain’s] essential nature” (84, 1). The mountain is made by the inorganic material of the base elements, but is also its climate, unique to itself and space and time. As Shepherd learns through her many interactions on the mountain, the “elementals are not governable” meaning they “are as unpredictable as wind or snow” (3). The mountain is continually defined to Shepherd by its form and by what it yields both elementally and of life.

One of the most fascinating features of the mountain that Shepherd experiences is through her sense of hearing. Because silence is definitive of the mountain it is also unique to it. She says that “the most vital thing that can be listened to here is silence” but “to bend the ear to silence is to discover how seldom it is there” (75). The movement of the mountain is not only

relegated to life, but also to the elements. In stillness, Shepherd learns that “always something moves,” because “there is always running water” (75). To be attuned to this type of being is again something beyond the typical empirical observation of the senses. She extends perception to a transcendental field achieved by disassociation of her being from her self. New discoveries of being are made in this field of impersonal consciousness (Deleuze 25):

But now and then comes an hour when the silence is all but absolute, and listening to it one slips out of time. Such a silence is not a mere negation of sound. It is like a new element, and if water is still sounding with a low far-off murmur, it is no more than the last edge of an element we are leaving, as the last edge of land hangs on the mariner’s horizon. (75)

Sound as a new element is a profound characteristic of the immanence Shepherd gains by being with the mountain. Sound seems to be the very life of the inorganic and the elemental. She listens with *a* life, not one’s life, and achieves knowledge to a degree that perception is deepened and her own being is more carefully known, because then it is created in relation to absolute consciousness afforded by the mountain’s life.¹³ It is a “transcendental empiricism,” as Deleuze calls it (25).

To further this disassociation of her being from empirical time, she goes on to describe the other sounds the ear can hear on the mountain: the “turmoil” of gales crashing, of “air shattering itself upon rock,” and “cloud-bursts [battering] the earth and [roaring] down the ravines” (76). She reasons, “Mankind is sated with noise; but up here, this naked, this elemental savagery, this infinitesimal cross-section of sound from the energies that have been at work for aeons in the universe, exhilarates rather than destroys” (76). “Exhilarates” could be a by-word for create, as “sound from the energies” becomes elemental in that it is evidence of life of an

integral mountain, made up of its elements, which though not governable, are absolute. They are Being. They are the mountain.

Conclusion: The Intersection of Ecocriticism and Ontology

Though her chapters are divided by characterizing parts of what make up the total mountain, they are descriptive of the integration of all the parts that give it life. She herself is part of it too. She says:

So there I lie on the plateau, under me the central core of fire from which was thrust this grumbling grinding mass of plutonic rock, over me blue air, and between the fire of the rock and the fire of the sun, scree, soil and water, moss, grass, flower and tree, insect, bird and beast, wind, rain and snow—the total mountain. (82)

All these parts of the mountain she has apprehended through the senses, and interestingly, she wishes for more senses by which to learn and know more. While she is encompassed by the mountain, she is also a part of it. Her senses permit this because they are the means of knowing. “There must be many exciting properties of matter that we cannot know because we have no way to know them,” she states, “Yet with what we have, what wealth! I add to it each time I go to the mountain—the eye sees what it didn’t see before, or sees in a new way what it had already seen. So the ear, the other senses” (82). Even so, she discovers sound as a new element for example, and learns how “to look on anything” as a way to know the mountain, even as it sees itself. This disassociation of self comes from entering the deep time of the mountain, to witness creation that our age is too impatient for, unless one has the love of a mountain and the willingness to pursue knowledge of it as she does. If one has *feyness*. Here is what she gains:

It is an experience that grows; undistinguished days add their part, and now and then, unpredictable and unforgettable, come the hours when heaven and earth fall away and one sees a new creation. The many details—a stroke here, a stroke there—come for a moment into perfect focus, and one can read at last the word that has been from the beginning. (82)

Her allusion to the creation narrative gives weight to a parallel that we in fact are also reading her own creation narrative. In seeking to know the mountain, as she concludes, she has come to “know Being,” or through a shared awareness reached by immanence, she and the mountain are recreated in the acts of knowing one another.

Resolving the dualism of thought from the Cartesian approach is enacted simply, in Shepherd’s ontology, by walking. “I walk therefore I am” is her cogito to arriving at Being. The moments of witnessing new creation, of entering the shared awareness with a mountain at the cross-section of organic and inorganic material is arrived at “after hours of steady walking, with the long rhythm of motion sustained until motion is felt, not merely known by the brain, as the ‘still centre’ of being” (83). Walking becomes the sensory experience of disassociation and thus self-creation. “Walking thus, hour after hour, the senses keyed, one walks the flesh transparent. But no metaphor, *transparent*, or *light as air*, is adequate,” she says. “The body is not made negligible, but paramount. Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled. One is not bodiless, but essential body” (83).

I argue that her ontology is that of walking into immanence. This is the way she has come to *a* life, but not of her own. It is the life of the mountain, what she started at the onset to know, and was able to walk into: “I have walked out of the body and into the mountain” (83). She achieves immanence because of this type of encounter—a willingness to let her being be

dissolved and disintegrated into the base elements of the mountain, only to be re-created in a movement and a moment of knowing, of shared awareness that is Being. This ontology is entirely unique to place, and a place that is known by walking the body through a sensory engagement with the elements. The “journey into Being” is pure immanence: “for as I penetrate more deeply into the mountain’s life, I penetrate also into my own” (84).

I would not have come to write about Nan Shepherd if I had not lived and studied in England, where I first encountered her, and then left England. It was when I came to adopt this place, Provo, Utah, and specifically Brigham Young University, because of its location along the Wasatch front, that Shepherd’s work *The Living Mountain* prodded me again and again until I could no longer ignore it. My place next to these mountains allowed me to imagine my own journey into being as I walked, hiked, climbed, and ran through this landscape just as Shepherd had experienced and wrote about in the Cairngorm Mountains of Scotland. Place could not be more interrelated through her discussion of being and immanence. This is her contribution to a dialogue that at large seeks meaning in the intersection of place and perception, landscape and being, ecocriticism and ontology. Hers is a key text, I would argue, in its subtle and profound ability to write being into place, and be read in open consideration of a local sense of place to know being, wherever that may be encountered

Notes

¹ I am also considering here how Seamus Heaney wrote about “The Sense of Place” from his work *Preoccupations* (1980). He writes, “I think there are two ways in which place is known and cherished, two ways which may be complementary but which are just as likely to be antipathetic. One is lived, illiterate and unconscious, the other learned, literate and conscious. In the literary sensibility, both are likely to co-exist in a conscious and unconscious tension...” (131). Shepherd’s *The Living Mountain* seems to be in this same vein of literary sensibility because her experience is itself “illiterate and unconscious” until she attempts to describe it.

² See, for instance, Neil Evernden’s article “Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader*. He argues for this ecological sense of place and states, “There is no such thing as individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place” (103). See also, Cheryll Glotfelty’s introduction “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis” from *The Ecocriticism Reader*, where she asks in defining ecocriticism, “In addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category?” (xix).

³ See, for instance, Alan Bold’s *Modern Scottish Literature*, 1983, and Roderick Watson’s *History of the Literature of Scotland*, 1985. Watson wrote the introduction to *The Living Mountain*. It is clear though that often Shepherd simply didn’t fit in anthologies covering only modernism or fiction or poetry by women authors. Her place has been more secure when consideration of her writing is done with an ecocritical eye. Scottish anthologies published in the last 15 or so years do include Shepherd, but are most often in reference to her fiction. Her work is receiving more attention thanks to a reprinting through Canongate and by scholars of ecocriticism.

⁴ Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson, editors of *Scottish Women’s Fiction: 1920s to 1960s: Journeys into Being*, write in their critical introduction of the “complexity of Scottish writing [that is made] even more apparent when gender is brought into play” (10). They confirm that “the women writers of the twenties and thirties were for a long time excluded from discussions of modernism (invisible because of their Scottishness as well as their gender, perhaps), and from critical discussions of the Scottish Renaissance (which was presented as a predominantly male movement)” (10–11). I am of course less concerned with the role of gender for the purposes of this paper.

⁵ See Roderick Watson’s full article for further discussion on “The Modern Scottish Literary Renaissance” and the idea of origins. Watson posits “As with Grassic Gibbon (and indeed MacDiarmid’s early poems, there is a sense in which the ‘bonnie lowe o’ Eternity’ erases all the petty distinctions of who and what we are in any mundane, socio-political or nationally-determined sense” (86). Alison Lumsden also writes of this issue in her article “‘To Get Leave to Live’: Negotiating Regional Identity in the Literature of North-East Scotland.” Lumsden considers Shepherd’s fiction as it explores the “relation to those two potentially problematic signifiers of north-east identity, language and landscape” (95). For the purpose of this article to not avoid, but refocus, the issue of culture and language, I am focusing on ecocritical themes of place and experience.

⁶ From the Royal Bank of Scotland’s website announcing the new polymer note feature Shepherd, “Royal Bank of Scotland engaged with thousands of people across the country through workshops, online communities and polling surveys in order to develop a series of new notes with relevance to the people of Scotland. This led to the choice of ‘Fabric of Nature’ as the theme and the Royal Bank of Scotland Scotland’s Board chose Nan Shepherd to feature on the note.” Furthermore, they write, “Her work has become an important part of the Scottish literary canon and now people everywhere will carry her portrait and her words with them.”

⁷ I recognize, and engage with, Jonathan Bate who wrote in *The Song of the Earth* that Wordsworth's poetry of place was "inspired by place itself" (205). But where Shepherd's sense of place diverges is in its context of deep time and how she represents base elementals in a language unique to a deep geologic sense of time. Greg Garrard in *Ecocriticism* put it this way: "Wordsworth is, on the whole, far more interested in the relationship of non-human nature to the human mind than he is in nature in and for itself" (47). Shepherd is more concerned about "nature in and for itself" as this paper attempts to prove.

⁸ See, for instance, Ursula K. Heise's *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* (2008), which is concerned about bioregionalism but takes that local sense of place to a greater understanding of a globalized sense of place.

⁹ Note the Biblical allusion to Jehovah's statement and title "I AM," which he declared to Moses in Exodus 6:2–3. See also Moses 1:1–10 (www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/moses/1?land=eng). George Handley's study of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda in *New World Poetics* treats a very similar theme of ecological self-creation. He writes "Neruda explores this contact the first time he formally tells his autobiography in verse in the final chapter, 'Yo soy,' of his 1950 epic, *Canto general*. Echoing the words of the Lord in the Old Testament ("I am"), the God who spoke and the world was, Neruda is interested in revising our notion of the constative powers of adamic naming because he recognizes that what has formed him, more than his own linguistic powers, family origins, or social relations, is the natural world he came into contact with from the time of his infancy. The natural world has replaced the Judeo-Christian Creator" (173).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Neil Gunn's *The Atom of Delight* (1956) where he writes of experience akin to Shepherd's in terms of the self: "There was no 'losing of the self in the sense that there was a blank from which I awoke or came to. The self may have thinned away—it did—but so delightfully that it also remained at the centre in a continuous and perfectly natural way. And then within this amplitude the self as it were became aware of seeing itself, not as 'I' or an 'ego' but rather as a stranger it had come upon and was even a little shy of" (29–30). In a later chapter, "Woods and Wild Places," Gunn explores a similar experience and puts it in terms of the woods being capable of absorbing consciousness of the boy, much like Deleuze's concept of a shared conscious awareness between subject and object. "The boy cracking nuts on the stone did not fall into a resigned state. Anything but. Mindless, possibly, but in the sense that the essence of his woods had taken possession of his mind, and the rare feeling of timeless delight, like himself, simply was" (77).

¹¹ Alison Lumsden notes that Shepherd was well read in philosophy and had noted the meaning of Henri Bergson's term *élan vital* in her personal notebooks. Knowing that Shepherd had read Bergson sheds more light on this assertion of the eye and infinity in vision. Bergson wrote in *Creative Evolution* "There is in vision *more* than the component cells of the eye and their mutual coordination: in this sense, neither mechanism nor finalism go far enough. But, in another sense, mechanism and finalism both go too far, for they attribute to Nature the most formidable of the labors of Hercules in holding that she has exalted the simple act of vision an infinity of infinitely complex elements, whereas Nature has had no more trouble in making an eye than I have in lifting my hand" (91).

¹² Aldo Leopold's essay "Thinking Like a Mountain" from *A Sand County Almanac* suggests that to think like a mountain is to consider the interconnectedness of life on the mountain, and life is fueled by the so-called non-living matter on a mountain. A mountain thinks in terms of its parts that work together. By entering the shared conscious awareness with the mountain as Shepherd does, she begins to understand how to think like a mountain.

¹³ Wallace Stegner contributes to this need to listen when he wrote we need to “learn to be quiet part of the time, and acquire the sense not of ownership but of belonging. ... Only in the act of submission is the sense of place realized and a sustainable relationship between people and earth established” (*Where the Bluebird Sings* 206).

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